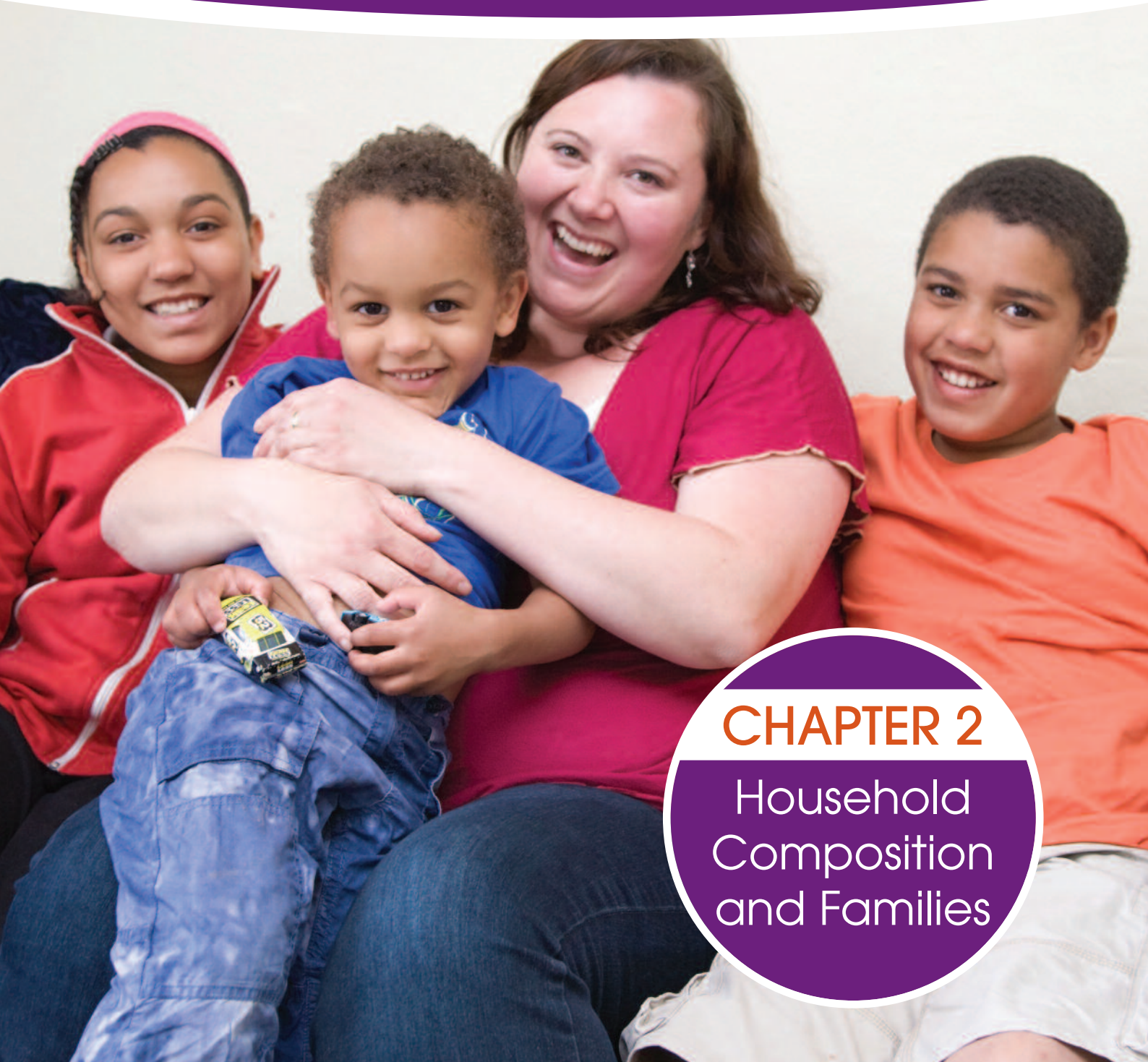


Understanding 21st Century Relationships

A Compendium of Key Data

Gareth Lloyd and Rebecca Lacey



CHAPTER 2

Household
Composition
and Families

Understanding 21st Century Relationships

A Compendium of Key Data

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About OnePlusOne

OnePlusOne is a UK charity that strengthens relationships by creating resources that help families and frontline workers tackle relationship issues early.

We help couples and parents through a range of web-services, while our online learning equips front line workers with the skills to offer timely and effective face to face support to families.

Everything we do is based on the latest research evidence. Our research builds the knowledge base on relationships and, by sharing what we know, we influence policy and the creation of services that work.

Acknowledgements

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Chapter 2: Household Composition and Families

**“ Average household
sizes have decreased
between 1971 and 2010**



Chapter 2: Household Composition and Families



The statistics presented in Chapter 1 showed that patterns of partnership formation and dissolution in the UK have changed significantly in the last 40 years. With the increasing levels of UK cohabitation observed alongside decreasing levels of marriage, we now question whether other changes have occurred in terms of the makeup of households and families.

The type and number of people who occupy a household are referred to as its composition. This may be a two-parent family, a group of adults sharing accommodation, or a person living alone.

Census data from 2011 show that the population is growing and becoming older. In 2011 the population of England and Wales was just over 56 million, rising from 52 million in 2001. The average age was 39, whereas 100 years ago it was just 25. Alongside these population changes, the average UK household is becoming smaller. This is likely to be a product of several changes which includes parents having fewer children and more people living alone. These data also tell us more about families that differ from the average in terms of composition; for example, lone parent families or those households where grandparents provide primary or additional care for children. All data in this chapter refer to the UK unless otherwise indicated.



Headline Data

- Household sizes decreased between 1971 and 2010; from an average of 2.9 people per household in 1971 to 2.4 people per household in 2010.
- Between 1971 and 2011 there has been a 4% increase in lone parent households, and a 14% reduction in couple headed family households.
- Single occupant households have seen the largest proportional increase over time: from 18% of all households in 1971 to 29% in 2011.
- 30% of children aged 0-14 years are living in lone parent households. This represents a significant change from 40 years ago; in 1971 only 8% of families with children were headed by a lone parent.
- Data examining lone parenthood by ethnicity show that the majority of children in lone parent households in 2009 were White (79.3%) or Black/Black British (8.9%).
- The UK and Latvia have the largest overall proportion of lone mother-headed households. Finland has the highest proportion of family households where both parents are present, whereas Latvia has the lowest.

 *The population is growing and becoming older*

Key terms in this chapter



The terms in this chapter are those which are used by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) unless otherwise noted.

Household: a household is a group of individuals who live together in the same dwelling and share a meal, though can also refer to a single person living alone. A household may consist of one or more families, as well as other individuals who are not necessarily family members. The household is a key unit of interest in many social and economic models that are used to determine policy.

