



**CabinetOffice**  
The Strategy Unit



department for  
**children, schools and families**

# Families in Britain: an evidence paper

December 2008

**Making  
government  
work better**

This is an analytical discussion paper and not a statement of government policy

# Contents

---

- 1 Ministerial Foreword
- 2 Executive Summary
- 3 Family Matters
- 4 Family Composition
- 5 Family Process
- 6 Family Circumstances
- 7 The Future for Families
- 8 Implications
- 9 A Modern Family Policy

# Contents

---

- 1 Ministerial Foreword
- 2 Executive Summary
- 3 Family Matters
- 4 Family Composition
- 5 Family Process
- 6 Family Circumstances
- 7 The Future for Families
- 8 Implications
- 9 A Modern Family Policy

## Ministerial Foreword



*Other things may change us, but we start and end with family. (Anthony Brandt)*

Families are the bedrock of our society. They nurture children, help to build strength, resilience and moral values in young people, and provide the love and encouragement that helps them lead fulfilling lives. Extended family members provide one another with support throughout life, especially in difficult times and during critical moments, such as when a child is born, when a couple is separating or when relatives need caring for. It is within families that a sense of identity develops, and cultural and

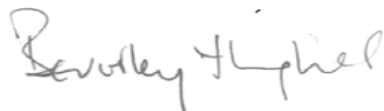
social values are passed on from one generation to the next. We often take for granted the fact that families are unparalleled in the sheer range of what they do and provide for us.

The family has also shown itself able to endure, shape and adapt to changes in social and economic circumstances, and it continues to do so today. So we see an increasing range of family structures, to the extent that there is arguably no longer a one size fits all family in Britain today. But this is diversity and not decline. Warm, loving and stable relationships matter more for our happiness and wellbeing than the legal form of a

relationship. And while marriage will remain of central importance, the reality in many people's everyday lives is that more and more families experience a range of family forms throughout their life time. There is no single family form that guarantees happiness or success. All types of family can, in the right circumstances, look after their family members, help them get on in life and, for their children, have high hopes and the wherewithal to put them on the path to success. Families are inherently private, of course. But because it is so important to all of us that our children achieve the best they can in life, in every way, Government

also has a duty to think about the kind of support families might need to fulfil the key role they play in society. We know that all families benefit from support at some time or another. Some families need and want more support than others. That support must come hand in hand with the recognition that families have responsibilities too, to family members and to others in society.

For a minority of families, a concern for fairness means on occasions these responsibilities must be enforced. There may still be some who argue that governments should stay out of family policy.



**Beverley Hughes, Minister of State for Children, Young People and Families**

We heard these arguments when we first introduced measures to empower families to make choices about their work life balance – including the right for parents of young children to ask for flexible working; provided support for families such as child tax credits and working family tax credits; and created nearly 3,000 Children’s Centres around the country and invested more than £100 million to expand our network of Parent Support Advisers. But these measures are patently not about government dictating, but about empowering families and enabling them to make the right decisions for

them. These successful policies are good examples of how Government can help strengthen families enabling them to help themselves and reduce the pressures they face. This paper and the family policy principles it sets out will, we hope, stimulate further discussion which will continue to inform our work and underpin our ambition for a truly family friendly Britain



**Liam Byrne Minister of the Cabinet Office**

# Contents

---

- 1 Ministerial Foreword
- 2 **Executive Summary**
- 3 Family Matters
- 4 Family Composition
- 5 Family Process
- 6 Family Circumstances
- 7 The Future for Families
- 8 Implications
- 9 A Modern Family Policy

# Family is a powerful social institution that matters for children, adults, communities and society

## Families matter, are unique and changing

- Families are the bedrock of our society, providing a **wide range of functions**. They nurture children, help to build strength, resilience and moral values in young people, and provide the love and encouragement that helps them lead fulfilling lives. Families are vital in ensuring all children have good life chances and the opportunities to get on in life
- Families are complex and dynamic. Families provide **support throughout life**, especially during critical moments and in difficult times, such as when a child is born or a couple is separating
- As an institution family has evolved, shaped and adapted constantly to social changes, and although families have much in common, there is **no such thing as a typical family in 21st Century Britain**. Today, people are marrying later, and it is the norm to live with a partner before marrying. Married couples are more likely to divorce, and more children are born outside of marriage than was previously the case. In addition, the population is ageing, with older people increasingly likely to live alone

# Family composition, circumstances and processes all matter for families. But strong and healthy relationships matter most

## What matters for families

- Family **composition, circumstances and processes** matter for outcomes of families – but not in equal measure
- Families with strong and healthy relationships have the ability to develop positive outcomes for the whole family
- Increased pluralism of family structures need not lead to poorer outcomes, since evidence suggests that the quality of relationships and families' circumstances have a greater effect on outcomes than the legal structure of a family. **Strong and healthy relationships** are therefore paramount regardless of the structure
- Poor **material circumstances**, emotional distress, and ill health reinforce other disadvantages for children and adults. Absent fathers and mothers may contribute to these adverse effects, and make it harder for families to achieve positive outcomes



# Families are inherently private and individuals have responsibilities towards each other. But their actions have a societal dimension and levels of need vary, and therefore Government has a role

## Why Government support matters

- The wellbeing of a family depends upon the commitment and behaviours of the individuals within it
- Government does not bring up children, parents do. Government does not build good relationships, individuals do
- Families have to fulfil their responsibilities. But there are three main reasons why the Government should have a strong, supportive family policy:
  - First, while all families will make decisions that are entirely private to its members, there are areas in which the decisions or circumstances of a family will **impact upon society more generally**
  - Second, families may not always have the **information** they need to do the best for themselves and their members
  - Thirdly, the Government has a role to play in addressing **inequalities** as families have different levels of need and capability
- But where possible Government should work in partnership with families, and the private and voluntary sectors

## However, family policy should be guided by a clear set of principles

### Family policy principles

- Any set of policies designed to build the skills and capabilities of families or to reduce the pressures on them must be judged against principles to ensure they give every family the best possible chance of thriving
  - **Family policy should be empowering**, giving people the information to make choices for themselves, helping them balance rights and responsibilities and fuelling aspiration to achieve their full potential
  - **Intervention should be proportionate**, recognising that families are their own experts on what is right for them but that they also have responsibilities for members and wider society
  - A modern family policy **should not exclude families based on form or structure**
  - Universal support should be complemented with targeted support for those in genuine need to **help secure equal opportunities**
- These principles are complementary but in practice there are often trade-offs between them

# Contents

---

- 1 Ministerial Foreword
- 2 Executive Summary
- 3 Family Matters**
- 4 Family Composition
- 5 Family Process
- 6 Family Circumstances
- 7 The Future for Families
- 8 Implications
- 9 A Modern Family Policy

# The family dominates public and policy debate and there is much discussion about the state of family in Britain. This paper assembles the key trends and sets out a framework to think about the family

## The aim of this paper is to provide a framework to:

1. take stock of family life in Britain and map recent trends and changes as well as explore future pressures on families
2. understand what lies behind headline trends and changes and highlight the complexity and interdependencies of drivers and outcomes
3. understand the implications of these changes and trends for family and wider societal outcomes
4. define the role of Government in supporting and intervening in families and derive policy principles to guide a modern family policy

For the purpose of this paper we **define** family by what families do (functional definition) rather than by a particular form or legal structure. The paper postulates that everybody is part of a family at some time in their lives and what family is and does depends on the particular life-stage of an individual. The framework developed is highly stylised but enables us to think more strategically about families

# This document will provide a framework for understanding the family, identify how it has changed and in the light of the evidence, set out the principles underlying the Government's family policy

Family matters

Overall approach

This chapter

Develops an analytical framework for understanding why family matters

Chapters 4 - 6

Identifies key trends affecting family over recent decades and proposes drivers

Chapter 7

Identifies future trends of importance for family

Chapter 8

Assesses the implications of past and future trends for outcomes

Chapter 9

Suggests a series of policy principles to distil the evidence into a framework for modern family policy

# The family can be thought of as an institution which is unique in the wide range of functions it provides, which in turn lead to outcomes for children, adults and society

What families can do in principle is universal and has changed little over time...

## Family functions

What families can do

Examples include

- Emotional support
- Parenting
- Division of labour

...but outcomes are highly context specific

## Outcomes of families

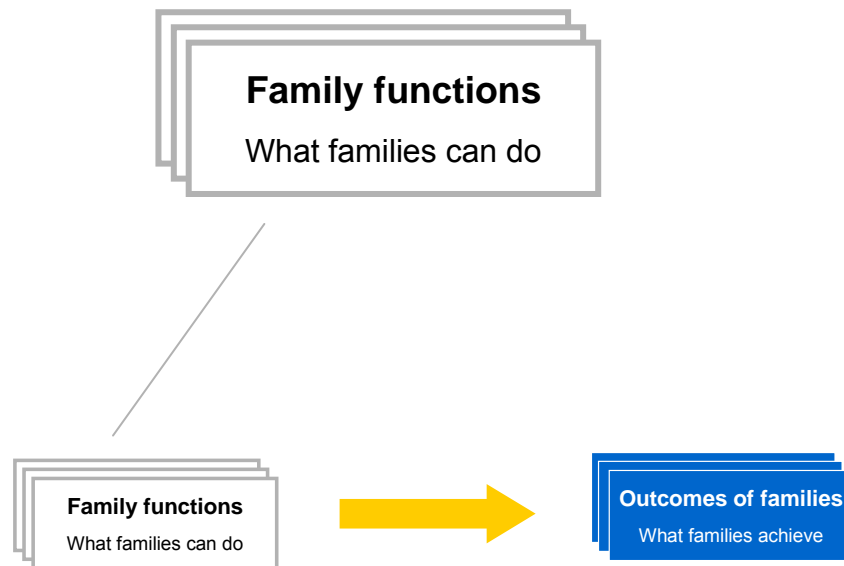
What families achieve

Outcomes fall in three categories:

- Material
- Emotional
- Physical wellbeing

# Whilst the range of functions that a family can theoretically provide is universal, the relative importance of a function depends on the family context...

## Examples of family functions fall broadly into two categories



### Instrumental

- Child supervision
- Creation and transmission of cultural and social capital
- Division of domestic and paid labour
- Risk sharing between partners or different generations

Functions concerning children are only important at certain points in a family's life course...

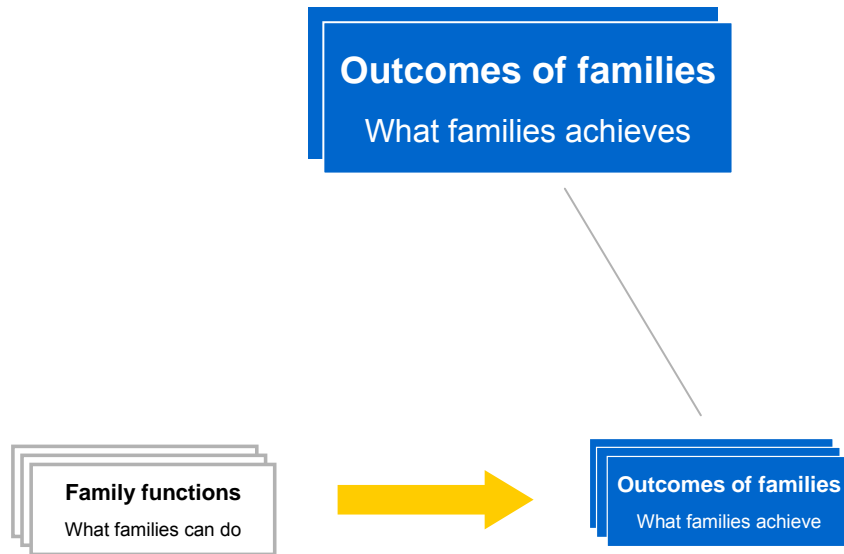
### Affectionate

- Loving and nurturing children
- Romantic relationships and companionship
- Sense of belonging

...whereas a family can provide an important sense of identity throughout life

# ...and the importance of the relevant outcome at that point in time. Outcomes can be grouped into physical, emotional and material wellbeing

Examples of outcomes of families for adults and children fall broadly into three categories



## Physical wellbeing

- Lead healthy lives
- Receive good quality care when needed
- Be safe from injury, accident and crime

## Emotional wellbeing

- Be safe from maltreatment and discrimination
- Achieve a work-life balance
- Enjoy education or employment
- Enjoy positive relationships with friends and within communities

## Material wellbeing

- Engage in education or employment
- Live in households free from low income and social exclusion



# Outcomes of families affect not only children and adults but also communities and society

## Families play a number of roles in society:

### Children

- Create a setting for children to be born, raised and nurtured
- Help children to fulfil their potential and opportunities in life through emotional, physical and material support by parents and extended family

### Adults

- Provide emotional fulfilment that enhances individuals' self-worth
- Enable intergenerational and informal support between family members
- Enlarge the economic opportunities of family members

### Community

- Help create strong and sustainable communities
- Contribute to social cohesion and crime reduction

### Society

- The successful upbringing of children brings social and economic prosperity to society
- Good family outcomes reduce the need for some public services e.g. provision of care, reduced costs of crime and poverty

# The family is constantly changing, adapting to new challenges. Government's chief concern should be where there are implications for outcomes

## The family is changing, as it always has

---

- The family is one of the oldest and most powerful social institutions which is found in almost all societies around the world
- As such, it has evolved, shaped and adapted constantly to social changes – though public perceptions of what family *should* be tend to change more slowly
- Family forms and attitudes fluctuate – e.g. lone parenthood rates in the 15<sup>th</sup> century were very similar compared to current rates but much lower in other times
- The nuclear family ideal advocated by some has had a varied existence and the 1950s and 1960s were a historical peak rather than the end of a longstanding ideal type

## Why we care about change

---

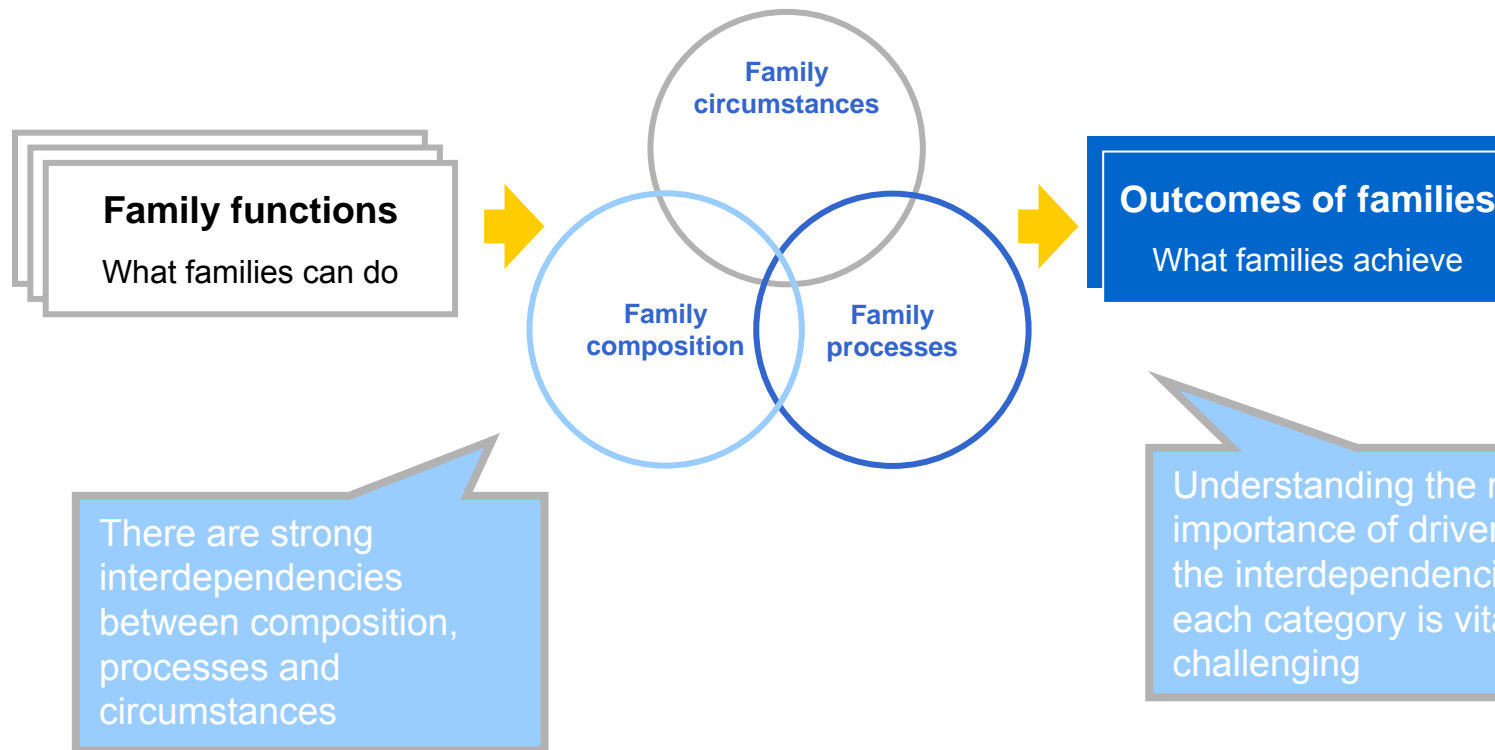
- As Government we should be concerned about family change only if those changes affect outcomes – not because of change per se
- We therefore need to understand which trends and changes matter and why; and if and how policy might respond
- Government's response must be informed by evidence

# Understanding the impact of change on family outcomes is therefore vital. The many drivers of family outcomes can be grouped into categories; the following three chapters deal with each in turn

Families provide certain functions...

...and the interaction of composition, circumstances and processes...