Family: a family consists of a married or cohabiting couple with or without children. A family may also consist of a lone parent (see further definition below) with one or more children.

Household type: there are many ways in which households can be distinguished, but much of the data in this chapter focus on the following definitions: couple family households (comprising a couple who may or may not have children), single person headed households, lone parent households, multi-family households (where more than one family lives in the same dwelling), and households that consist of more than one unrelated adult (who do not comprise a couple).

Head of household: this term was used to refer to the main wage earner within a household. Although many of the statistics in this chapter continue to use this term, official statistics now prefer the term 'household reference person' which affords equal priority to both male and female partners as the reference person within a household.

Lone parents: this term is currently used by organisations such as the Office for National Statistics to refer to people who have children but are not in a partnership. A lone parent family is one which consists of a lone parent and one or more children. Lone parents may also be referred to as single parents.

Dependent children: children are classified as dependent if they live with the family unit in the household and are either aged 16 years and under or aged 16-18 years and in full-time education.

Grandparent-headed households: grandparents may become the primary caregiver for their grandchildren. In these cases the household will be classified as grandparent-headed. This is distinct from cases where grandparents provide supplementary care.

Stepfamilies: the basic definition of a step family is one which includes children that are related to one parent but not the other. Either one or both parents may have children from previous relationships, and these are sometimes referred to as *blended families*.

To help the reader by highlighting interesting opportunities to consider trends and statistics in greater depth, talking points and focus points are included throughout. Further research and updated data are also indicated throughout the chapter. **Talking points** encourage the reader to consider the wider issues that might underpin some of the effects and trends shown. **Focus points** provide greater detail on one aspect of the data.



Talking points encourage the reader to consider the wider issues that might underpin some of the effects and trends shown.



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Focus points provide greater detail on one aspect of the data.



Further research at www.oneplusone.org.uk

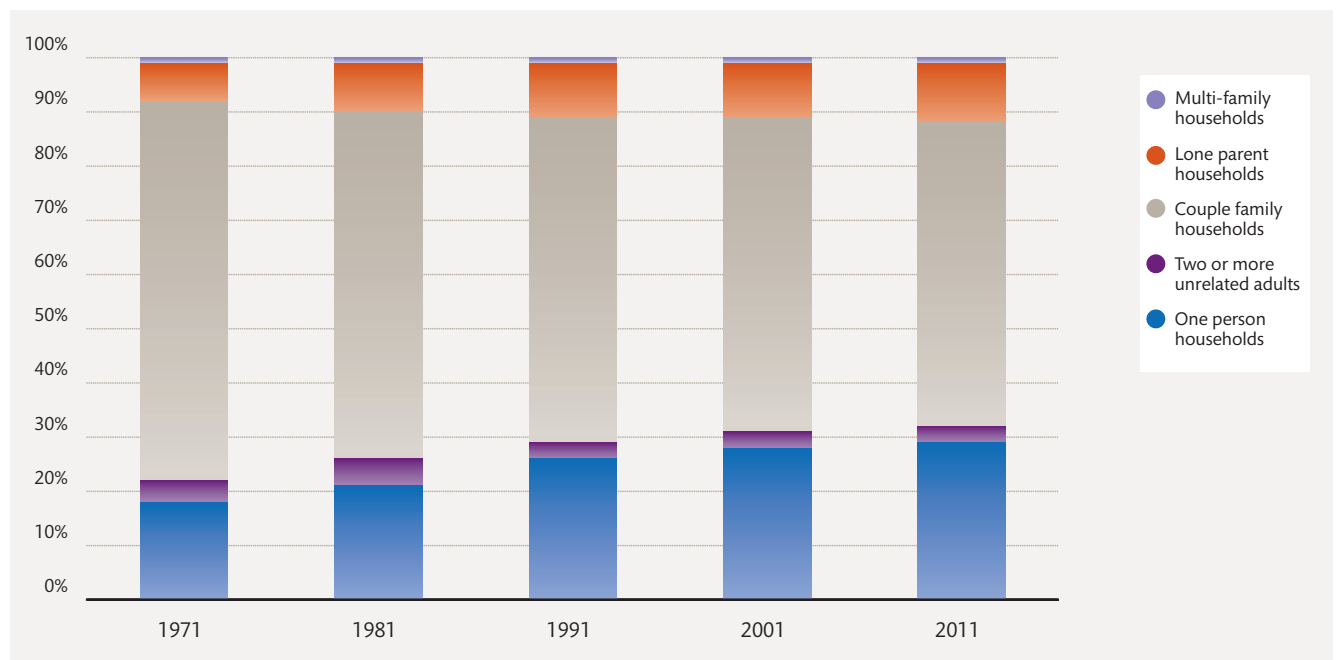


Be aware to check for **future updates** on data.

The 'average' household

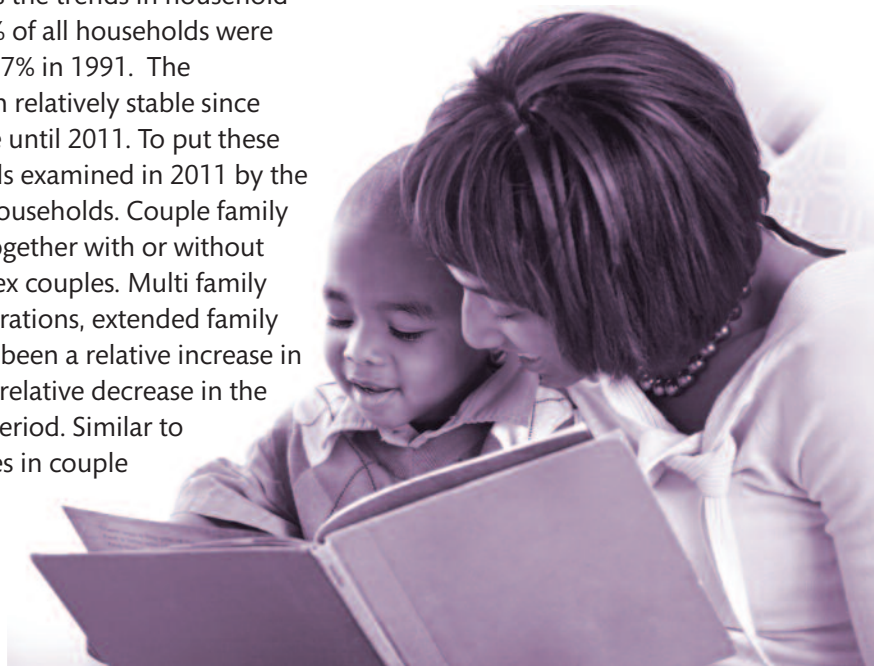
Households have become smaller in the UK over the last 40 years, though also more numerous. This shift may have been driven by a number of factors, including (but not limited to): parents having fewer children (see Chapter 3); more people choosing to live alone; people living longer; and higher levels of divorce (leading to families splitting into two or more households). These issues can be explored by examining data from the UK Labour Force Survey (LFS). People living in private households (excluding those in prisons, hospital or care homes) are included in these official figures.

Chart 2.1 Trends in Household Type, 1971-2011, UK



Source: UK Labour Force Survey, ONS, 2011

There have been significant increases in the number of single person households in the last 40 years. **Chart 2.1** shows the trends in household types between 1971 and 2011. In 1971 only 18% of all households were classified as single person households, rising to 27% in 1991. The proportion of single person households has been relatively stable since 2001, only rising to 29% and remaining the same until 2011. To put these figures into perspective, of the 26,258 households examined in 2011 by the Labour Force Survey, 7,722 were single person households. Couple family households in this chart include couples living together with or without children, and refer to both opposite and same-sex couples. Multi family households refer to those housing multiple generations, extended family members, or other unrelated families. There has been a relative increase in the proportion of lone parent households and a relative decrease in the proportion of couple family households in this period. Similar to the changes in single person households, changes in couple family households have also stabilised.



Data produced by the ONS in 2009 examined ethnicity and lone parenthood in greater detail: these data show that the majority of children in lone parent households were White (79.3%) or Black/Black British (8.9%; ONS 2009).

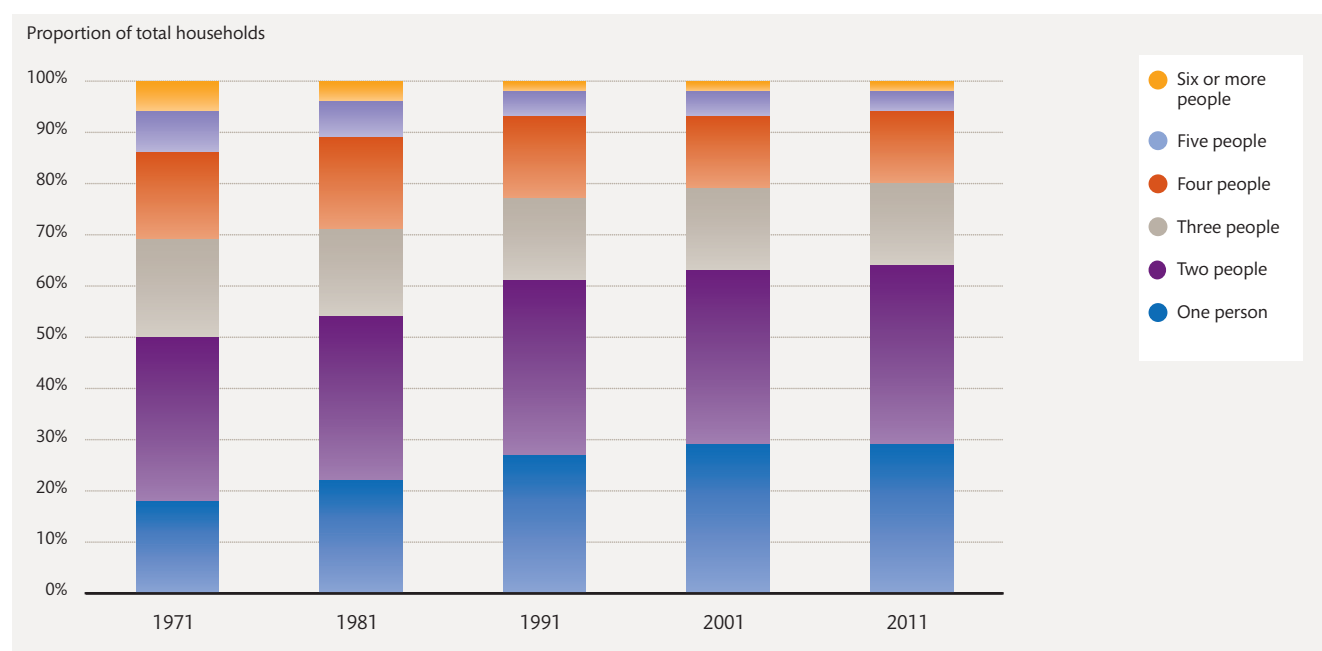


Focus on...

The Labour Force Survey

The Labour Force Survey is conducted by the ONS on a quarterly basis. It surveys a sample of households living at private addresses in the UK, in order to provide information on the labour market to inform policy. The sample selected aims to represent the country's population in terms of geographical region and accommodation type. It constitutes around 41,000 households per quarter. Around 20% of all respondents are new to the survey each quarter, and each household is then followed up multiple times.

Chart 2.2 Trends in household size, 1971-2011, UK



Data source: Census, Labour Force Survey, ONS

Households have become smaller since 1971. **Chart 2.2** shows the trends between 1971 and 2011. In 1971 households tended to be larger than those in 2011. This is seen by the greater proportion of households with at least five people (14% of households in 1971 compared to 6% of households in 2011). The most notable change in the past 40 years has been the increase in single person households. However, compared with the 1970s and 1980s there has been relatively little change in household sizes between 2001 and 2011.

Another way of summarising household size is provided by the average number of people in a household. This has fallen from 2.9 people in 1971 to 2.4 people per household in 2011. It has been predicted that the average size in 2031 will be approximately 2.1 people per household (Housing and Neighbourhoods Monitor 2011).



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The decrease in overall household size is partly due to the increase in the number of people living alone. Single person headed households are now examined in greater detail.

Talking point

Declining Household Size

From the trends shown in **Charts 2.1** and **2.2**, the changes in household type and size observed over the last 40 years appear to have mostly occurred in the initial half of this time period, with less change observed in the last decade in particular. Why should this be the case? There is no obvious answer to this question; however, it may be that changes in the number of people living alone provide an indication. Cultural changes and advances in communications technology may have been somewhat responsible for this effect, as well as changing patterns of partnership. As suggested by the data on increasing levels of cohabitation presented in Chapter 1, partnership forms are becoming increasingly fluid. Other possible explanations are increasing overall levels of divorce leading to smaller (though more numerous) households, and longer overall lifespans leading to people living longer as widows or widowers. However, continually increasing numbers of people living alone may not be sustainable; single person households have higher running costs, and create greater demand in terms of affordable housing. These issues, along with economic concerns, may have served to limit the numbers of people choosing to live alone in the last decade.