...determines the outcomes for children, adults, the community and society

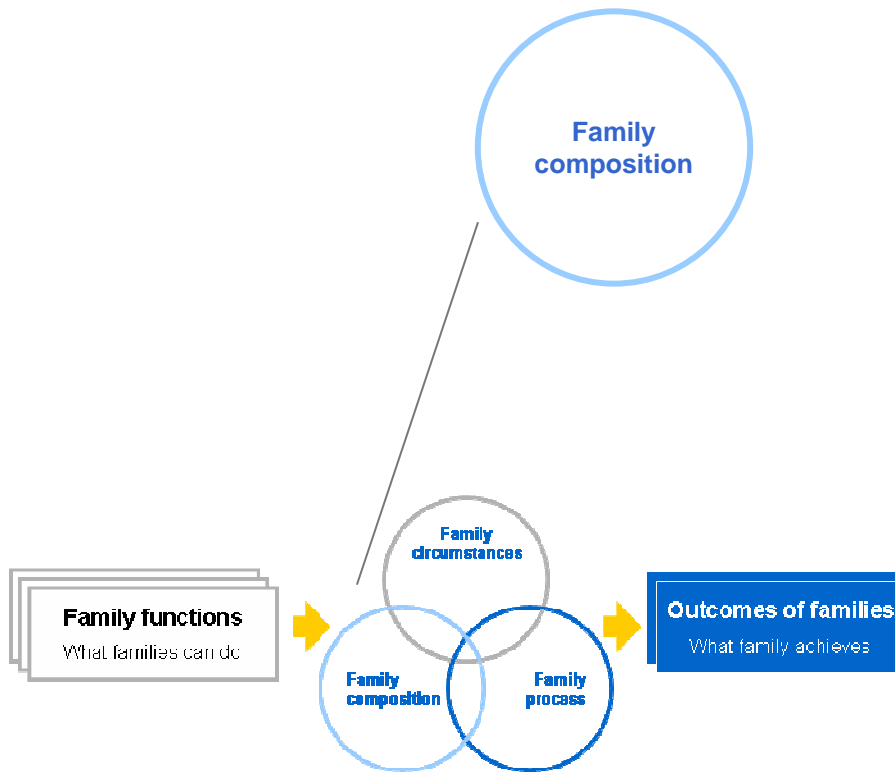


# Contents

---

- 1 Ministerial Foreword
- 2 Executive Summary
- 3 Family Matters
- 4 **Family Composition**
- 5 Family Process
- 6 Family Circumstances
- 7 The Future for Families
- 8 Implications
- 9 A Modern Family Policy

## By family composition we mean who makes up a family, and the type and the structure of the underpinning relationships



By family composition we mean who makes up a family, and the type and the (legal) structure of the underpinning relationships

## Facts

---

- Marriage rates have declined and the number of cohabiting couples has increased
- Divorce rates rose until the 1980s and have declined slightly ever since
- Relationship types have become more fluid and family composition now changes more frequently over the life course
- Fertility rates declined until the 1980s but have recently begun to increase again



## Drivers

---

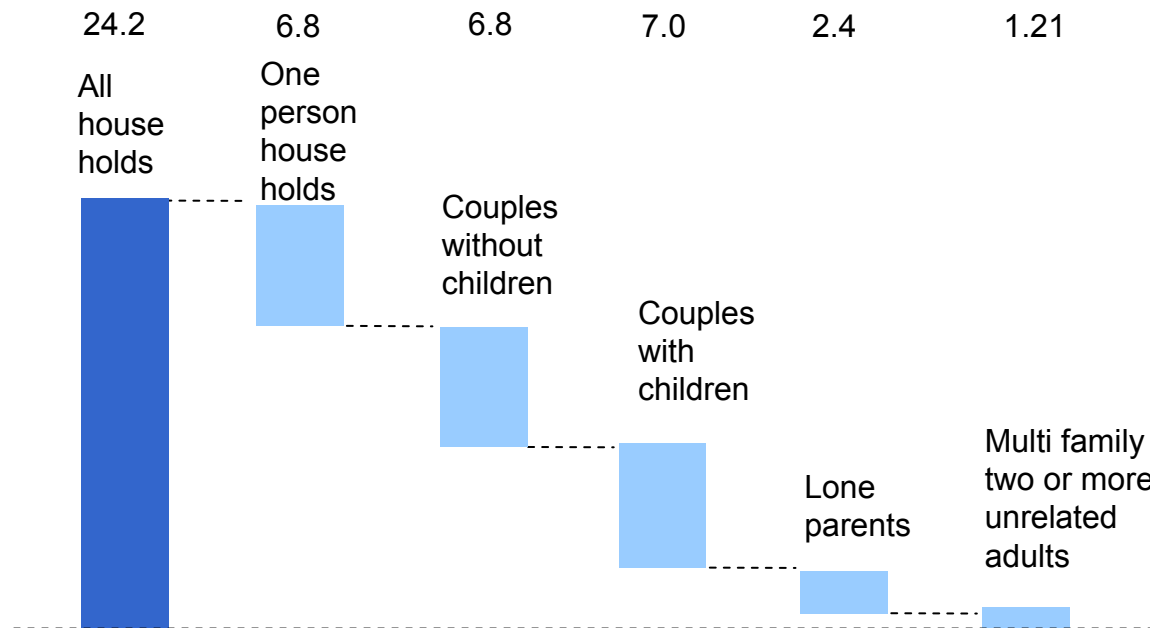
- Changes in social norms reflect widespread acceptance of alternative family forms
- Legislation around family breakdown both reflects and drives changes in family composition and social norms
- Changes in women's employment and the availability of contraception have altered the timing of family formation
- People expect more romantic love and emotional closeness in relationships
- For most drivers, the effects are bidirectional and reinforcing e.g. changes in social norms are also the result of greater plurality in family forms

# Living arrangements are diverse and changing. Taking a snapshot, the majority of households have no dependent children but most are part of an extended family or a relationship

Composition
Trends
Drivers

## Family forms are diverse and cut across household structures

Households, millions<sup>1</sup>



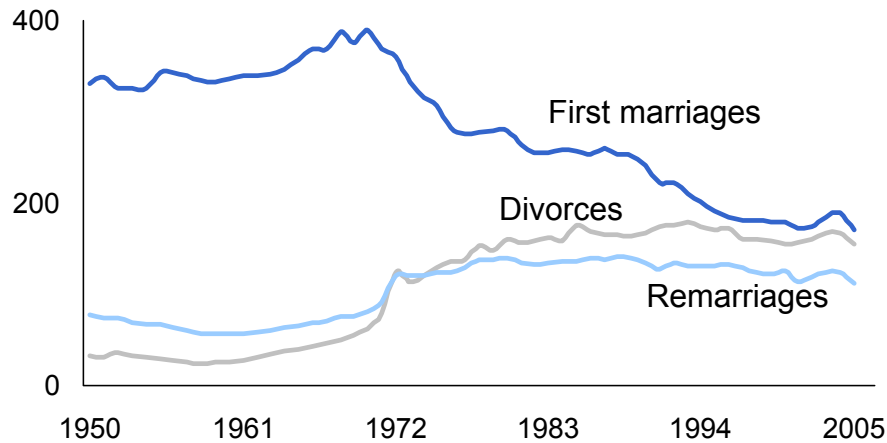
- The average household size fell from 2.9 persons per household in 1971 to 2.4 in 2006<sup>1</sup>. Household size varies considerably by ethnicity<sup>1</sup>
- One person households increased from 18% to 29% between 1971 and 2007; this reflects, in part, young people's postponement of relationship formation, high rates of relationship breakdown and increased longevity among the elderly<sup>2</sup>
- Amongst households with only one adult or several unrelated adults, there are ~2m people in relationships not living together<sup>3a</sup>
- Family ties stretch beyond household living arrangements: 73% of people belong to three, four or even five generation families<sup>4</sup>
- An increasing percentage of couple families with children are stepfamilies<sup>5</sup>

# There has been a decline in marriage over the long term in the UK and also other European countries

Composition
Trends
Drivers

## The total number of marriages has declined since the 1950s

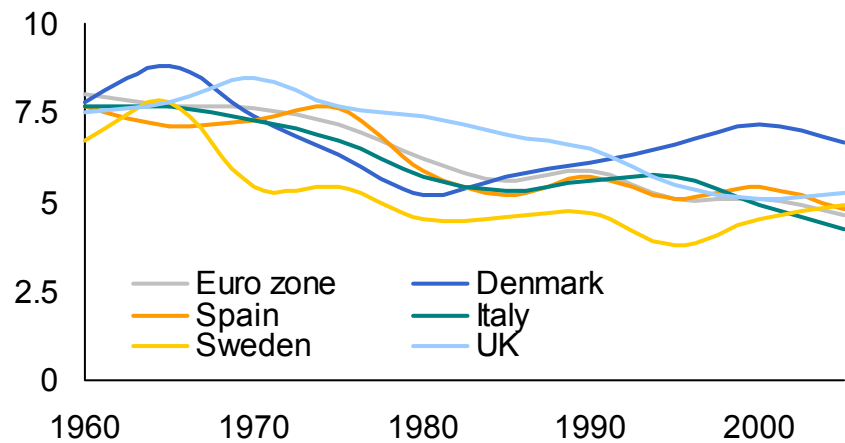
Number of marriages, divorces, and remarriages, UK, (thousands)<sup>1</sup>



- Marriages in England and Wales fell by 4% in 2006 to 236,980: the lowest number of marriages since 1895<sup>1</sup>
- In 2006, the England and Wales marriage rate (number married per 1000 people aged 16+) was 22.8 for men, down from 24.5 in 2005. The marriage rate for women in 2006 was 20.5 down from 21.9 in 2005<sup>1</sup>
- However, around 7 in 10 families were headed by a married couple in 2006<sup>2</sup>

## Most European countries have experienced a similar decline in marriage rates

Marriage rate per 1000<sup>3</sup>



- UK marriage rates have been higher than the euro zone average but the difference has narrowed consistently due to greater decline<sup>3</sup>
- The mean age at first marriage went up for females in the EU-25 from 23 to 27, and in the former EU-15 from 23 to almost 28 between 1960 and 2005<sup>3</sup>

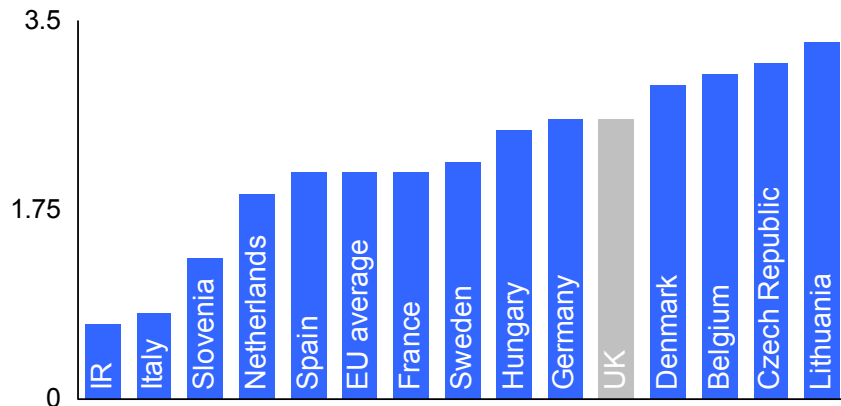


# Divorce rates have increased since the 1970s. While the UK divorce rate is still high compared to other countries, it has recently started to fall

Composition
Trends
Drivers

## The UK divorce rate is high compared to other countries...

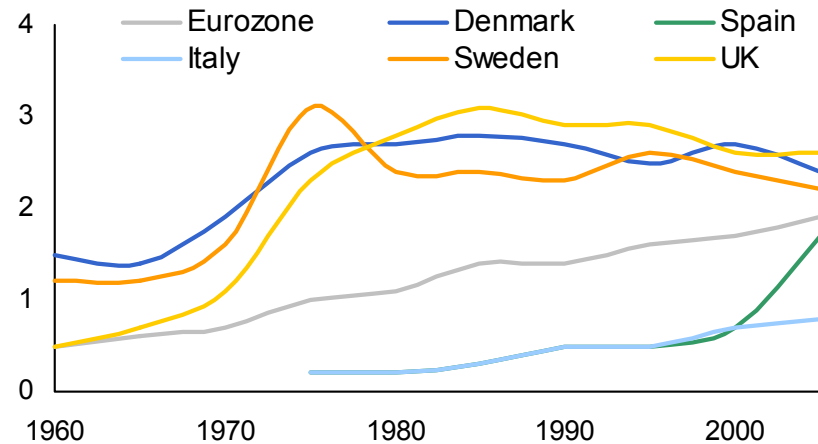
Divorces per 1000 inhabitants, 2005<sup>1</sup>



- The divorce rate in the former EU-15 has now caught up with the new Member States<sup>1</sup>
- Divorce rates are higher for any given marriage duration in more recent marriage cohorts<sup>3</sup>
- The median duration of marriage at time of divorce however has decreased only slightly from 12.7 years in 1965 to 11.6 years in 2005<sup>4</sup>

## ...but the rate peaked in the mid-1980s and has been stable or declining ever since

Divorces per 1000 inhabitants, 1960-2005<sup>1</sup>



- Divorces in the EU have near quadrupled since 1960<sup>1</sup>
- The divorces to marriages ratio was 25:100 in 1973; 55:100 in 2005<sup>2</sup>. However the 2007 UK divorce rate was 11.9 divorcing people per 1,000 married population: its lowest since 1981<sup>3</sup>
- Since 1997 the average age at divorce in England and Wales has risen from 40.2 to 43.7 years for men and from 37.7 to 41.2 years for women<sup>3</sup>

# Cohabitation has become more popular but mostly as a 'trial-marriage'. Stepfamilies have increased and make up one tenth of all families with children

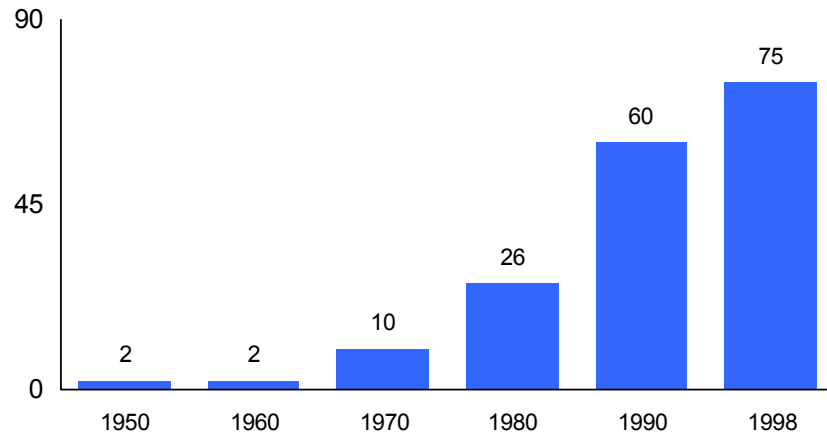
Composition

Trends

Drivers

## Pre-marital cohabitation has become far more common

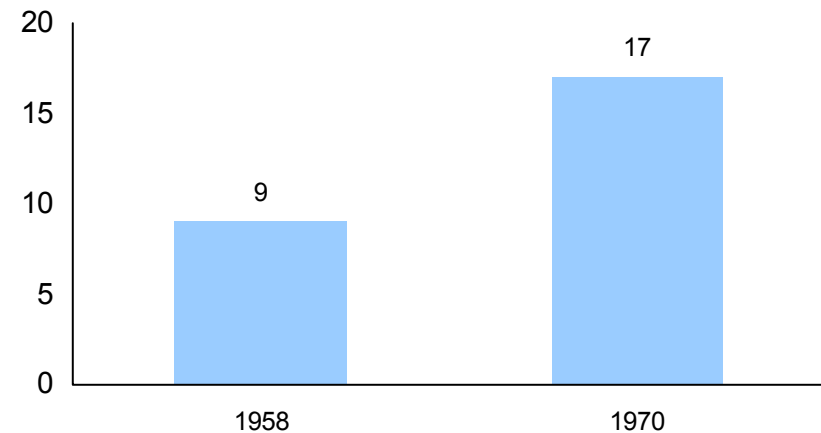
Per cent by year of first marriage<sup>1</sup>



- The percentage of working age people cohabiting increased from 2% in the 1970s to over 10% in the late 1990s<sup>2</sup>. Cohabiting couple families made up 9% of all families in 1971 and 14% of families in 2006<sup>3</sup>
- The median duration of cohabitation is just under 2 years. About three in five first cohabitations turn into marriage<sup>2</sup>
- Less than a fifth of cohabitating unions survive 5 years or more, less than a tenth survive 10 years or more<sup>2</sup>

## The proportion of stepfamilies has grown

Per cent of all fathers being stepfathers at age 30, by birth cohort<sup>4</sup>



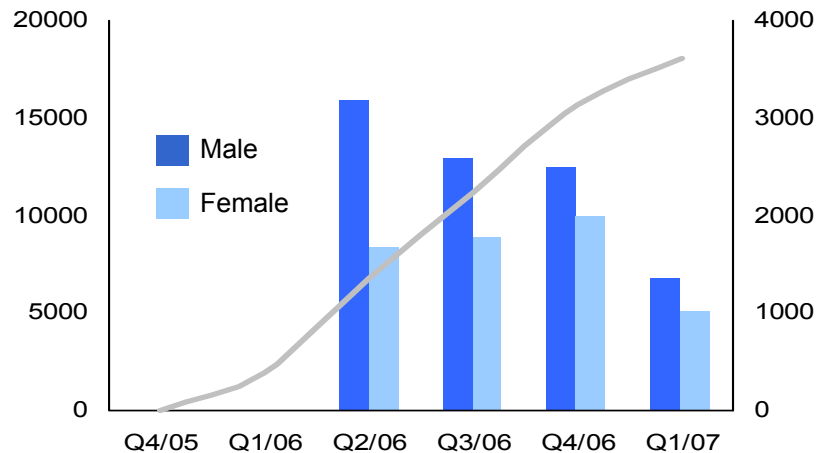
- Step families are one of the fastest growing family form in the UK<sup>4</sup>
- In 2005, 10% of families with dependent children were step-families<sup>5</sup>
- 30% of all mothers will spend some time in a stepfamily during their adulthood before age 45<sup>6</sup>
- Two-fifths of all marriages are remarriages<sup>7</sup>

# Civil partnership is relatively new family structure and Living Apart Together is a relatively new relationship form

Composition
Trends
Drivers

## More than 18,000 civil partnerships have formed

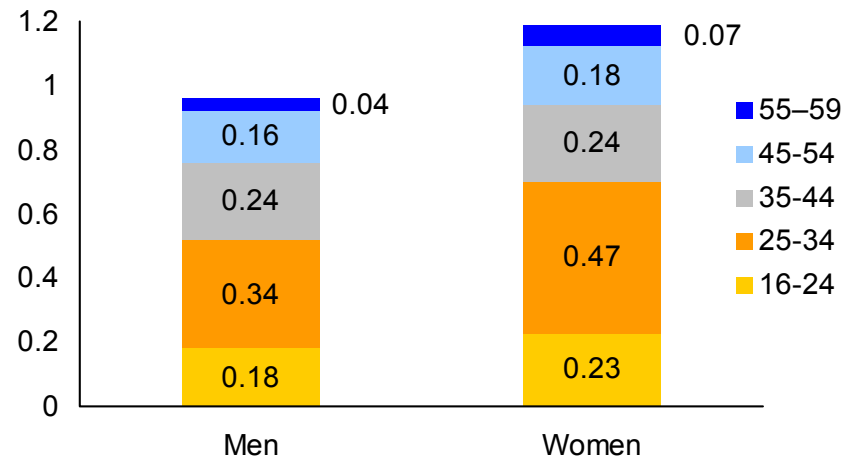
Number of civil partnerships (total left, quarterly total right)<sup>1</sup>



- An estimated six per cent of the population, or about 3.6 million Britons, are either gay or lesbian<sup>2</sup>
- The Civil Partnership Act 2004 came into force in December 2005 and enables same-sex couples to obtain legal recognition of their relationship
- 10% of all men and 25% of all women forming a civil partnership in the UK had been in a previous marriage

## Being in relationships but not living together is becoming an important relationship form

Millions, Great Britain 2002-03<sup>3</sup>



- Being in a relationship but not living together: people aged 16–59 who report having a regular partner who lives elsewhere (excluding students or a child of a household reporting person)<sup>3</sup>
- Estimates suggest three in ten men and women aged 16-59 not currently married or coresidentially cohabiting have a partner living elsewhere; of those, half - about 2 million - might be said to be LAT<sup>3</sup>

# Fertility rates declined in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century but have recently begun to increase. The proportion of births occurring outside marriage has risen constantly

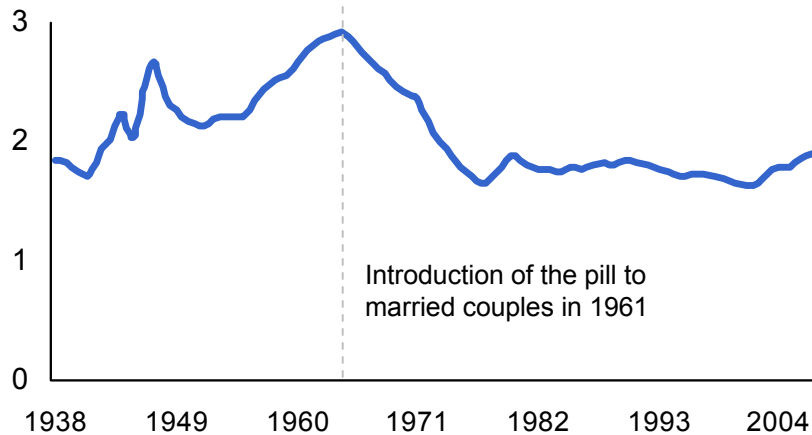
Composition

Trends

Drivers

## Fertility rates fell rapidly in the 1960s-70s and remained relatively stable thereafter

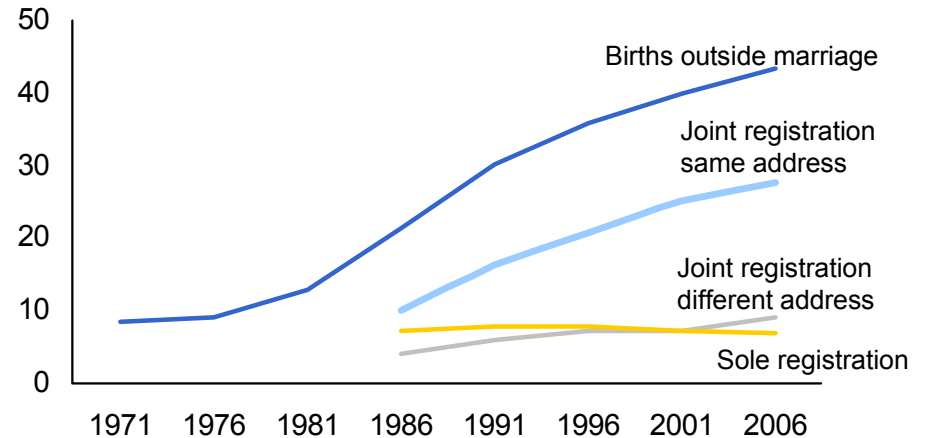
Total fertility rate, England and Wales 1938-2004<sup>1</sup>



- UK Total Fertility Rate (TFR) is about 1.9 children in 2007 – among the highest in the EU<sup>1</sup>
- The UK TFR has increased each year since the record low of 1.63 in 2001<sup>1</sup>. Only part of the recent increase is driven by immigration: the TFR for women born in the UK rose substantially from 1.68 in 2004 to 1.79 in 2007<sup>1</sup>
- Fertility in England and Wales has been below replacement level since 1973<sup>2</sup>

## Births outside marriage have increased, especially those to cohabiting couples

% of all live births, England and Wales 1971-2006<sup>3</sup>



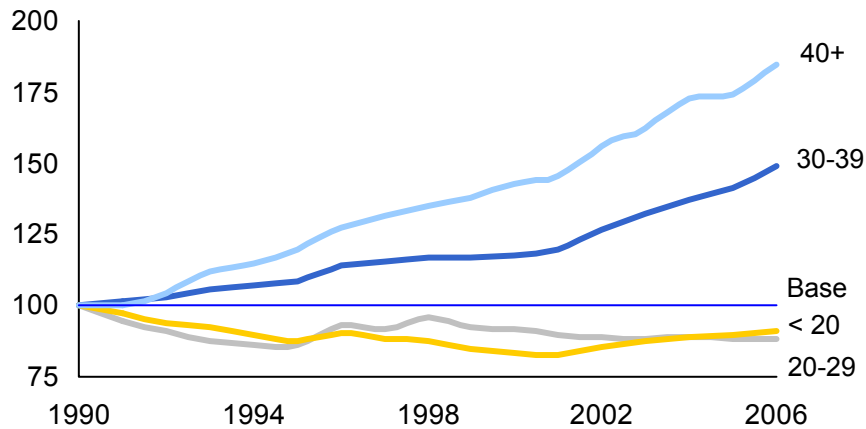
- Births outside marriage have gone up from about 10% in the 1970s to over 40% in the 2000s<sup>3</sup>
- Most of that increase took place among birth to cohabiting couples<sup>3</sup>
- Solely registered births out of wedlock have been on the decline over the past decade<sup>3</sup>

# People are delaying parenthood and women with higher education levels have fewer children

Composition
Trends
Drivers

## Conceptions are rising significantly in the over 40s

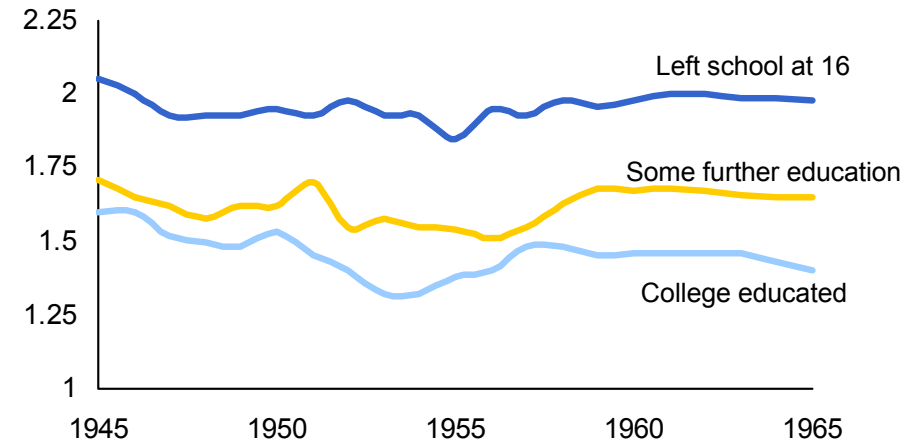
Relative changes in age-specific conception rates, England and Wales, 1990-2006 (1990=100)<sup>1</sup>



- Since the 1980s, the proportion of children being born to older mothers has increased as women delay having children until later in life<sup>1</sup>
- For example, in 1981, 1.4% of 35-44 year olds gave birth during the year; by 2004, 2.9% did<sup>1</sup>
- Women's average age at first birth was 27.6 in 2006<sup>2</sup>

## Completed family size varies significantly by education

Estimates of average no. of children by birth cohort, 1945-1965<sup>3</sup>



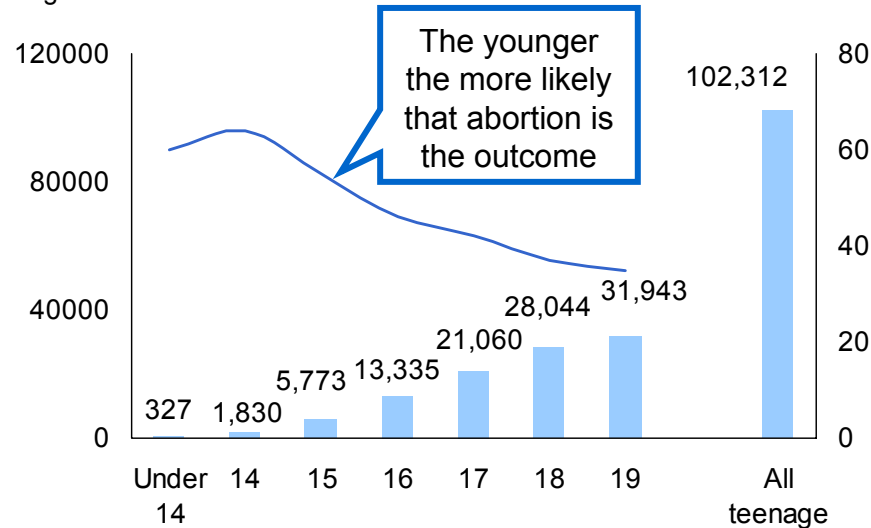
- British men and women at childbearing age desire on average 2.5 children<sup>4</sup>
- Although women's desired number of children varies little by education when they are in their early 20s, women with college education end up having fewer children<sup>3</sup>
- The fertility difference between women with low and high levels of education has widened<sup>3</sup>

# Teenage pregnancies are falling and are at the lowest for 20 years. Abortion rates are increasing slightly among young women

Composition
Trends
Drivers

## The under-18 conception rate is now at its lowest level for over 20 years

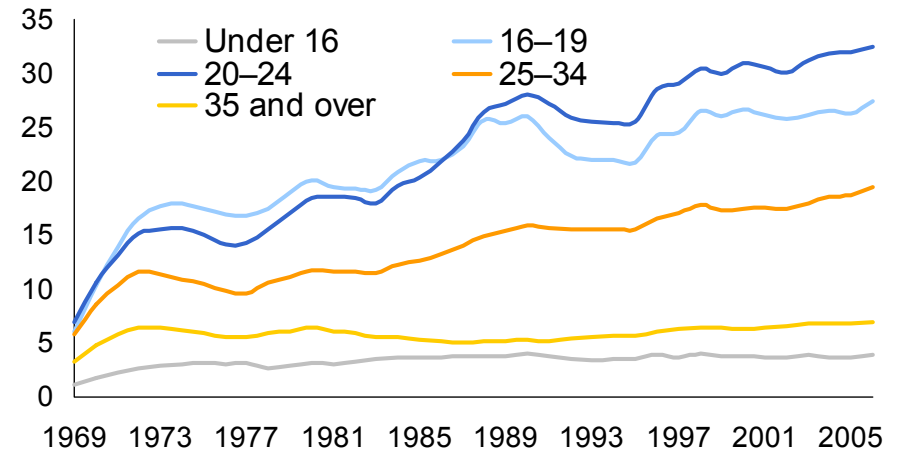
Number of teenage conceptions (left), % leading to abortion (right); England and Wales 2005<sup>1</sup>



- The 2006 under-18 conception rate for England of 40.4 per 1000 girls aged 15-17 represents an overall decline of 13.3% since 1998. However teenage pregnancy rates in Britain remain among the highest across developed countries<sup>2</sup>
- 49% of teenage mothers live in the most deprived 20% of areas. There are also clear differences among ethnic groups<sup>3</sup>

## The abortion rates have increased since the 1970s for young women and are highest for ages 20-24

Abortion per 1000 females, England and Wales<sup>4</sup>



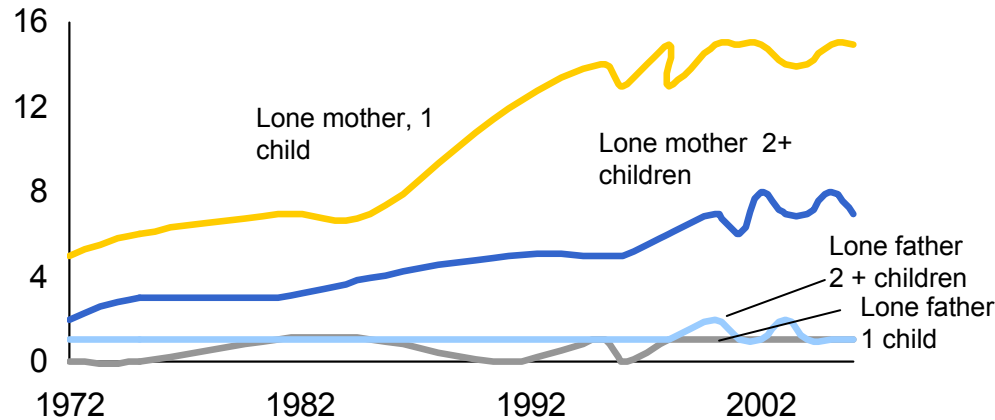
- In 2007 the Eng & Wales age-standardised abortion rate was 18.6 per 1,000 resident women aged 15-44, compared with 18.3 in 2006<sup>5</sup>
- 32% of women undergoing abortions in 2007 had one or more previous abortions (28% in 1997)<sup>5</sup>
- 81% of abortions in 2006 were carried out for single women, a proportion that has risen slowly from about two thirds since 1997<sup>5</sup>

# The number of children growing up in lone parent families has increased considerably, and significant numbers of children now live in stepfamilies

Composition
Trends
Drivers

## There are more children in lone parent families

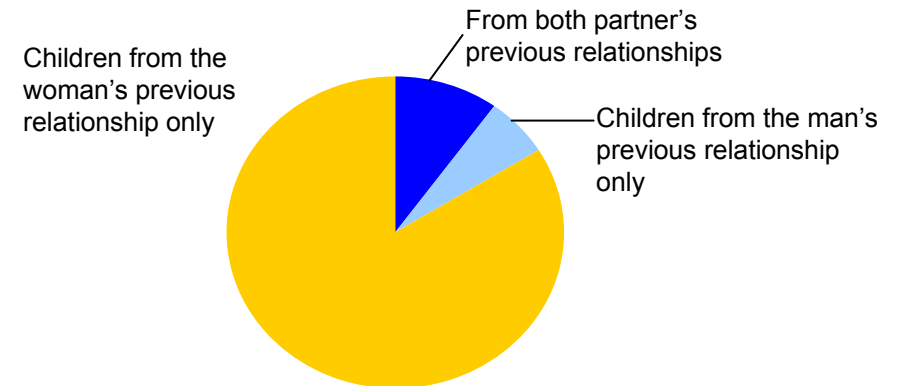
% of all dependent children in each family type Great Britain 1972 - 2005<sup>1</sup>



- In 2007 the proportion of lone parents as heads of households (12 per cent) was treble that of 1971 (4 per cent)<sup>2</sup>
- 5% of multi generational families are headed by a lone parent, this includes large proportions of lone parents aged 19 or younger<sup>3</sup>

## The majority of stepfamilies include children from the mother's previous relationship

Stepfamilies with dependent children, 2006<sup>2</sup>



- There were 0.7 million stepfamilies (about 10% of all families with dependent children) living in the UK in 2005<sup>3</sup>. 0.4 million were married couple stepfamilies, 0.3 million were cohabiting couple stepfamilies<sup>3</sup>
- Estimates suggest the number of children in stepfamilies increased from 1 in 15 to 1 in 10 between 1990 and 2001<sup>4</sup>

## The following slides discuss the drivers of these trends in family composition

---



### Drivers

#### **What lies behind these changes in family form and structure?**

- To what extent have social norms towards family forms changed in parallel with behaviour?
- How important have changes in family law and contraception been?
- What impact did the expansion of female education and employment have?