Chart 2.3 Trends in single-person headed households by age and gender, 1971-2021, England

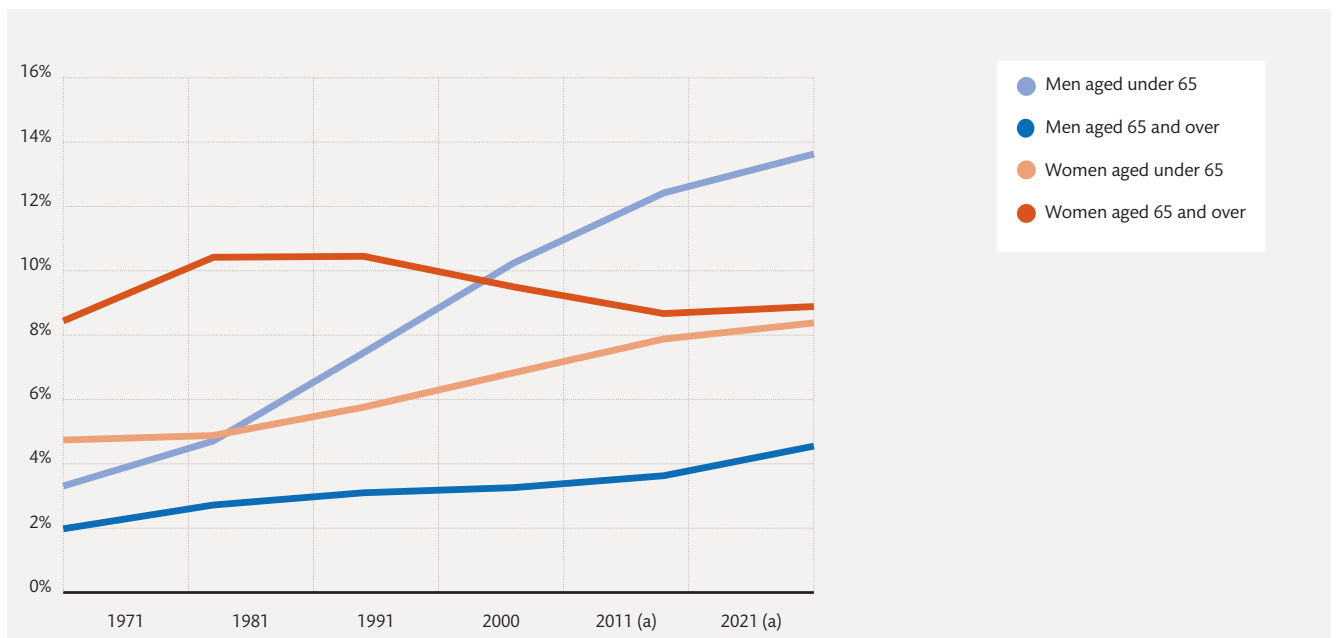


Chart 2.3 shows trends and projected trends in single person headed households between 1971 and 2021 and splits these trends by gender and age. The data given for 2011 and 2021 is based on 1996 data, and therefore is an estimate for what the actual figures will be for these years.

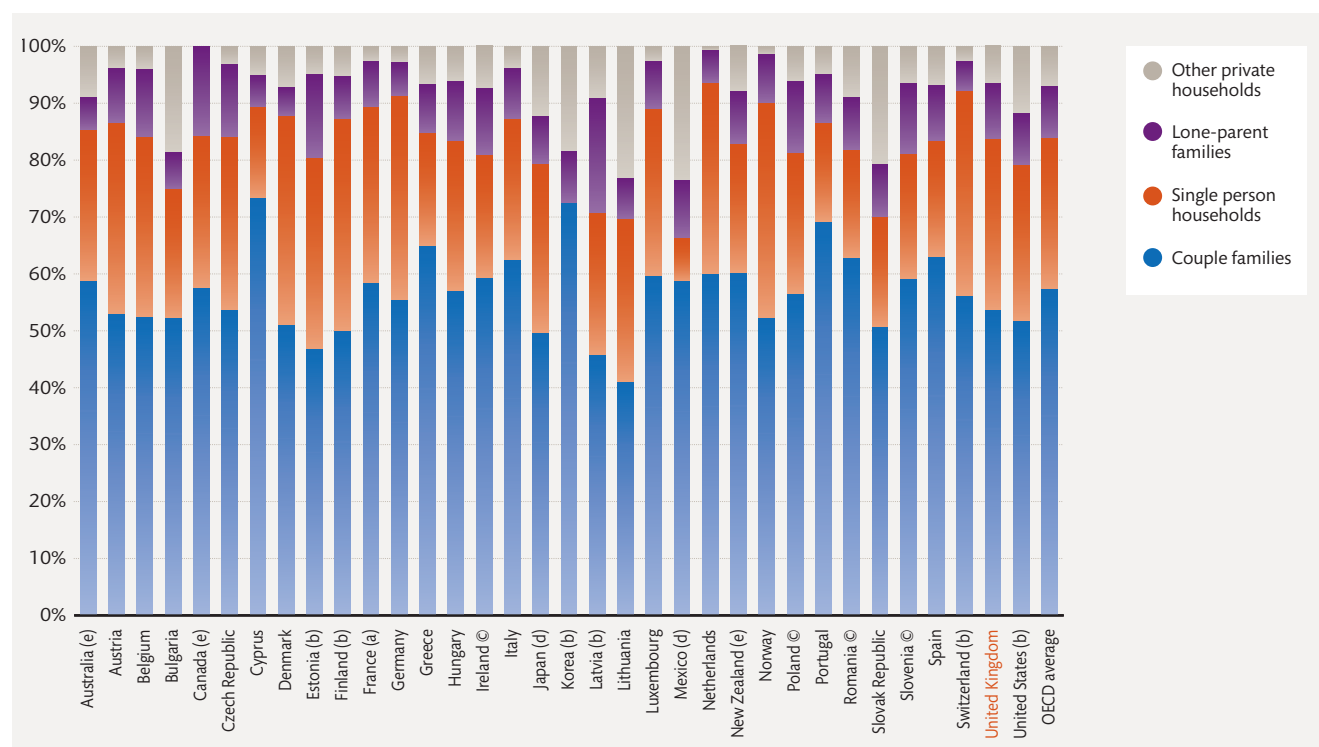


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In 1971 women were more likely to be in single person headed households than men, particularly those aged 65 years and over. This is likely to be largely due to the higher life expectancy of women compared to men. In 2011 it was estimated that roughly equal proportions of men and women overall were living in single person households: most male single person households were comprised of those under 65 years of age, whereas there was less of an age difference for women. The most notable change over the time period shown then is the increase in single male households, along with an overall rise in the proportion of single person headed households in total. This rise in single person households is also seen in **Chart 2.5**. The rise in single male households has been largely comprised of men aged 25 to 44 (Bennett and Dixon 2006). The overall increase in the number of households has been driven by a number of factors, including personal preferences and increasing divorce. This is relevant for housing and social policy, as this change represents an increased need for affordable housing, especially given that running costs can be higher for single households (Bennett and Dixon 2006).