# Social norms around marriage, cohabitation and divorce have become more liberal. Alternative life-styles have gained widespread acceptance

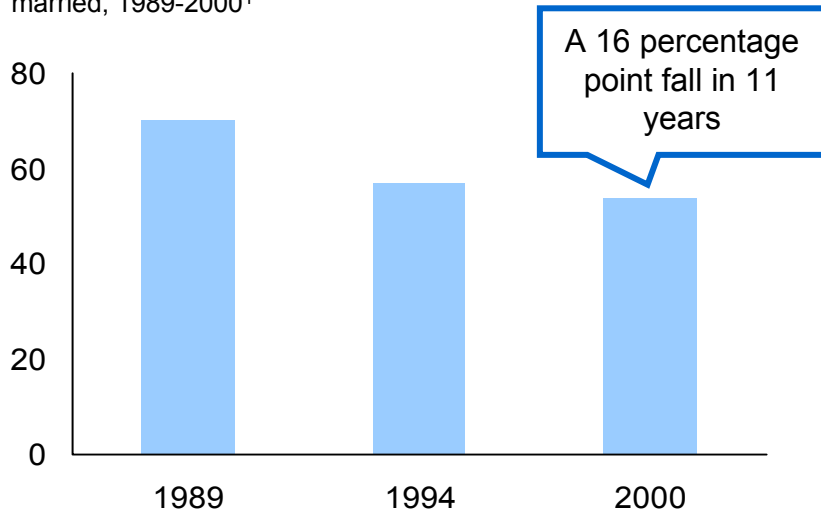
Composition

Trends

Drivers

## Acceptance of alternative family forms to marriage and of divorce has increased

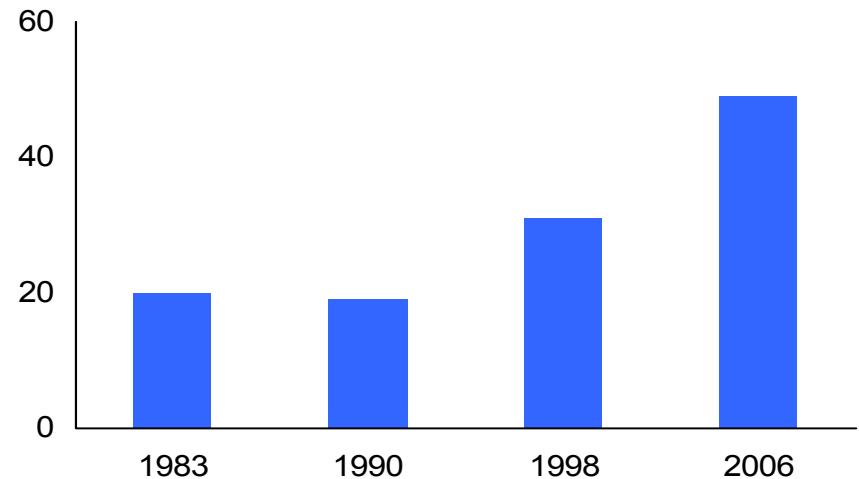
Percentage of people who agree that people who want children ought to get married, 1989-2000<sup>1</sup>



- Acceptance of cohabitation preceding and replacing marriage has increased but 28% of people still believe married couples make better parents than unmarried couples<sup>2</sup>
- 78% believe it is parental conflict rather than divorce which harms children<sup>2</sup>
- 63% think divorce can be a positive first step towards a new life<sup>2</sup>

## Acceptance of same sex relationships has increased

Percentage of people who agree that sexual relations between two adults of the same sex are rarely or never wrong, 1983-2006<sup>2</sup>



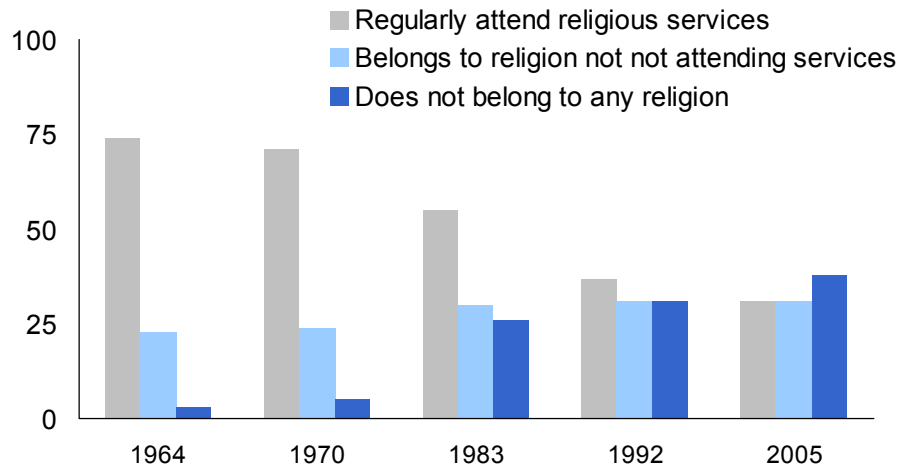
- 63% believe that same sex couples can be equally committed partners<sup>2</sup>
- Reservations remain regarding parenthood: only about one third of people believe same sex couples can be equally good parents as heterosexual couples<sup>2</sup>

# Religious observance has declined and sex before marriage is widely accepted. In a relationship, however, fidelity remains important

Composition
Trends
Drivers

## Religious service attendance declined strongly while more people now have no religious affiliation

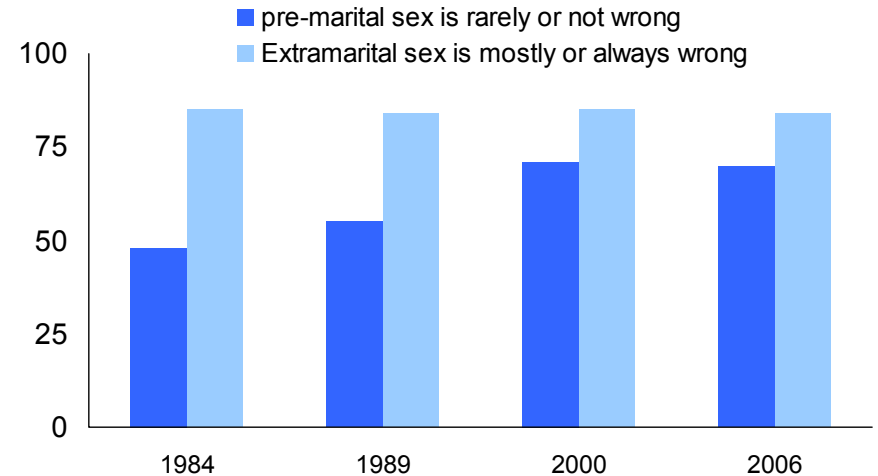
Percentage, 1964 - 2005<sup>1</sup>



- 71% of respondents to the British Social Attitudes survey regularly attended religious services in 1964 compared with 31% in 2005<sup>1</sup>
- The percentage of people stating no religious affiliation increased more strongly than those belonging to a religion but not attending services<sup>1</sup>
- Between 1979 and 2005, half of all Christians stopped going to church on a Sunday<sup>2</sup>

## Attitudes have become more liberal towards premarital sex but not regarding extramarital sex

Percentage, 1984 - 2006<sup>3</sup>



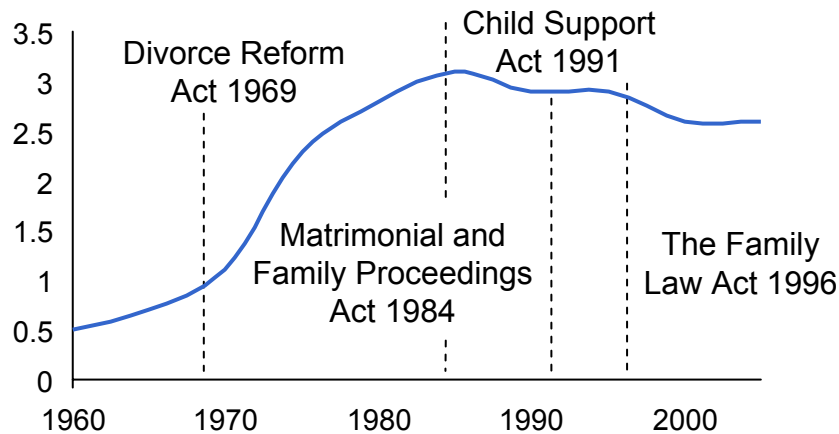
- 70% of people think there is nothing wrong with sex before marriage, compared with 48% in 1984<sup>3</sup>
- However an unchanged 85% of people disapprove of extramarital sex<sup>3</sup>
- The pill was introduced in 1961. By 2005, 75% of British women were using at least one method of contraception (25% of women use the pill)<sup>5</sup>. Sexuality is losing its value in exchange for commitment<sup>6</sup>

# Whether legislation drives or reacts to changing social norms is a matter of debate, but people do believe it has some impact on family composition

Composition
Trends
Drivers

## Divorce and family law has seen considerable change since the 1960s

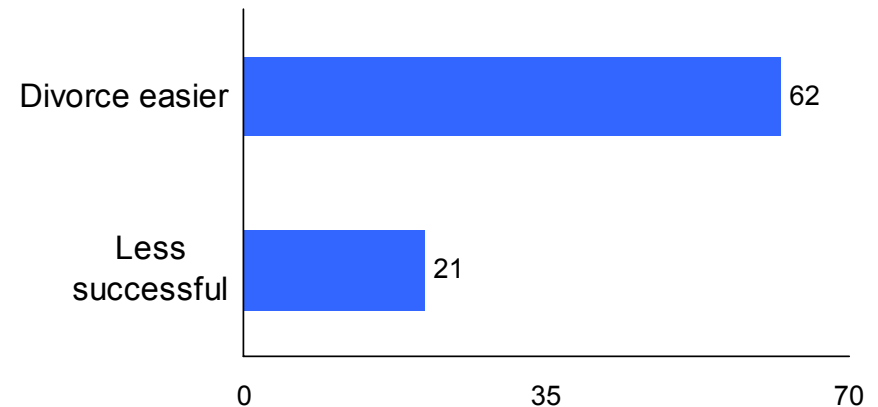
Divorces per 1000 inhabitants<sup>1</sup>



- The Divorce Reform Act 1969 introduced a single ground for divorce ('irretrievable breakdown'). This Act probably contributed to the stark rise in divorce rates<sup>2</sup>
- The other legislative acts have changed proceedings upon relationship breakdown

## People ascribe the increase in divorce to legislative change

Does a higher divorce rate today mean marriage is less successful, or just that divorce is easier?<sup>3</sup>



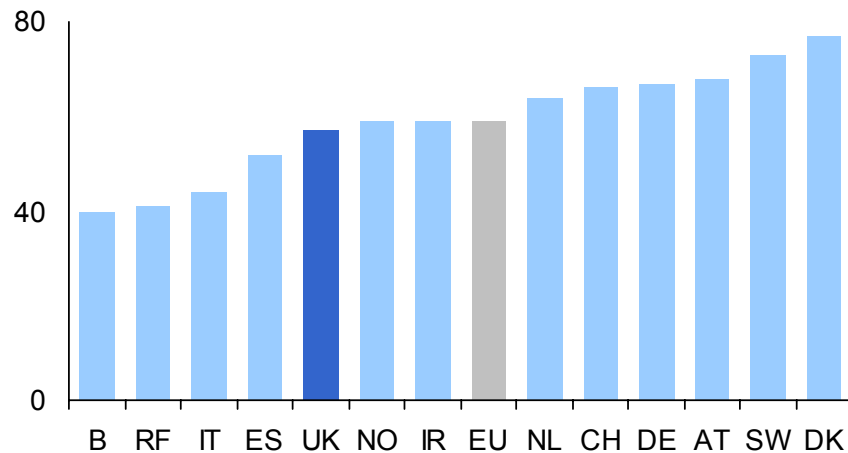
- Estimates suggest that the legal reforms account for about 20 percent of the increase in divorce rates in Europe between 1960 and 2002<sup>2</sup>
- The Scottish Family Law Act 2006 has given cohabitants some similar rights on relationship breakdown as married couples. This debate is ongoing in England and Wales

# People have greater opportunity to find the right partner, and a greater diversity of relationship types are on offer; but what they expect from those relationships may also have changed

Composition
Trends
Drivers

## Internet dating is seen as socially acceptable in most European countries

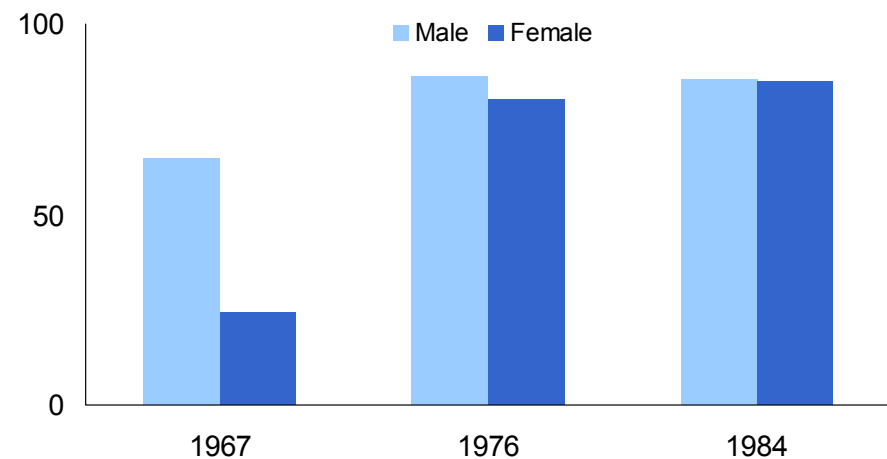
% of those aged 18-59<sup>1</sup>



- In a survey of UK singles aged 18-59, 52% of men and 48% of women in the UK have used the internet to find a date<sup>1</sup>
- Those aged 30-40 are the most likely to use the internet (in particular women) tailing off for later age groups<sup>1</sup>
- On average, British singles have had 1.9 relationships compared to 2.6 for Germans<sup>1</sup>

## Our expectations of love have changed, particularly those of women

Per cent agreeing that romantic love is a prerequisite for establishing a marital relationship<sup>2</sup>

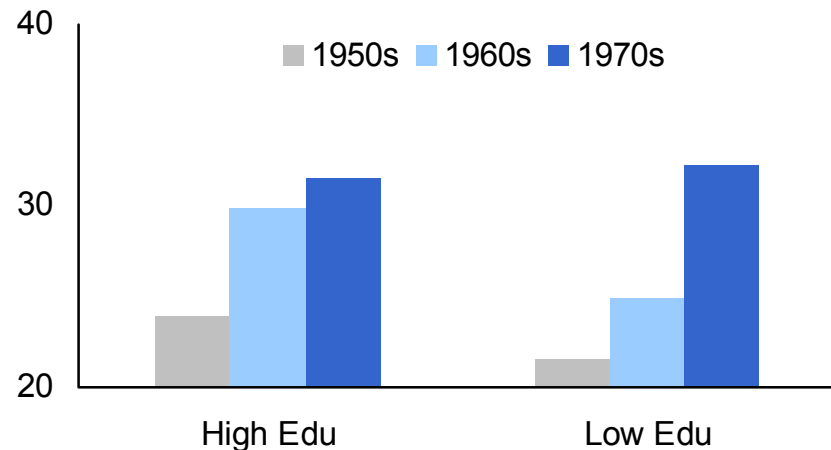


- Honesty, ability to communicate, openness, humour and fidelity are attributes most people are looking for in relationships<sup>1</sup>
- More women (88%) than men (76%) are looking for equality in relationships<sup>1</sup>
- However 47% of women also want their partner to protect them, while 25% expect him to offer an upscale standard of living<sup>1</sup>

# Better education has been an important factor in women marrying later, and delaying childbirth

## Highly educated women led the move to later marriage, but low educated have now overtaken

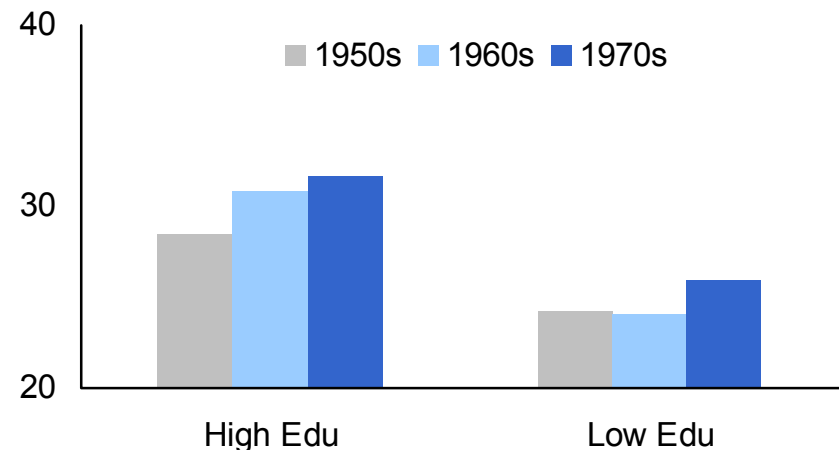
Median age at first marriage by birth cohort, BHPS<sup>1</sup>



- Cohabitation was more likely for more educated women for women born in 1950s and 1960s<sup>1</sup>
- More educated were pioneers in cohabitation. Less educated women had caught up by 1970s cohort<sup>1</sup>
- The average age at first marriage rose from 25.5 years in 1991 to 29.5 in 2005<sup>2</sup>. Cohabitation is also now delayed - 8% of 16-19 year old women were cohabiting in 2001 compared with 2% in 2006<sup>3</sup>

## Median age at motherhood significantly increased for *more educated* women

Median age at motherhood by birth cohort, BHPS<sup>1</sup>



- Less educated women were always more likely to have children outside marriage<sup>1</sup>
- Within cohabiting unions, educational differences in first birth rates are widening across birth cohorts
- Outside of cohabiting unions, educational differences in first birth rates are widening even more across birth cohorts

# Factors such as the expansion of women's education and employment have improved opportunities and affected the gender power balance in relationships

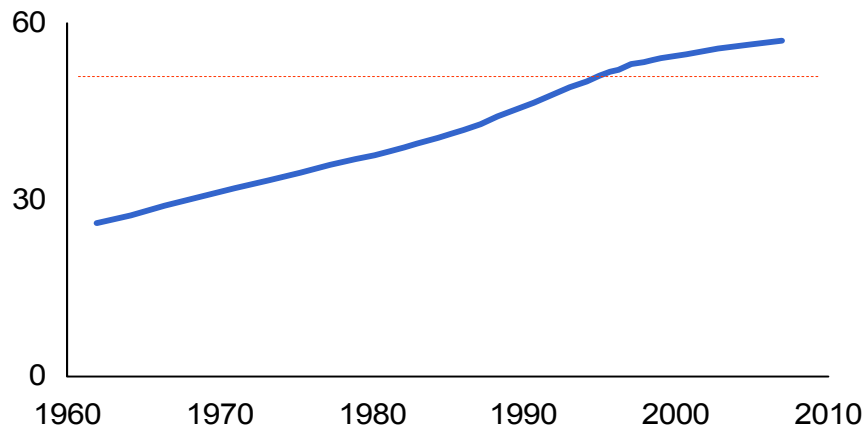
Composition

Trends

Drivers

## Women's participation in higher education has now overtaken men's

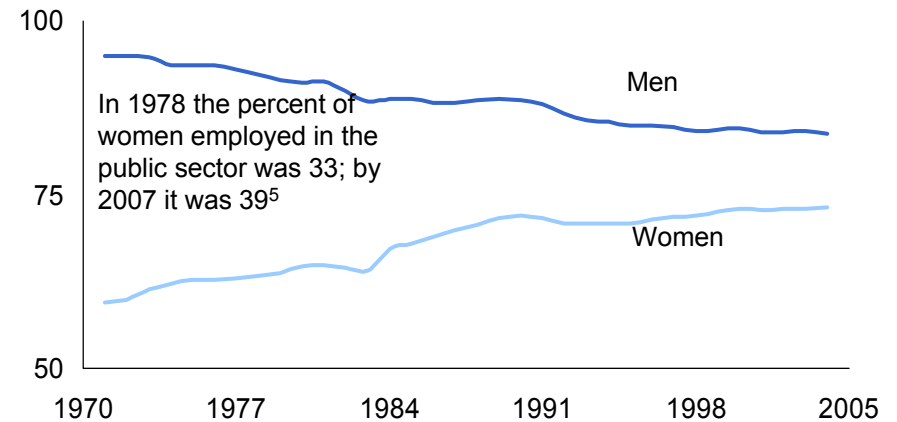
Per cent of women attending higher education relative to men<sup>1</sup>



- 32% of young women in maintained schools are in Higher Education by age 19, compared to 25% of young men in maintained schools<sup>1</sup>
- 17.5% of professors in higher education institutions are now women<sup>6</sup>

## More women have entered the formal workforce

Per cent active by gender<sup>2</sup>



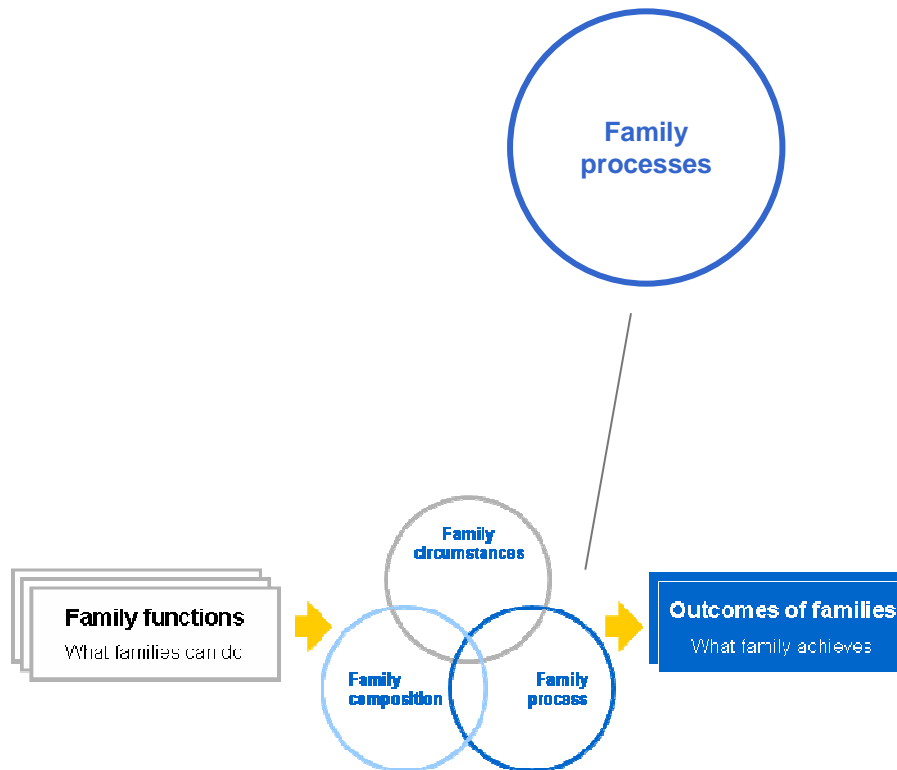
- While childless women have similar employment rates to men, there remains a large difference between employment rates of mothers and fathers<sup>2</sup>
- Employment rates of mothers are particularly low for those with low levels of education<sup>3</sup>
- In 2007, the full-time and part-time gender pay gaps were 17.2% and 35.6% higher than the EU average but there has been a downward trend since 2003<sup>4</sup>

# Contents

---

- 1 Ministerial Foreword
- 2 Executive Summary
- 3 Family Matters
- 4 Family Composition
- 5 Family Process**
- 6 Family Circumstances
- 7 The Future for Families
- 8 Implications
- 9 A Modern Family Policy

**By family processes we mean the way families make decisions about the allocation of time, money and relationship resources in order to produce certain outcomes**



**By family processes we mean the way families make decisions about the allocation of time, money, and relationship resources in order to produce certain outcomes**



## Facts

---

- Dual earner couples are increasing but mothers with small children mostly work part-time
- Most mothers remain mainly responsible for childcare and housework. Fathers' and mothers' childcare time has increased
- Parents place greater emphasis on parent-child interaction and educational activities
- Reduced couple time and more conflict presents new challenges to relationships



## Drivers

---

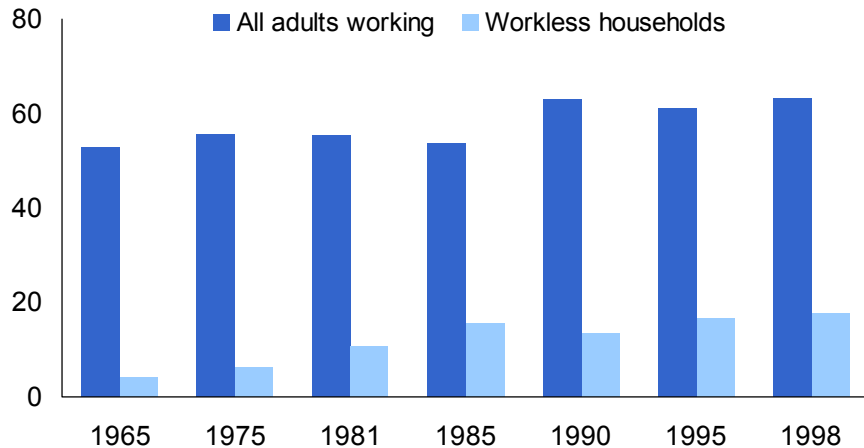
- The increase in women's education and technological advance of household appliances have helped the expansion of women's employment
- Women and men aspire to more egalitarian (even if not equal) gender roles in employment and family life; partly also as a result of the increase in women's employment
- People remain very committed to family life and providing informal care
- Policy changes in terms of flexible working, leave and childcare support families' work-life balance

# The increase in female employment has eroded the traditional male breadwinner / female homemaker model. Women's working patterns however are still strongly related to the presence and age of children

Processes
Trends
Drivers

## Households with all adults in paid work as well as workless households have increased

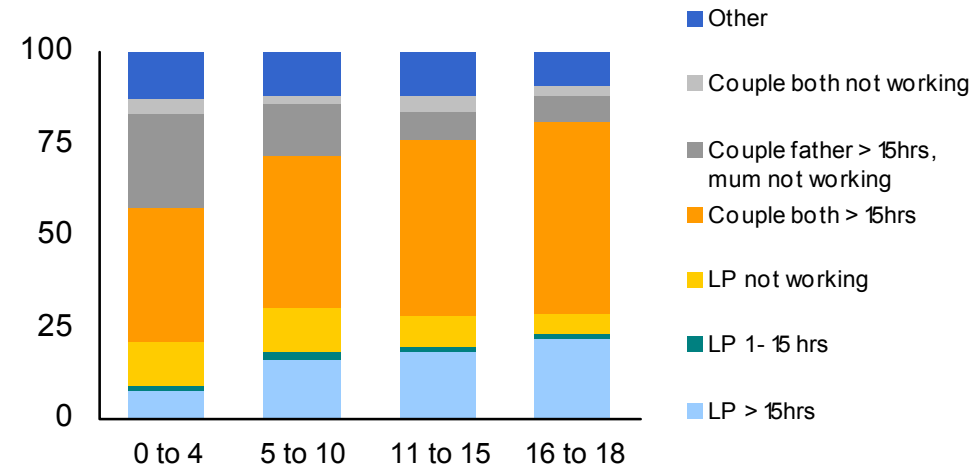
Percentage of all working age households, 1965-1998, FES & FLS<sup>1</sup>



- Women's employment rate has increased sharply from 59% to 73%, while men's decreased from 95 to 83% between 1971-2005<sup>2</sup>
- Measured in full-time equivalent, women's employment rate however was only 52 per cent in 2005<sup>3</sup>
- The rate of female part-time employment remained unchanged at about 40% between 1980 and 2003<sup>4</sup>

## The older the child, the higher the percentage of mothers working

Age of youngest child, 2005 DWP (%)<sup>5</sup>



- 53% of lone parents were working more than 15 hours, 42% were not working<sup>5</sup>
- Among couples with young children in 2002, about 40% of women worked part-time compared to 17% full-time and 35% who did not work for pay<sup>6</sup>

# Full time working hours are relatively high for UK males. Women's part-time employment hours are increasing slightly but are still relatively low compared to most other European countries

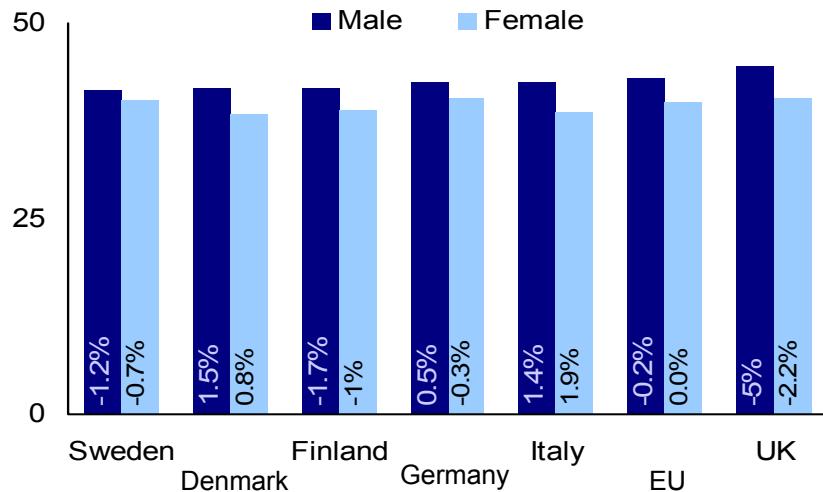
Processes

Trends

Drivers

## The UK has still very high male working hours in full time employment, though they have declined

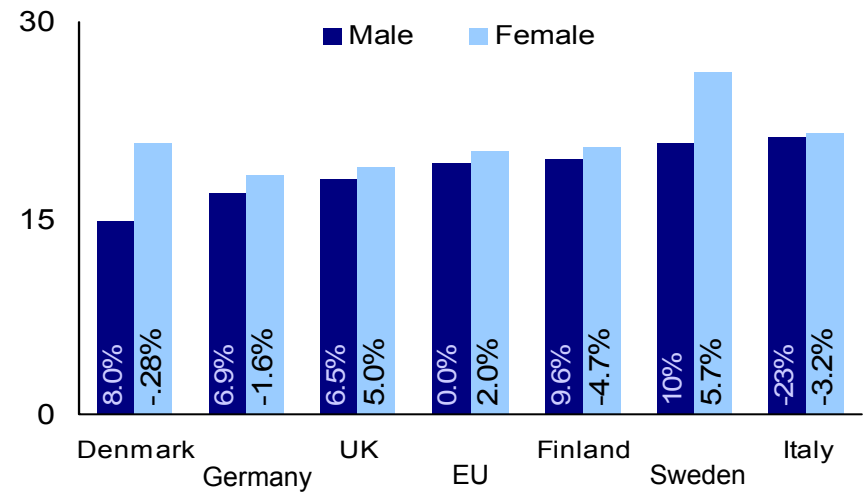
Hours (FT, % change 1997-06)<sup>1</sup>



- 5.1% of men in Sweden work more than 44 hours a week, compared to 41.8% in the UK<sup>1</sup>
- The UK also has a much wider range of working hours than Scandinavia. 87% of Swedish men work 35-44 hours per week compared to 51% in the UK<sup>1</sup>
- However, there has been a 7% reduction in the percentage of men working > 40 hours per week between 1985-2005<sup>2</sup>

## Women's part-time work hours are increasing but are still comparatively low in the UK

Hours (PT, % change 1997-06)<sup>1</sup>



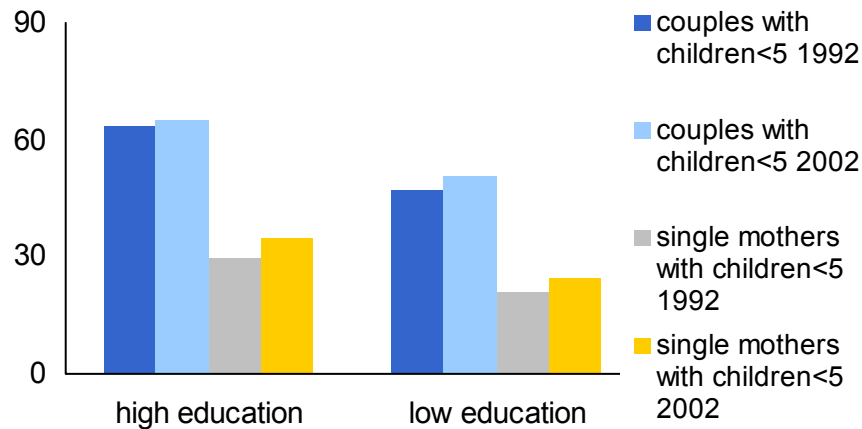
- 16.7% of UK working-age women work between 1-19 hours per week and 18.1% work 20-29 hours per week. This compares with 4.9% and 12.6% in Sweden, and 6.5% and 6.6% in Finland<sup>1</sup>
- In the UK, working hours of partnered and single mothers with children have gone up since 1997<sup>3</sup>

# Couples' combined work hours have increased on average. However there is also a significant counter-trend towards 'downshifting'

Processes
Trends
Drivers

## Family work hours increased over the 1990s; the rise was largest among parents of small children

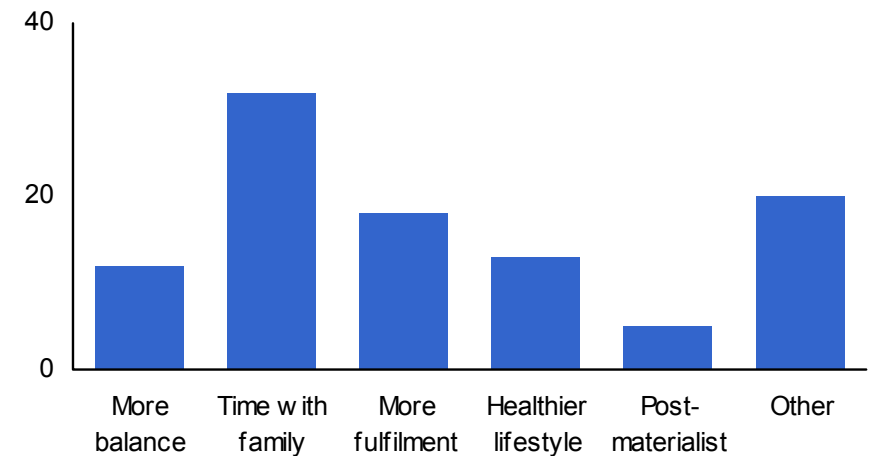
Mean of household's normal weekly work hours, 1992-2002<sup>1</sup>



- Large variations remain between people with high and low levels of education<sup>1</sup>
- Increases are concentrated among dual earner couples and single parents, while working hours in male breadwinner couples decreased<sup>1</sup>
- Before the 1990s, the pace of change was probably even faster<sup>2</sup>

## Most people downshift because they want to spend more time with their family

Why Britons downshift (%)<sup>3</sup>



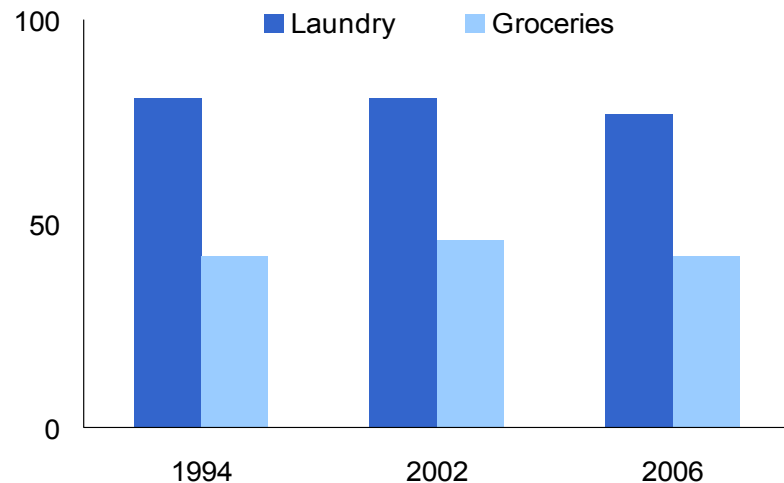
- 25% of British adults aged 30-59 have downshifted over the last ten years<sup>3</sup>
- Most who downshift stop working, reduce their hours or change their career<sup>3</sup>
- 90% of downshiffters are happy with their decision, with two in five saying that they do not miss the extra income at all but another two in five did miss the money. Only 6% were unhappy with the decision<sup>3</sup>

# Women's housework time has decreased strongly. Couples' division of domestic labour has changed as well but is far from equal

Processes
Trends
Drivers

## Women remain mainly responsible for most of the housework

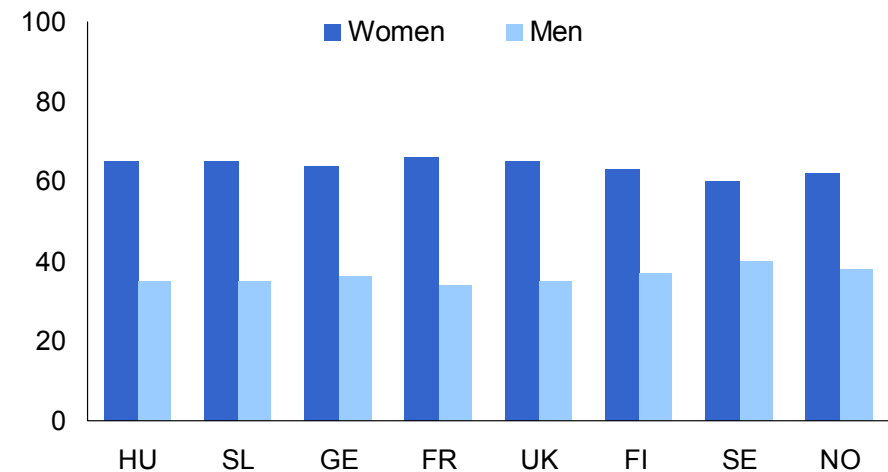
Percentage of partnered people saying that task is usually done by woman<sup>1</sup>