As with the data on marriage and divorce in Chapter 1, comparisons can also be made between the UK and other countries. Data on relative proportions of household types are routinely collected in many countries across the world, and overall international proportions are provided by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Chart 2.4 International comparison of Household Types, 2001



(a) 1999 data; (b) 2000 data; (c) 2002 data; (d) 2005 data; (e) 2006 data
Data source: OECD Family Database (2010)

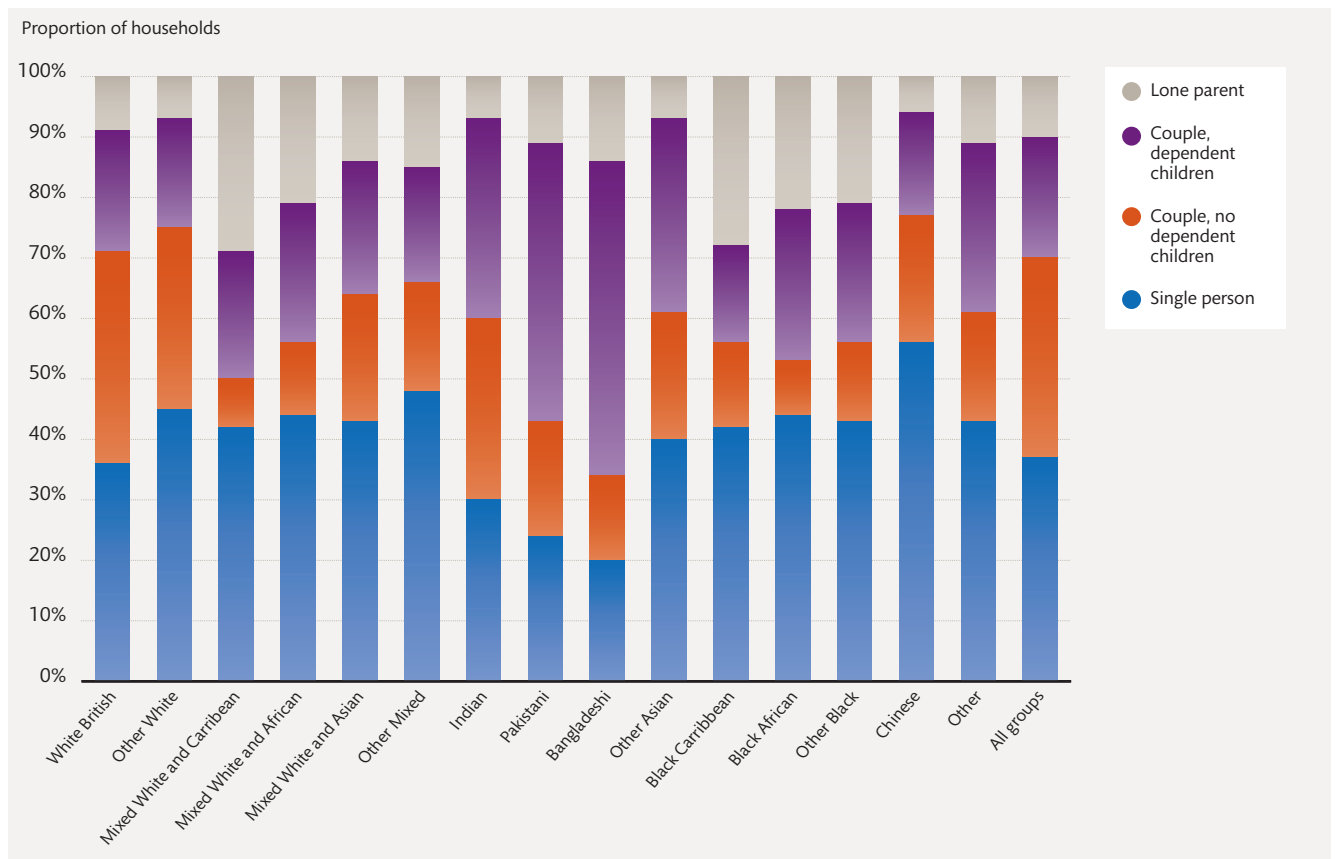
Cyprus (73.2%) and Korea (72.6%) have the highest proportions of couple households, as is shown in **Chart 2.4**. However, there is a need for caution here: in the case of Korea this may represent a difference in the way that these statistics have been coded (by the OECD), as no single person headed households are reported by these data. Norway (37.7%) and Finland (37.3%) have the highest proportion of single -person headed households. In the UK, 53.5% of

households are couple households and 30.2% are single person headed households. The UK therefore has a relatively high proportion of single person headed households in comparison to other countries.

There are other ways in which households can be distinguished between. These can be useful in estimating various aspects of family demographics in the UK. These are now examined in more detail in terms of ethnicity or presence of children in the household.

Children and Family

Chart 2.5 Family type and average family size, by ethnic group of head of family unit, 2004-2008 (combined), UK



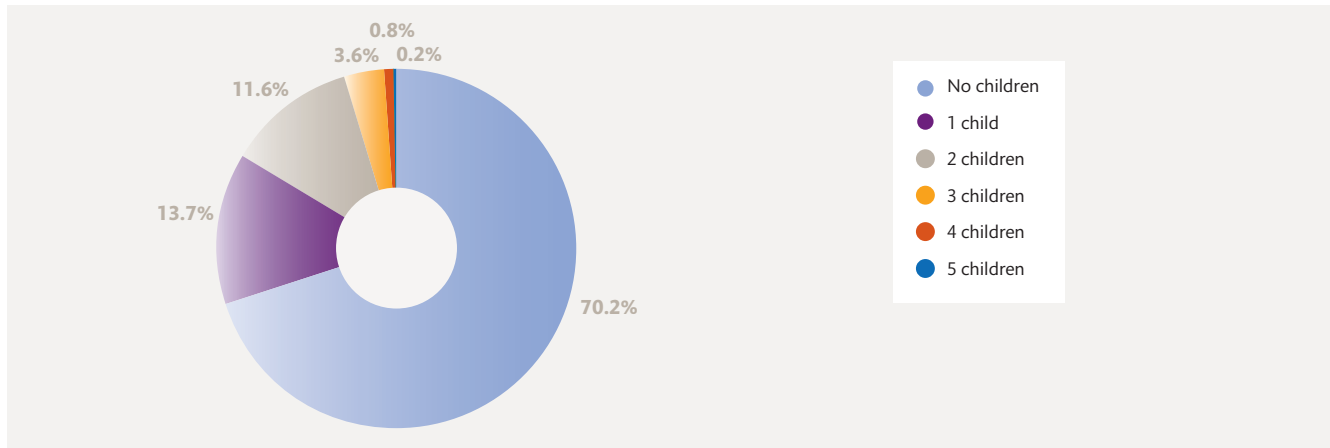
Data source: LFS household data sets October-December 2004 to April-June 2008, weighted proportions.