- British women's time spent on housework decreased significantly, while men's increased slightly between 1975 and the early 1990s<sup>2</sup>
- Childcare time more than doubled among fathers while it increased by about two thirds for mothers<sup>2</sup>
- Change in housework slowed down during the 1990s, while it continued for childcare<sup>1</sup>

## The division of domestic work is similarly unequal among most European countries

Share of total domestic work time by gender (%)<sup>3</sup>



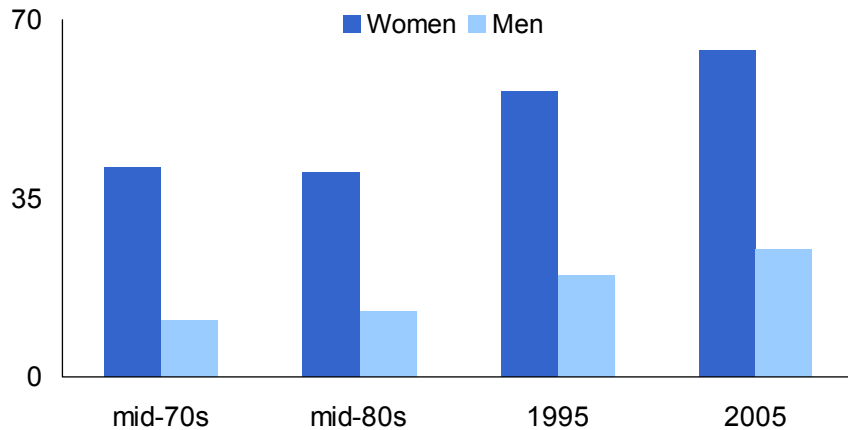
- Only Scandinavian countries show a slightly more equal allocation of domestic work than the UK<sup>3</sup>
- Women and men's total time spent on paid and unpaid labour is about equal except in Eastern Europe where women work longer hours<sup>3</sup>
- Mothers do more multitasking and have less uninterrupted leisure time than fathers<sup>4,5,6</sup>

# Mothers and fathers both spend more time with their children than they did in the past...

Processes
Trends
Drivers

## There is evidence that parents spend more time with their children than in the past

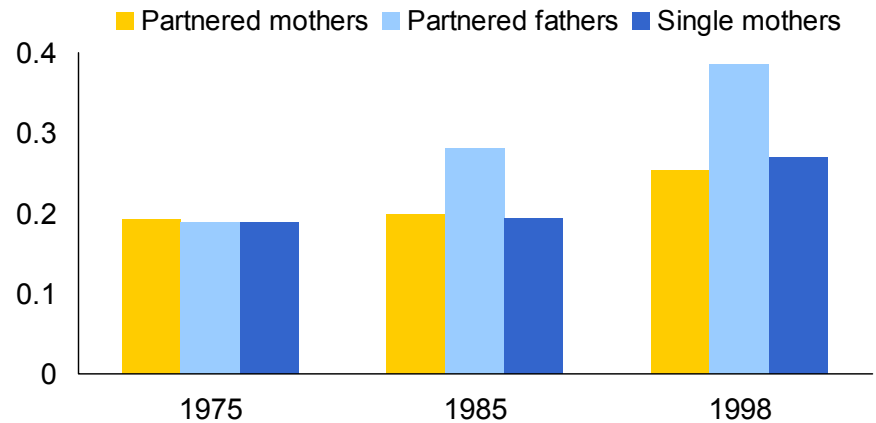
Mean minutes per day spent on childcare as primary or secondary activity<sup>1,2</sup>



- In 2000, children spent on average just under 4 hours on weekdays and 6 ½ hours on weekend days with their parents<sup>3</sup>
- Employed mothers spend less total time but the same amount of 'quality time' with children<sup>4</sup>
- In 2008, three quarters of families regularly had a family meal together at home<sup>5</sup>; this does not seem to have declined significantly from earlier periods<sup>6</sup>

## Evidence from the US suggests time spent on teaching and playing has increased more than time spent on routine childcare

Time spent on teaching and playing as proportion of total primary childcare<sup>7</sup>



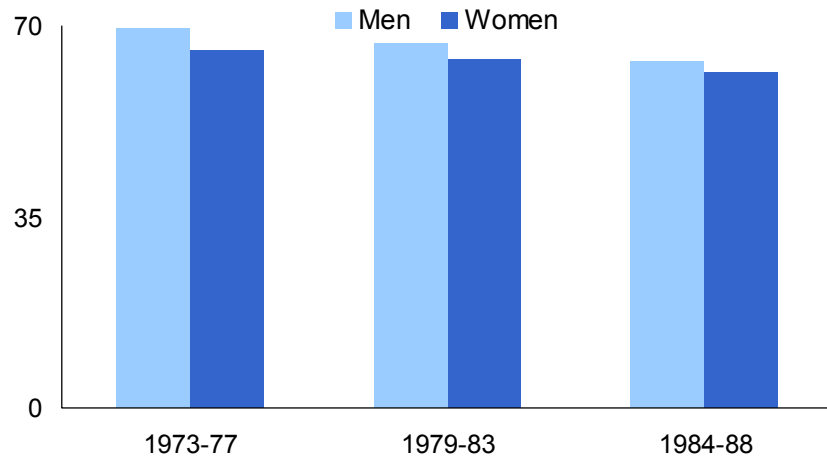
- Fathers' time on routine care and play / teaching activities has increased markedly<sup>7</sup>
- The increase in time with children is likely to be due to greater knowledge about parenting, and intensive care ideals<sup>4,8</sup>
- Peer pressure may be increasing expectations. 63% of mothers and 51% of fathers worry about whether they are doing a good job<sup>9</sup>

# ...but parents with dependent children spend less time together as a couple. Despite this people's satisfaction with their relationships has remained relatively stable

Processes
Trends
Drivers

## There is US evidence that marital happiness has decreased over the past decades

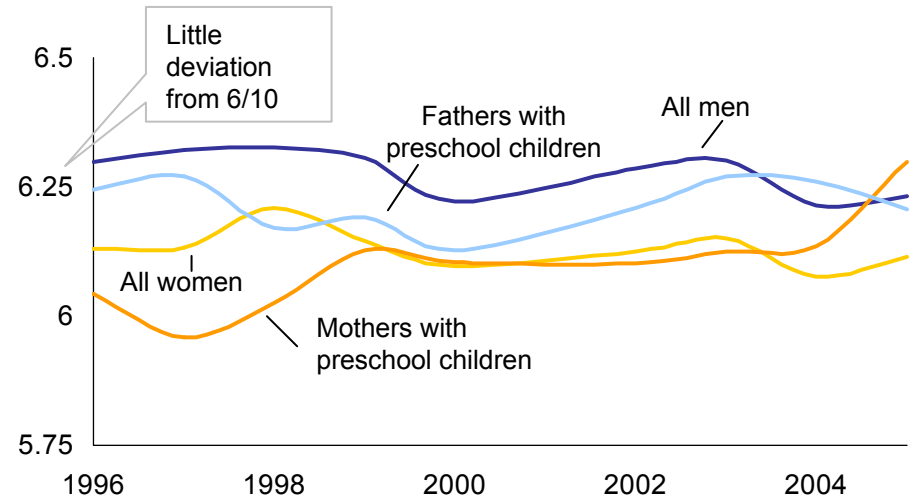
Percentage of people in first marriages reporting "very happy" marriages, US General Social Survey<sup>1</sup>



- When remarriages are taken into account, the reduction of "very happy" marriages is even greater<sup>1</sup>
- Women are less happy than men<sup>1</sup>
- Women report more and men less influence over family issues compared to previous cohorts<sup>2</sup>
- Marital conflict has increased while couples' interaction time decreased since the 1970s<sup>3</sup>

## British couples' satisfaction with their partner is unchanged since 1996

How satisfied are you with your partner? mean response on scale 1-7<sup>4</sup>



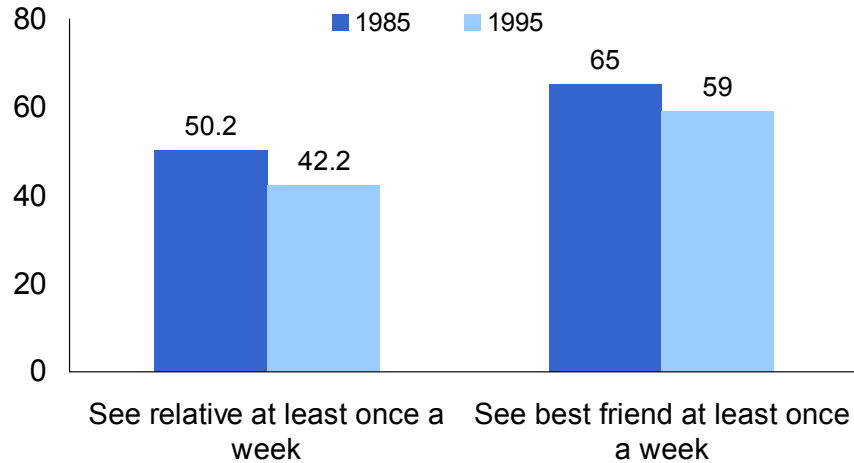
- Women with preschool children report greater satisfaction in more recent years<sup>4</sup>
- The presence of children decreases the time couples spend together<sup>1</sup> and a greater part of adults' leisure time is now spent with their children<sup>5</sup>
- Pressures to combine work and family life and lack of couple time are greatest among couples with young children and both partners work full-time<sup>5,6</sup>

# Frequency of contact outside the immediate family has declined slightly but generational ties remain important. Grandparents play a key role in informal childcare

Processes
Trends
Drivers

## Fewer people see relatives and friends frequently

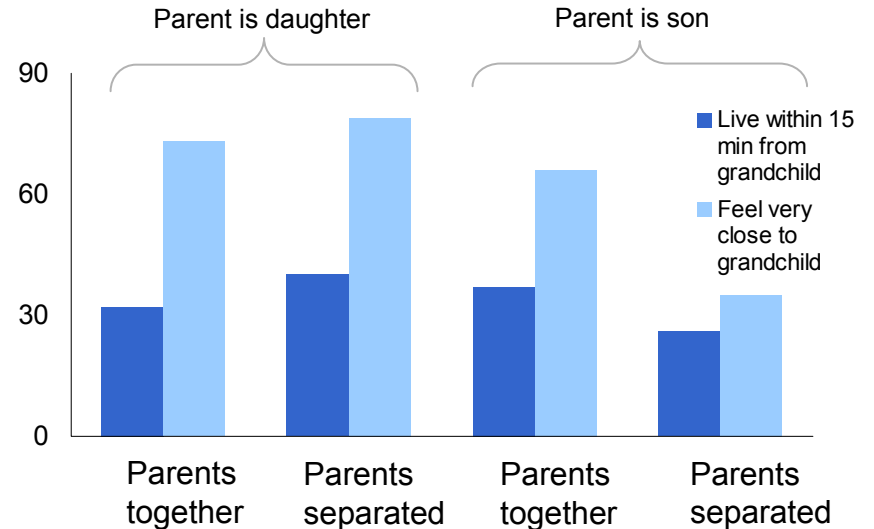
Percentage of people seeing a relative or best friend min. once a week<sup>1</sup>



- 65% of people lived within an hour's journey from a relative in 1995, down only slightly from 68% in 1985<sup>1</sup>
- Just under 40% of grandparents live within 15 minutes' travel and see their grandchild several times a week<sup>1</sup>
- Overall, 68% of grandparents feel very close to their grandchild<sup>1</sup>

## Maternal grandparents become more important when parents separate

Percentage of grandparents with contact to grandchild under age 16<sup>1</sup>



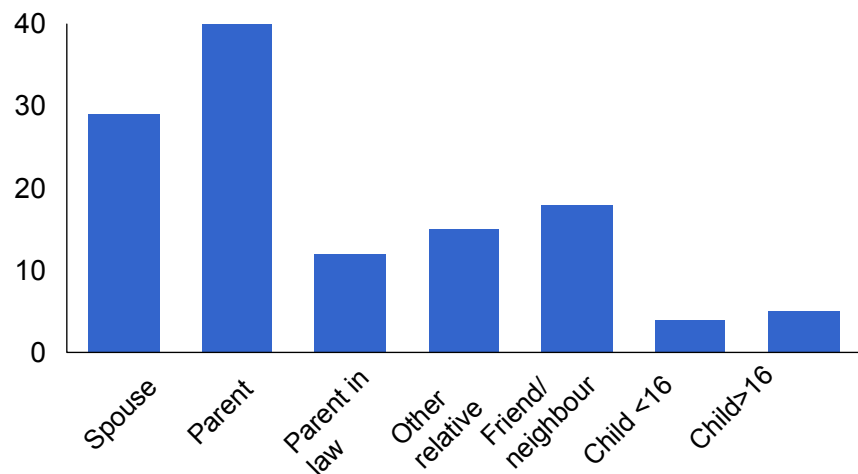
- A quarter of families use grandparent childcare each week, with their care valued at £3.9 billion each year<sup>2</sup>
- Grandparents' help has an important influence on whether mothers of young children take employment, especially those with lower earnings potential and those who work part-time<sup>1</sup>



# Family ties also remain important for the increasing provision of adult care in addition to care by friends or neighbours

## Family provides the main source of informal care

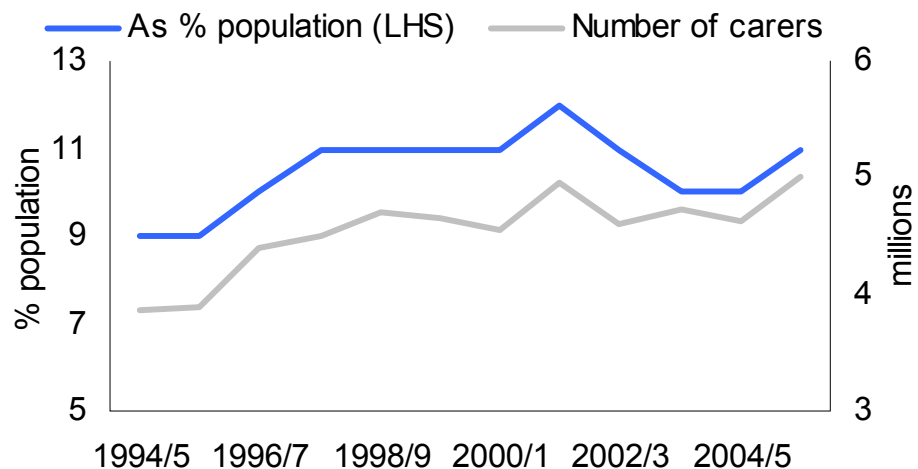
% of people with respective relationship to carer<sup>1</sup>



- A third of carers were the only unpaid caring support for the main person cared for. The remainder shared their caring responsibilities with others<sup>2</sup>
- Emotional closeness between adult children and their parents seems to have increased: At age 42, men and women born in 1958 were more likely to feel emotionally close to their parents than those in the 1946 cohort<sup>3</sup>

## The proportion and numbers of carers has slowly increased

Number and percentage of carers<sup>4</sup>



- Demand from older people for unpaid care has risen over the 1990s and is forecast to grow further<sup>4</sup>
- The majority of all care received is unpaid care: 1.79m people over age of 65 receive some informal care compared to 1.54m receiving help from formal professional services in 2007<sup>4</sup>

## The following slides discuss the drivers of these trends in family processes

---



**Drivers**

### **Why have we seen these changes in the way families live their lives?**

- How have time-saving household appliances spread over time?
- How have gender role attitudes and family values changed?
- What has been the role of work-life balance policies?

# Women's educational levels have improved considerably in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Technological advances in household appliances contributed to reducing housework time

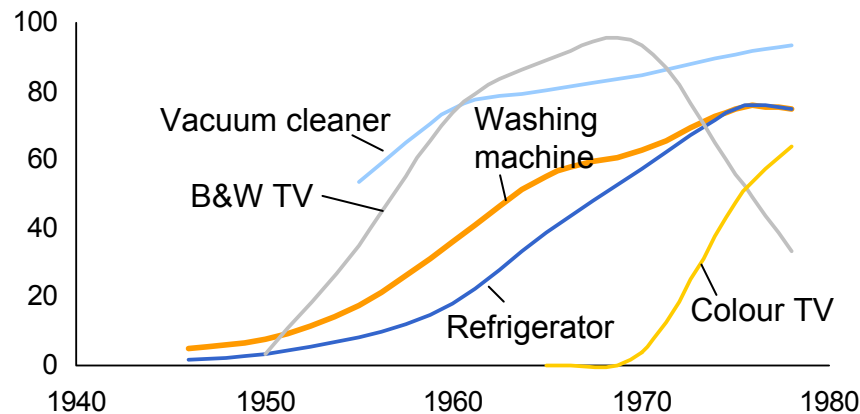
Processes

Trends

Drivers

## Time-saving household appliances spread from the 1950s; diffusion of the TV was even faster

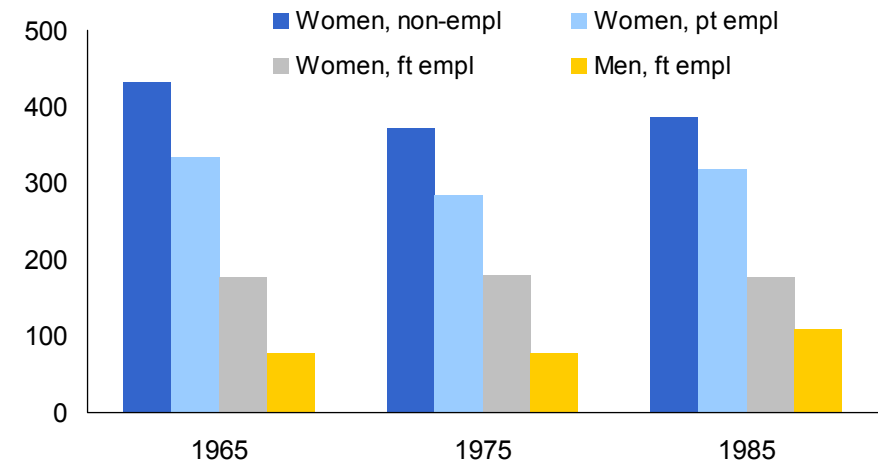
Diffusion levels of selected household appliances as % of all wired households, England and Wales<sup>1</sup>



- Many time-saving household appliances were invented after the 1st World War but spread widely only as income levels increased in the 1950s-60s<sup>1</sup>
- 'Time-using' home entertainment like the TV took off even faster and changed how families spend their leisure time<sup>1</sup>

## Housework time declined significantly between 1965 and 1975

Average housework minutes per day, UK Time use surveys<sup>2</sup>



- The decline in housework time was seen mainly among non-employed and part-time working women<sup>2</sup>
- Men's housework time increased slightly from the mid-1970s<sup>2</sup>
- Around one in ten children (12%) report doing no housework, with most (69%) doing up to three hours per week<sup>3</sup>

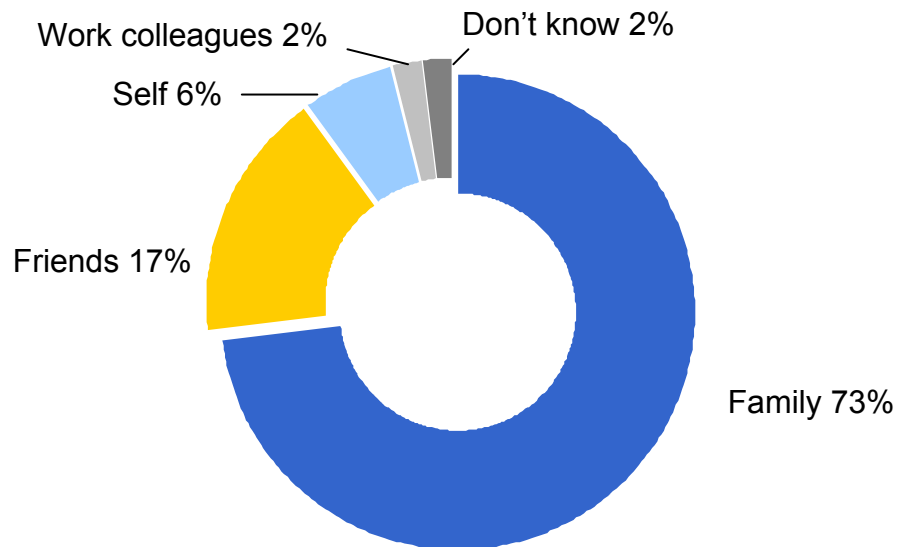
# Family remains an important source of fulfilment and people are committed to caring for family. The majority of people make a lot of effort to spent time with family

Processes

Trends

Drivers

With which group of people do you tend to be most happy?<sup>1</sup>



60% of people make a lot of effort to spend time with their partner or family, while only 31% and 24% make the same effort to spend time with their friends or to follow their hobbies<sup>2</sup>

People express a strong preference to do some care for family

- 53% of non-working mothers said they did not take up work because they wanted to be with their children<sup>3</sup>
- Half of mothers who are not working would like to if alternative family care or affordable, high-quality childcare was available<sup>4</sup>
- For small children, fathers are the most popular care alternative to mothers; followed by grandparents<sup>5,6</sup>
- Most grandparents enjoy caring for children<sup>7</sup>, but half of them feel more stressed<sup>4</sup>
- Most people would want to and would be able to care for their parents<sup>8</sup>
- People caring for family or friends report that fulfilment is a key element of the carer experience<sup>9</sup>

# Men and women have become more accepting of egalitarian family arrangements, women more so than men. Men's attitudes are more traditional when small children are present in the family

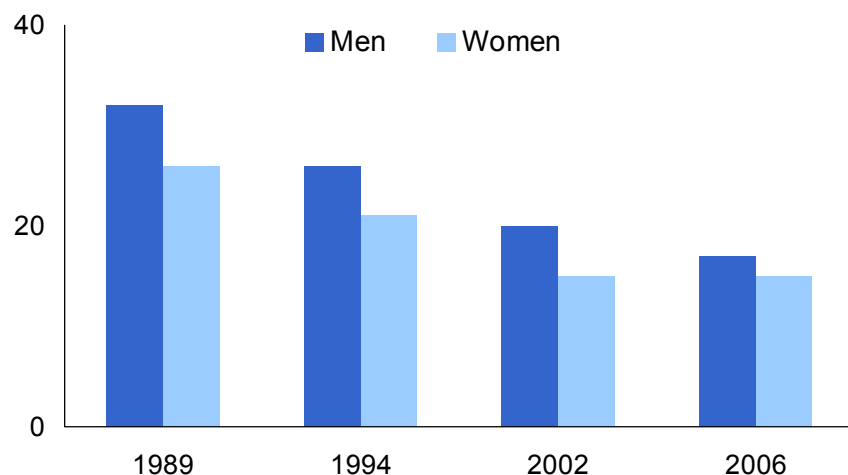
Processes

Trends

Drivers

## The traditional male breadwinner/female carer family model is increasingly rejected

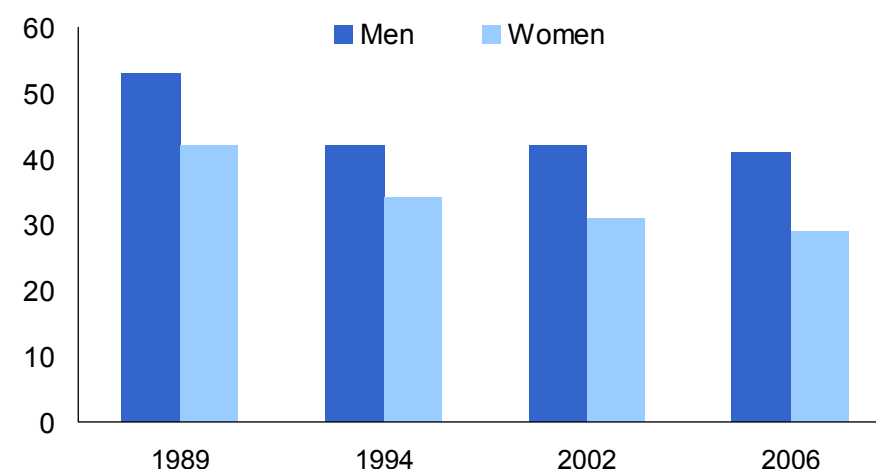
Percentage who agree with statement "A man's job is to earn money; a woman's job is to look after the home and family"<sup>1</sup>



- Women hold significantly more egalitarian gender role attitudes than men and there is no sign that this difference is narrowing<sup>1</sup>
- However, in 2005 only 39% of fathers saw breadwinning as the main aspect of what being a father means for them<sup>2</sup>

## Attitudes remain more conservative when it comes to mothers of pre-school children

Percentage who agree with statement "A pre-school child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works"<sup>1</sup>



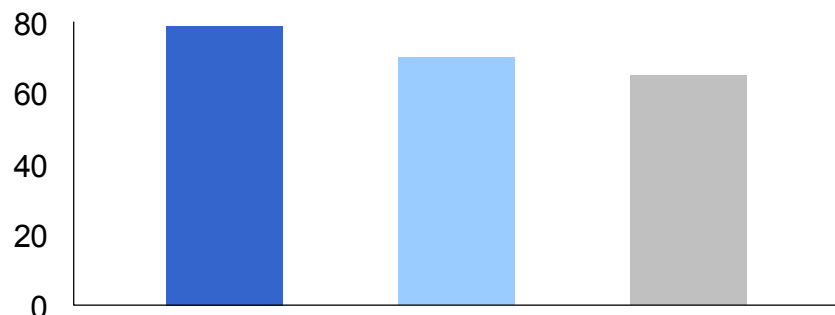
- Segmentation analysis can reveal attitudinal and behavioural differences between groups sharing otherwise similar socioeconomic characteristics. For example, DCSF's parent segmentation describes two broadly similar groups, one of which is significantly less likely to sacrifice family time in order to get ahead at work<sup>3</sup>

# Fathers today express great interest in being involved in caring for their children but still believe mothers are better carers. Paternity leave, working flexitime and home working have proved very popular

Processes
Trends
Drivers

## Most fathers want to be more involved in childcare but still feel women are generally better carers

Percentage of fathers with children aged 3 -15 months who agree<sup>1</sup>

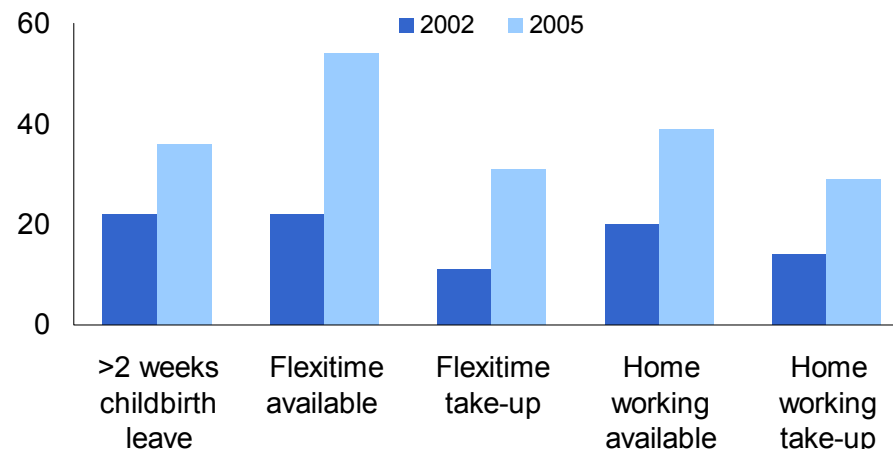


- I would be happy to stay at home and care for my child
- I would like to be more involved in the care of my child
- Women are naturally better than men at childcare

- 79% would feel comfortable caring for their child on their own<sup>1</sup>
- However 65% feel women are better than men at caring for children<sup>1</sup>
- DCSF segmentation analysis found that 81% of parents agreed that if money wasn't an issue it would be better for one parent to stay at home at least some of the time<sup>2</sup>

## Fathers show great interest in paternity leave and some other policies to balance work and family life

Percentage of fathers reporting availability/take-up<sup>3</sup>



- Since April 2003 fathers have been entitled to two weeks' paternity leave, which 53% regard as too short<sup>3</sup>
- In 2005, 36% of fathers took more than 2 weeks off around birth of their child, up from 22% in 2002<sup>3</sup>
- Over 80% would have liked to take paternity leave, low pay is the main reason for those who did not<sup>3</sup>
- Fathers' take-up of flexitime increased from 11% in 2002 to 31% in 2005. Fathers' working from home doubled from 14 to 29%<sup>3</sup>

# Availability of formal childcare and leave policies for parents has increased and creating more choice and opportunities for work-life balance

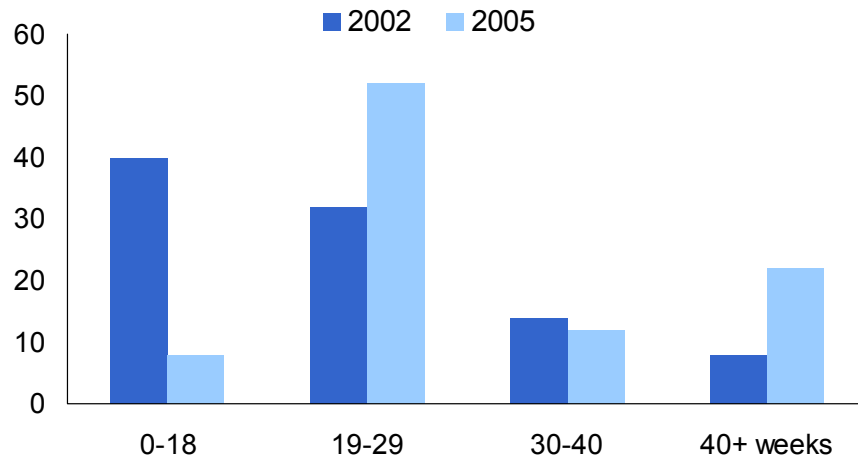
Processes

Trends

Drivers

## Mothers' average maternity leave duration increased between 2002 and 2005

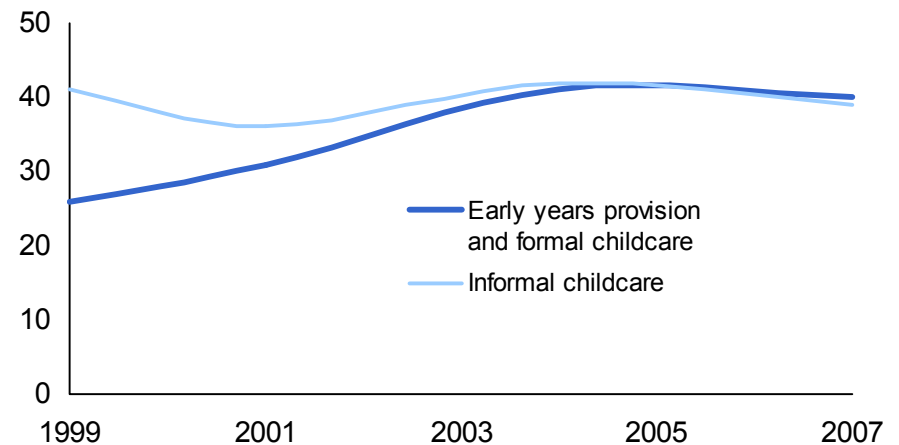
Percentage of mothers taking maternity leave of different durations<sup>1</sup>



- Statutory maternity leave and pay was extended in 2003 and 2007 and is among the longest in Europe<sup>1</sup>
- In 2005, mothers took on average 6 months maternity leave compared to 4 months in 2002<sup>1</sup>
- Many mothers returning to the labour market chose to work part-time and downshift<sup>1</sup>

## Take-up of formal childcare has increased, while use of informal childcare is relatively stable

Percentage of mothers taking up formal and informal childcare, 1999-2007<sup>2</sup>



- Due to increases in female employment, the amount of childcare hours used has probably risen even more than take-up rates<sup>2</sup>
- The number of registered childcare places more than doubled between 1997 and 2008<sup>2</sup>

# An increasing number of people also work flexibly and enjoy the benefits of a work-life balance, however challenges remain for some families. There is still unmet demand for arrangements

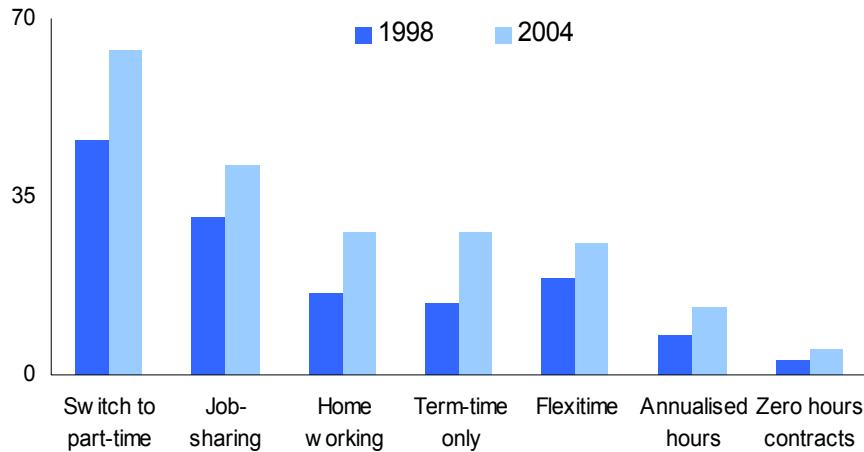
Processes

Trends

Drivers

## There has been an increase in employers offering flexible working

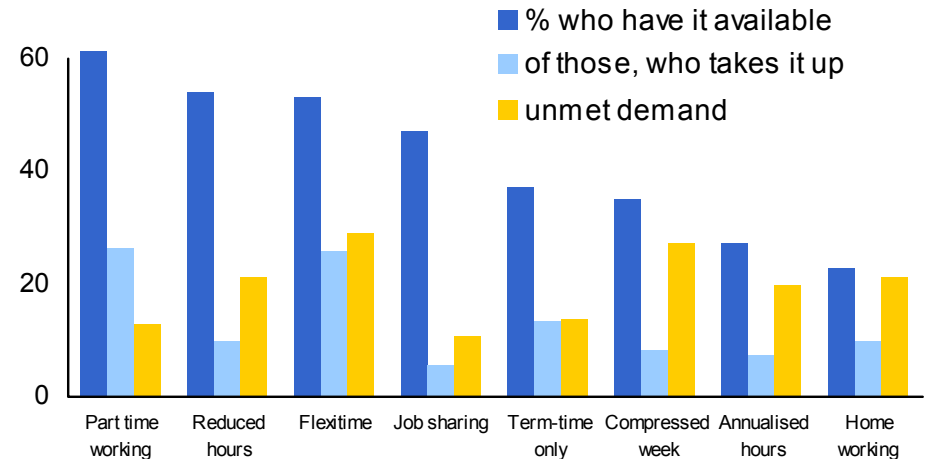
% of employers offering flexible working<sup>1</sup>



- 90% of workplaces in 2006 were offering one or more forms of flexible working (85% in 2003)<sup>2</sup>. 91% of workplaces who received requests approved them all<sup>2</sup>. In 2006, 14m people worked flexibly (56% of employees) or have done so within the last year<sup>2</sup>
- 71% of fathers and 68% of mothers say their family does not have their preferred working arrangement. 22% and 11% respectively are worried about the impact working flexibly could have on their career<sup>3</sup>

## Unmet demand is focused on alternative forms of flexible working other than PT working

Employees' access to and take up of flexible working<sup>2</sup>



- The main reason employees give for working flexibly are to improve work-life balance and spend more time with family<sup>2</sup>
- Part-time arrangements are disproportionately concentrated in lower skilled jobs<sup>4,5</sup> and mainly filled by women with family responsibilities<sup>6</sup>. Half of women in PT jobs are working below their skill level<sup>7</sup>
- Men prefer flexitime working, a compressed work week or working from home<sup>8</sup>