Chart 2.5 shows that ethnic groups in the UK tend to vary in terms of proportions of household types within each group. Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi are the least likely to be single-person headed households, and the most likely to be couples with children. Of the other groups, Chinese households are the most likely to be single person. Black households are more likely to be comprised of a single parent with dependent children, and White British households are the most likely to be couples with no children.



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Chart 2.6 Number of children aged 15 years and under in the household, 2009, UK



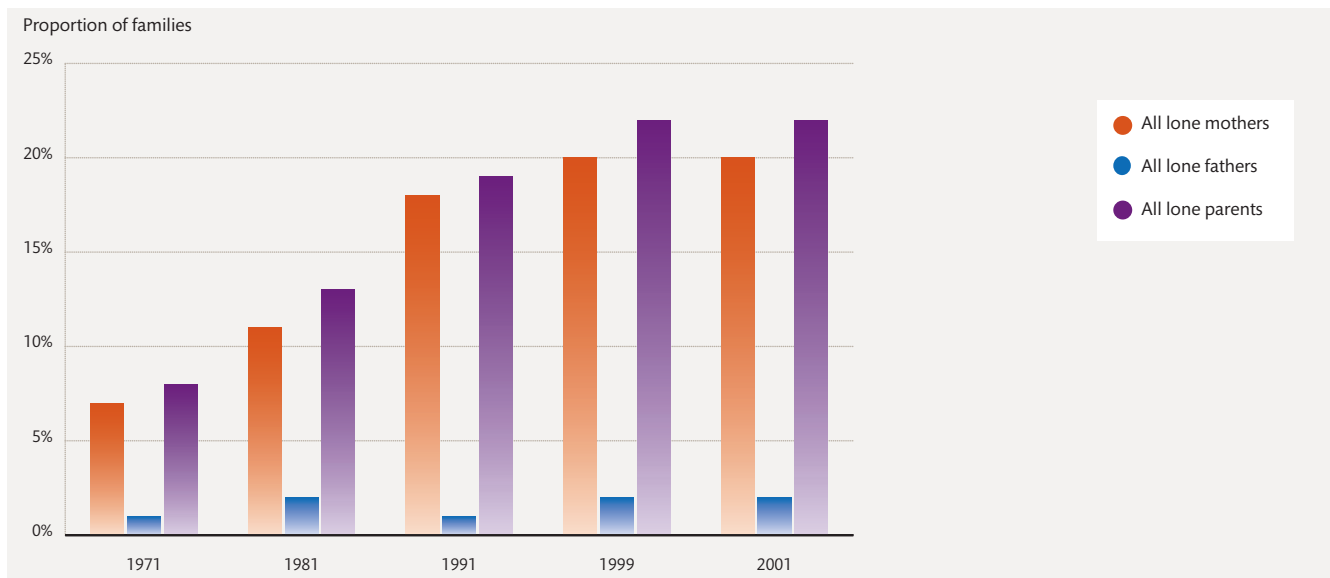
Data source: Understanding Society - wave 1 interim data set 2009

Chart 2.6 reports data from the Understanding Society survey, a UK longitudinal study of approximately 40,000 households in the UK. The study began in 2009, and covers topics ranging from behaviours and cognitive ability to religious beliefs. 70.2% of Understanding Society households had no children under 15; the majority had one or two children. Only 3.6% of households in the sample had three children, with even smaller numbers having more than three children.

The data presented so far have shown that households are becoming smaller, and that there has been an increase in lone-parent households. Does this increase in lone parenting also apply when looking specifically at families rather than households in general? Lone parent families have been a key policy focus for some time in the UK, particularly since the publication of the Finer Committee’s report in 1974 highlighting the needs of lone parent families. Evidence from the academic literature has shown that children growing up in lone parent families are more likely to be part of a lower income family, more likely to use informal childcare (referring to arrangements with friends and families, as opposed to more costly formal childcare; see Rutter and Evans, 2011) and to have a parent with health problems (Gingerbread, 2010).



Chart 2.7 Proportion of families with dependent children headed by lone parent, 1971-2001, UK

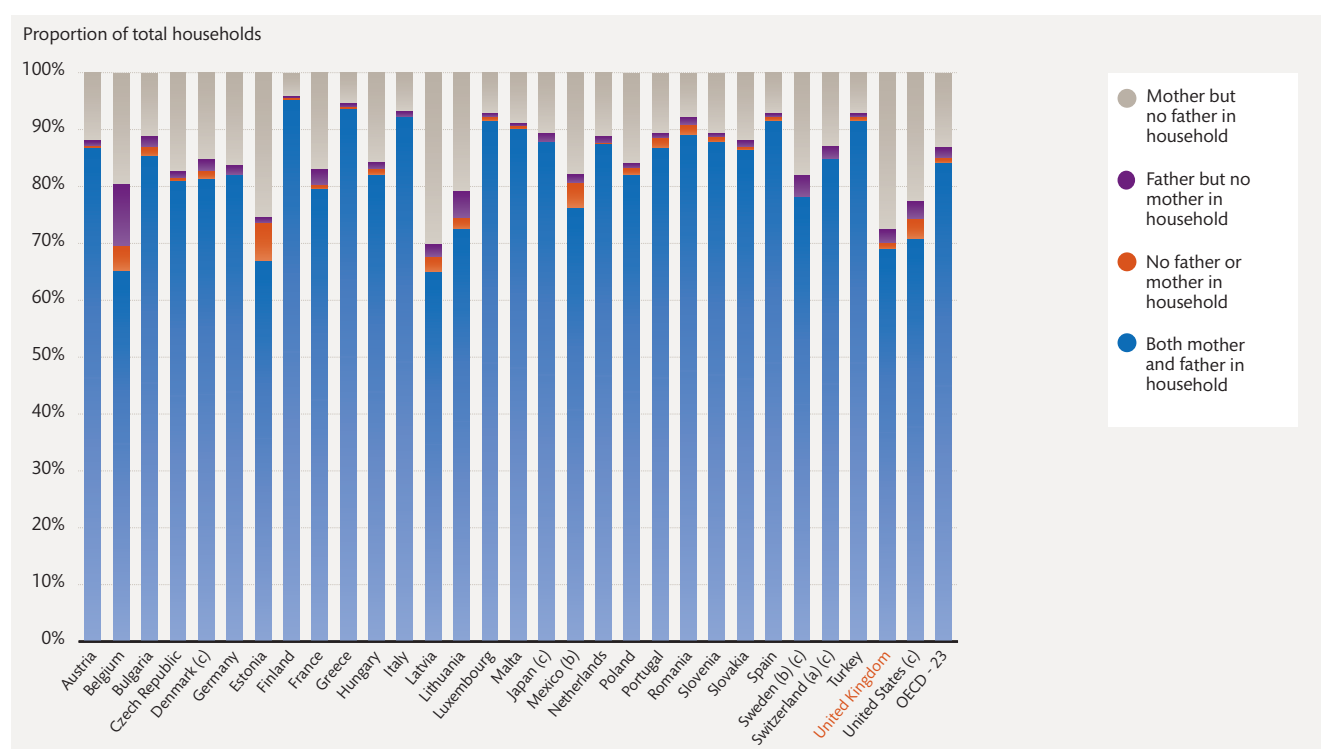


Data source: ONS (2002) General Household Survey, Labour Force Survey

Chart 2.7 shows the proportion of families in the UK with at least one dependent child (either aged 16 years and under or aged 16-18 years and in fulltime education) headed by a lone parent. The bars indicating total numbers of lone parents (comprising both lone mothers and fathers) show a striking increase in the proportion of families with children which are headed by a lone parent. This has increased from 8% in 1971 to 22% in 2001. The proportion of families headed by a lone father has remained relatively constant across this 30 year period (around 2%), but the proportion of families with children headed by a lone mother has increased by approximately three times from 7% in 1971 to 20% in 2001.

Looking again at international data, there are also distinctions between countries in terms of types of families.

Chart 2.8 International Comparison of Household Structure of Households with Children aged 0-14 years, 2007



(a) 2000 data; (b) 2005 data; (c) children aged 0-17 yrs Data source: OECD Family Database (2010)

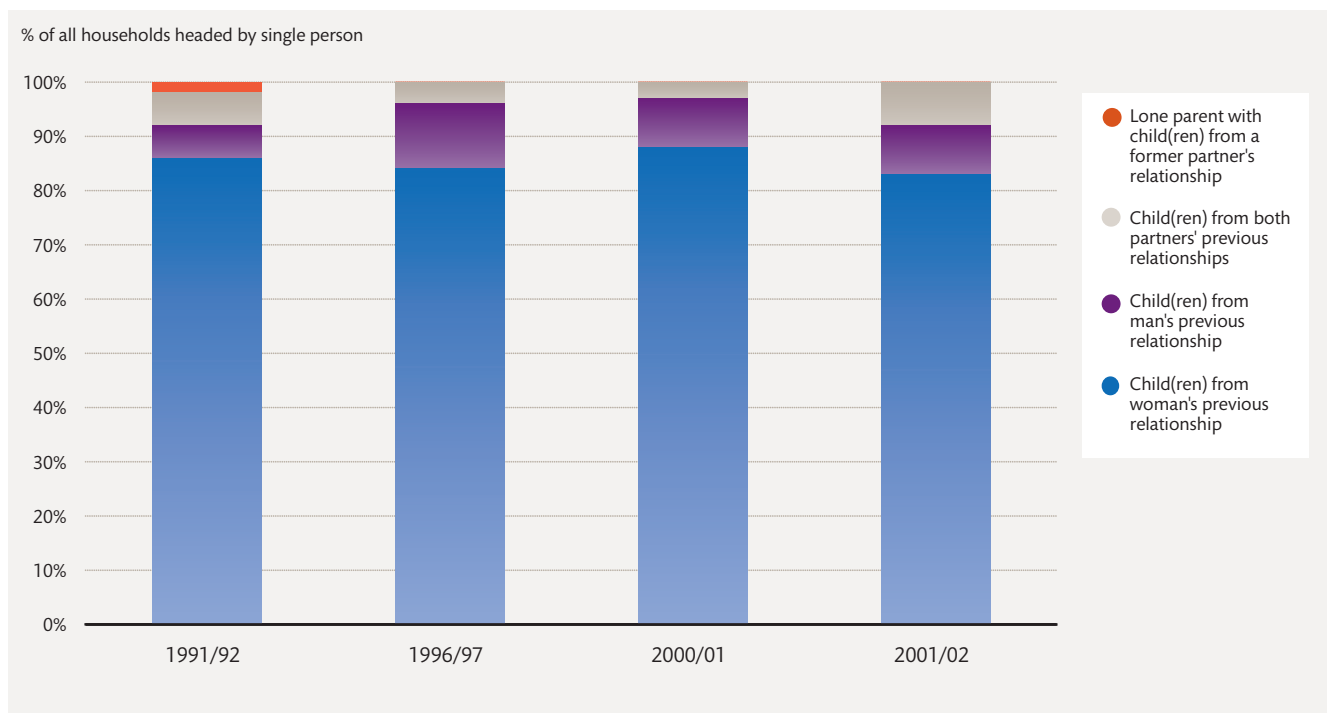
Chart 2.8 shows an International comparison of families with children aged 14 years and under. The data are taken from the OECD Family Database; however, care should be taken when comparing countries in these figures as only data from different years is available in some cases.

Amongst the countries included in these figures, Belgium has the largest proportion of lone father headed families. Latvia and the UK have the largest proportion of lone mother headed families. In total 30% of UK families are comprised of lone parents with children aged 0-14. Finland has the highest proportion of families where both parents are present, and Latvia has the lowest. Estonia and Mexico have the highest proportion of families where neither a mother nor father is present (these may be cases where a child is looked after by grandparents, other family members, or care services).

Other family and household types

The data presented in this chapter so far have focused on typical families: those family types and sizes which are found most often in both the UK and abroad. However, minority household forms are also important. Chapter 1 covered divorces involving children and remarriage; step families are the largest-growing family type in the UK. Household forms also reflect the economic climate, including people choosing to live with their parents for a longer period of time. Data is available from the ONS which explores these issues.

Chart 2.9 Stepfamilies with Dependent Children, 1991/2-2001/02, England



Data source: Social Trends 34 (2004), ONS

In relation to step family households, **Chart 2.9** shows trends in the composition of step families with dependent children between 1991 and 2001/02 (again classified as either those aged 16 years and under, or those aged 16-18 years who are in full-time education). There has been some fluctuation in the composition of step families over this period.

In the early 1990s the vast majority (86%) of families contained children only from the woman's previous relationships. This could be due to women being more likely to have custody of children following divorce (Pryor and Rodgers 2001). It can also be observed that in the early 1990s equal proportions of families (6% in both cases) were comprised of children from the man's previous relationships and from both partner's previous relationships (often known as a 'blended' family).

In 2001/2002, little changed in terms of the makeup of step families; the bulk of step families continued to be made up of only children from the woman's previous relationships, although it had become slightly more common for children from the man's previous partnerships to be in the step families.



Talking point

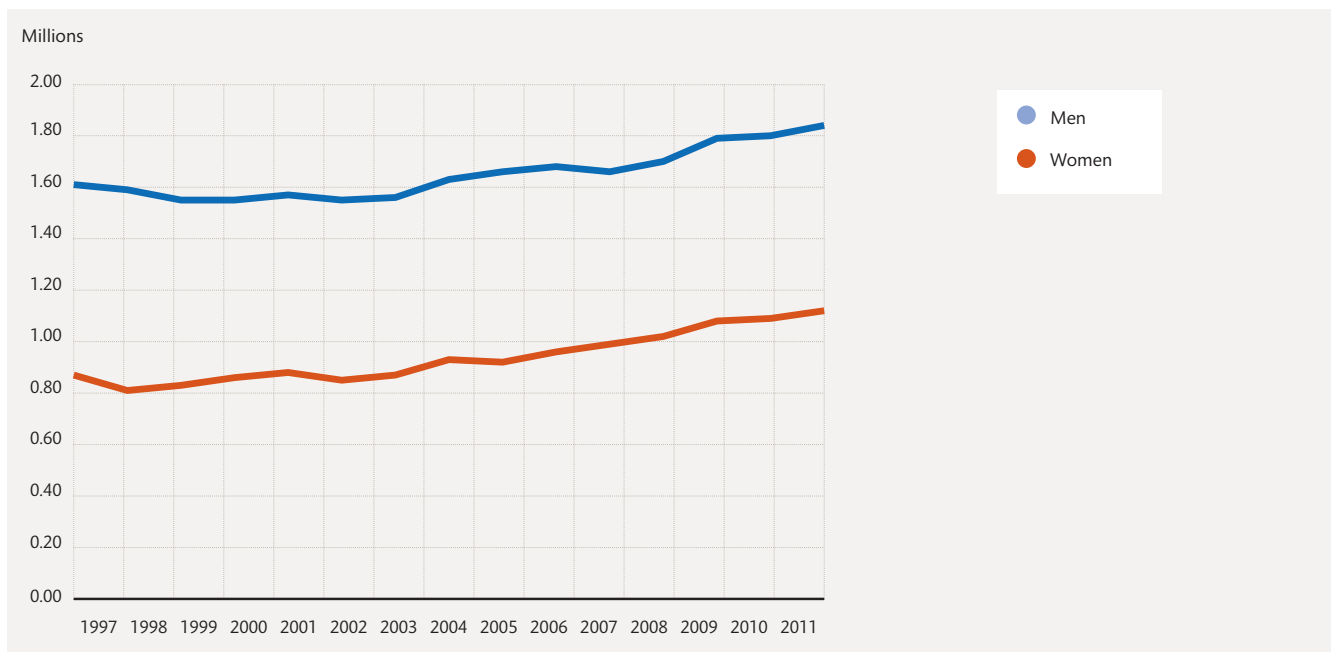
Grandparents as carers

Data from the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS), involving more than 19,000 children born during 2000-2001 in the UK, also assessed the roles of grandparents as carers. The sampling was designed to focus more closely on areas with disadvantaged and/or high ethnic minority populations, though statistical techniques were applied to the data to ensure that it represented the UK's population as closely as possible.

4.4% of MCS children lived in a household which included a grandparent. In the majority of households with a grandparent, two natural parents were also present (60.7%). In almost 29.7% of grandparent households only the natural mother was present. Grandparents appear to be important sources of informal childcare and support, particularly to lone mother parents (Gray 2005).

There are also variations in terms of the ethnicities of children living in households with grandparents. Of the 4.4% of MCS children who lived with a grandparent, more than half were White (53.1%). However, a disproportionately high number of children in this group were of Pakistani or Bangladeshi ethnicity (25.7%) and 14.1% were Indian (overall proportions of these ethnicities in the general population are much lower). This suggests an increased number of multi-generational or extended family households within Bangladeshi, Indian and Pakistani groups, with mothers in these groups more likely to have informal childcare arrangements with grandparents (Bell et al. 2005).

Chart 2.10 Men and women aged 20-34 living with parents, 1997-2011 UK



Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics

Economic circumstances may influence the composition of households, and one indicator of this may be in terms of adults who continue to live with their parents.

Chart 2.10 shows trends in men and women living with their parents between 1997 and 2011. Most adult children still living with their parents were men, though steady increases have been shown in both men and women over the last decade. The higher proportion of men living with their parents may reflect women getting married at younger average ages than men (see **Chart 1.10** for example).



Reminder to check for latest updates on data

However, these statistics do not necessarily reflect delays in moving out from the parental home; the transition out of the parental home is not always clean-cut, and several returns to the home may be made before adult children finally leave. Therefore it is not certain from the data in the previous chart that adult children remain continuously in their parent's home from childhood onwards. However, longitudinal research comparing participants of 1958 and 1970 birth cohorts did suggest that those born in 1970 were slower in leaving the parental home than those born in 1958 (Kneale et al. 2010).



Talking point

The Boomerang Generation

The increased numbers of both men and women living with their parents may be a result of economic circumstances: the global financial crisis, which was marked by the collapse of the US housing market in 2007, remains on-going, and the UK has entered its first 'double-dip' recession since 1975. However, the numbers of adults living with their parents appeared to be increasing even before these economic crises became apparent. The most common reason given in 2007 – the year in which the US housing market became destabilised – by young adults as to why they lived with their parents was that not enough affordable housing was available (ONS 2009). Other factors may be tied up with this reasoning, such as: wider economic factors relating to the recession (including youth unemployment and lower income to pay for housing); high private rental costs; and rising costs of higher education. Affordable housing may be a problem which increasingly affects individuals during both periods of both economic 'boom and bust', with high property prices during periods of growth and poor credit availability during periods of recession. For example, more adults may choose to live with their parents to save money for home deposits when banks are reluctant to offer mortgages with high loan-to-value ratios. The effects of economic factors on parenthood are also discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

Chapter Summary

Statistics and research have been presented in this chapter exploring the size and type of the typical UK household, with households occupied by fewer people on average, and more people living alone. At the same time the number of couple headed households has decreased, as the number of lone parent households has increased. International comparisons also suggest that the UK has a relatively high proportion of single person headed households compared to other countries. The UK also has a comparatively high proportion of lone mother headed families. Data also suggest that the numbers of alternative family and household types are increasing, including step families formed in the UK, households where grandparents act as carers, and adults who live with their parents. Later chapters investigate the further underpinnings of family composition by exploring patterns of parenthood and relationship quality.

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Notes

Understanding 21st Century Relationships

A Compendium of Key Data

Household Composition and Families is the second chapter of **Understanding 21st Century Relationships: A Compendium of Key Data.**

Chapter one examines statistics on relationship formation and dissolution in the UK. Parenthood is the focus of Chapter three, presenting data on conception and birth, and looking at how these statistics vary within the UK and worldwide. Chapter four examines relationship quality, and those factors which make some relationships endure while others fail.

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OnePlusOne strengthens relationships by creating resources that help families and frontline workers tackle relationship issues early.

Household Composition and Families forms the second chapter of Understanding 21st Century Relationships: A Compendium of Key Data. The full compendium marks OnePlusOne's 40 years researching what makes relationships work or fall apart.

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