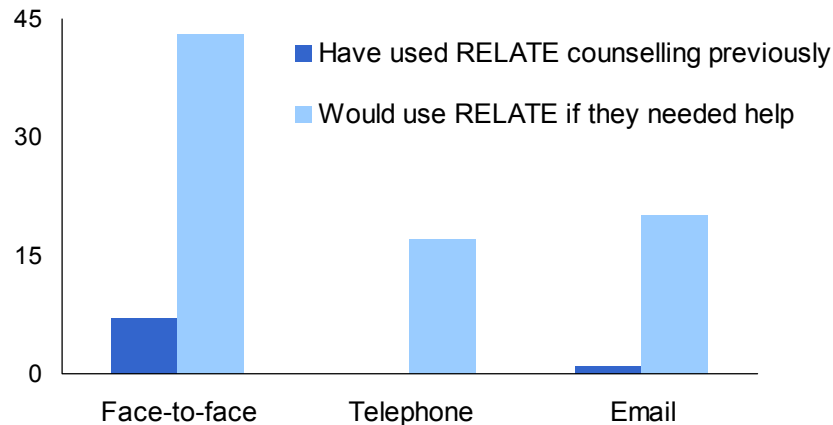


# An increasing number of people would consider using relationship counselling. Mediation in cases of separation or divorce continues to be used only by a minority of couples

Processes
Trends
Drivers

## While only 8% of people have used RELATE counselling, many would if they needed help

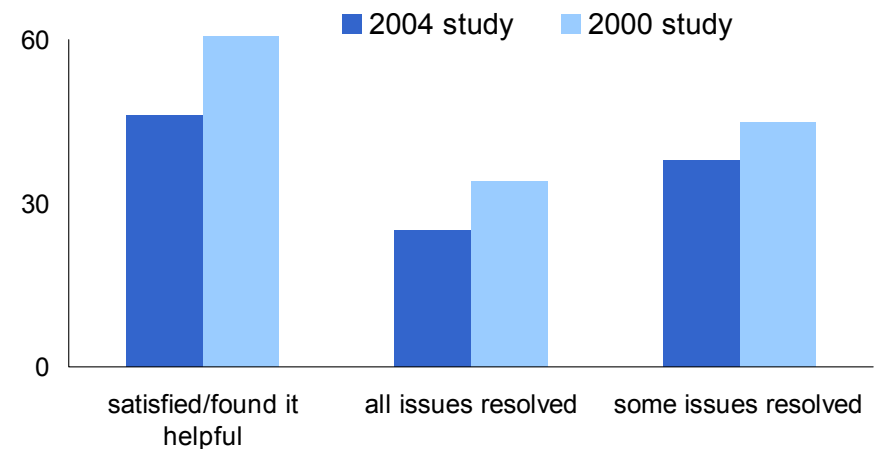
Percentage responding<sup>1</sup>



- Over 150,000 people have used RELATE in 2008 and 600,000 people think counselling might be useful<sup>1</sup>
- 7% of people have used face-to-face RELATE counselling<sup>1</sup>
- Men and women respond to different approaches
- Use was more likely among those with university degrees and lower among BME groups<sup>1</sup>
- 43% say that they would use face-to face counselling if they needed help<sup>1</sup>

## Many separating couples using mediation found it helpful but most needed additional legal advice

Percentage responding<sup>2, 3</sup>



- Only 10-20 percent of legal aid recipients use mediation<sup>3,4</sup>
- Only 25% managed to resolve all dispute issues; 90% of couples need additional legal advice<sup>3</sup>
- All-issues mediation seems more effective in improving communication and negotiating agreements than child-focussed mediation<sup>2</sup>
- Mediated cases were found to be less expensive and quicker to resolve than non-mediated divorce<sup>4</sup>

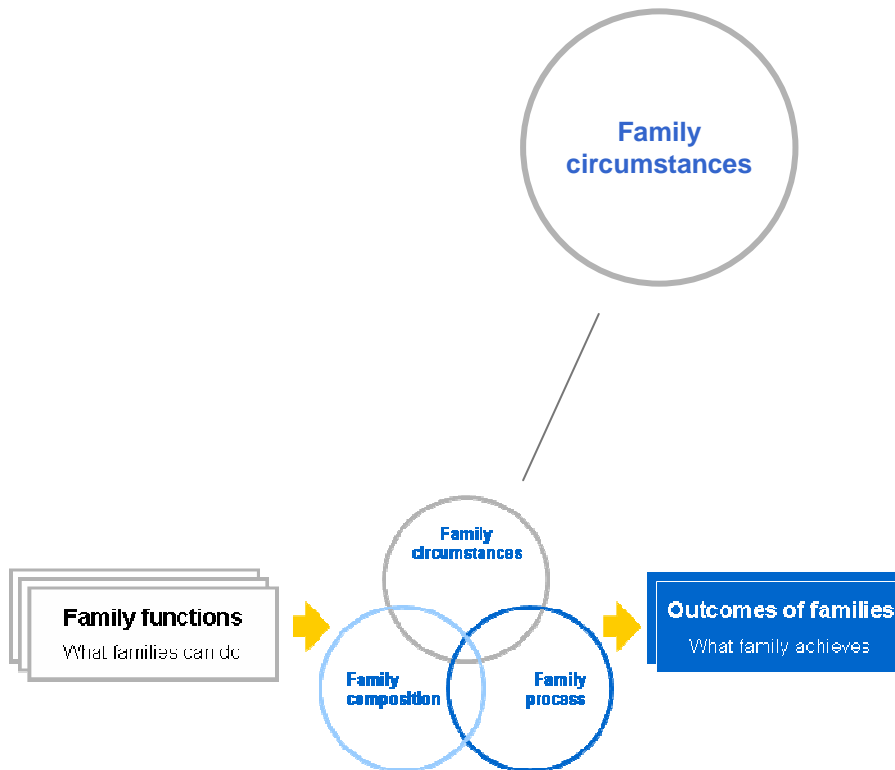
Sources: (1) RELATE commissioned omnibus surveys 2007/2008 (2) Walker et al 1994 (3) Walker et al 2004 (4) National Audit Office 2007

# Contents

---

- 1 Ministerial Foreword
- 2 Executive Summary
- 3 Family Matters
- 4 Family Composition
- 5 Family Process
- 6 Family Circumstances**
- 7 The Future for Families
- 8 Implications
- 9 A Modern Family Policy

By family circumstances we mean the material, physical and emotional wellbeing of the family and the individuals within it



By family circumstances we mean the material, physical and emotional wellbeing of the family and the individuals within it

## Facts

---

- Overall prosperity has increased, though some families still face challenging material circumstances
- Physical wellbeing is generally improving - we are living longer, but quality of life is not increasing at the same pace, which places increasing burdens on some families
- Despite overall increases in wealth and health, life satisfaction has remained constant – but where emotional wellbeing is poor, the consequences for other family members are considerable

## Drivers

---

- Different aspects of family circumstances are closely associated with each other – for example, material strain is associated with poor physical and emotional wellbeing
- Certain family forms are associated with better circumstances, but causality operates in both directions
- Policy is a key driver of the circumstances families face

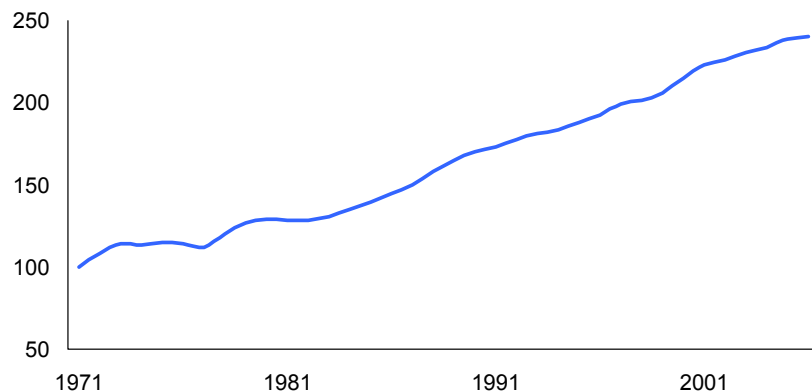


# Family wealth has increased, driven by a rise in the number of two-earner families. The proportion of family income spent on leisure has more than doubled in the last twenty years

Circumstances
Trends
Drivers

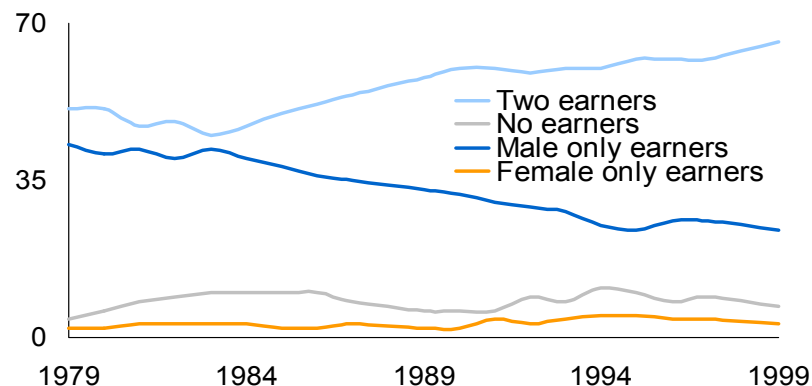
## Household income has doubled in real terms over the last few decades<sup>1</sup>

Increase in real household disposable income per head, 1971 = 100



## Two-earner households have increased<sup>2</sup>

Percentage of couples with children by number of earners in household



## More of this wealth is spent on leisure services, though housing remains the biggest outgoing

Difference in household expenditure as a percentage of total expenditure, 1984 versus 2006<sup>3</sup>

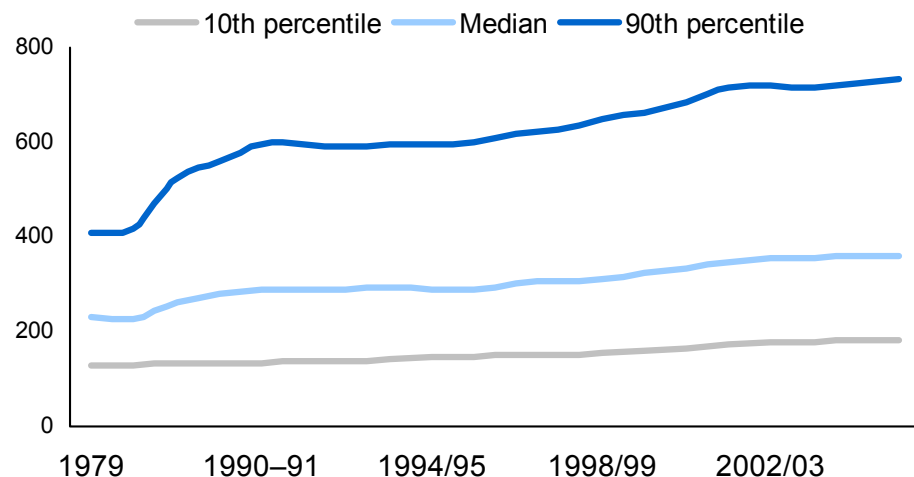
	1984	2006	Change	▲ ▼
Housing (Net)	17	19	+2	▲
Fuel and power	6	3	-3	▼
Food and non-alcoholic drinks	20	15	-5	▼
Alcoholic drink	5	3	-2	▼
Tobacco	3	1	-2	▼
Clothing and footwear	8	5	-3	▼
Household goods	8	8	0	=
Household services	5	6	+1	▲
Personal goods and services	4	4	0	=
Motoring	12	14	+2	▲
Fares and other travel costs	2	2	0	=
Leisure goods	5	4	-1	▼
Leisure services	7	15	+8	▲

# However, not all families have benefited equally from prosperity, and some, despite recent progress, face significant challenges

Circumstances
Trends
Drivers

## Household income inequality grew during the 1980s and then stabilised at a higher level of inequality

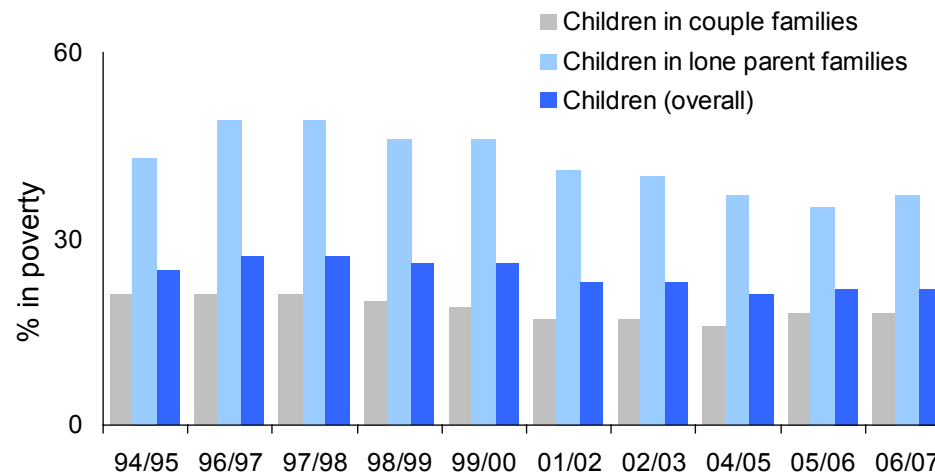
Distribution of real disposable household income<sup>1</sup>



- Workless households roughly quadrupled from 4.0% in 1968 to 17.4% in 1996<sup>2</sup>. There were 3.06 million workless households in the three months to June 2008. This represented 15.8 per cent of all working age households<sup>3</sup>
- However, since 2000, income inequality and poverty have fallen faster in the UK than any other OECD country<sup>4</sup>

## The risk of poverty has fallen for families with children, but many families remain in poverty

Risk of poverty (<60% contemporary median income, before housing costs)<sup>5</sup>



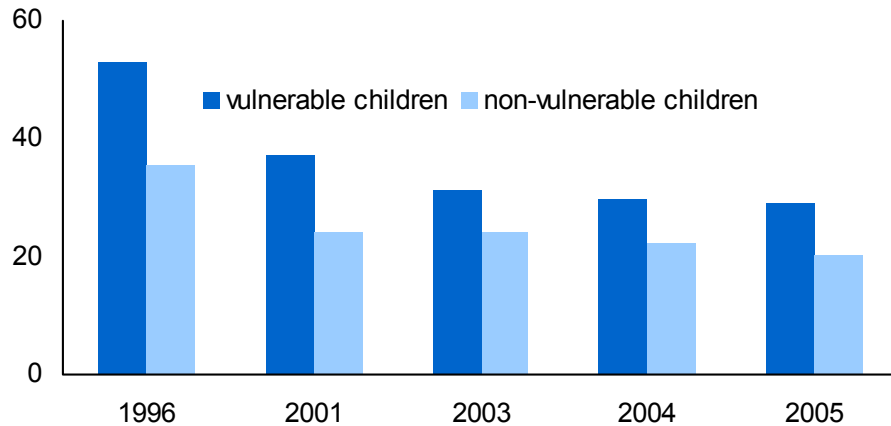
- Since 1997 the number of children living in relative low income has been reduced by 600,000 (before housing costs)<sup>5</sup>
- The proportion of households with less than half of the national median income in the UK is below the OECD average for the first time since the 1980s<sup>4</sup>
- However, 2.9m children (before housing costs) remain in relative poverty in the UK<sup>5</sup>

# The relationship between poverty, poor housing and a range of poor outcomes is evidence that vulnerable families face the most challenging circumstances

Circumstances
Trends
Drivers

## A falling but significant number of children live in non-decent homes

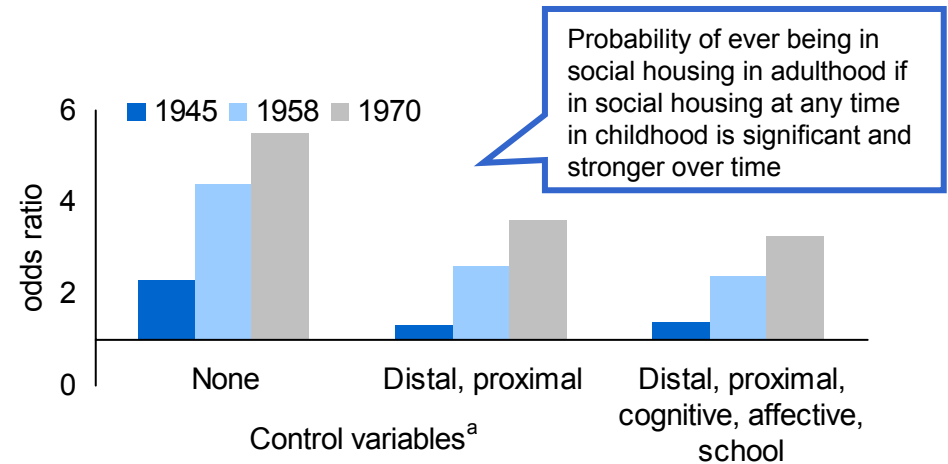
Percentage of 'vulnerable' and 'non-vulnerable' households with children (0-15 all tenures) in non-decent homes, 1996 to 2005<sup>1,2</sup>



- The housing conditions 'gap' between vulnerable families (across all tenures) and the more affluent has more than halved (from 17ppts to 8)<sup>2</sup>
- However, vulnerable families are more likely to experience poor conditions than more affluent peers: 29% compared to 20% in terms of non decent homes; 22% compared to 16% in poor quality environments; 14% compared to 4% in overcrowded housing<sup>3</sup>

## Social housing persists between generations even when controlling for many variables

Probability of ever being in social housing in adulthood (age 23+) if in social housing at any time in childhood (0-16)<sup>4</sup>



- Poor quality housing (particularly over-crowding) can have an adverse effect on children's psychological well-being<sup>5</sup>. Exposure to 'adverse housing conditions' in childhood increases the likelihood of certain illnesses in later life, even if they live in good quality housing in adulthood<sup>6</sup>
- However there is no robust quantification of the overall impacts of poor housing because of the complexity of both cause and effects

(1) CLG 2007 (2) CLG EHCS 2005 N.B. 'vulnerable' families are in receipt of means tested or disability related benefits Social Trends 38 / CLG (3) CLG mix of published/unpublished research (4) Feinstein 2008 (5) SCIE 2005 (6) Marsh et al. 1999. Note: (a) Control variables categories: *Distal* - socioeconomic & demographic factors; *Proximal* - elements of the home environment; *Cognitive* and *Affective* - (respective) development; *School* - features of school group & peer type

# In general health is improving. People are living longer than ever. However, healthy life expectancy is not keeping pace, and providing informal care is a significant issue for many families

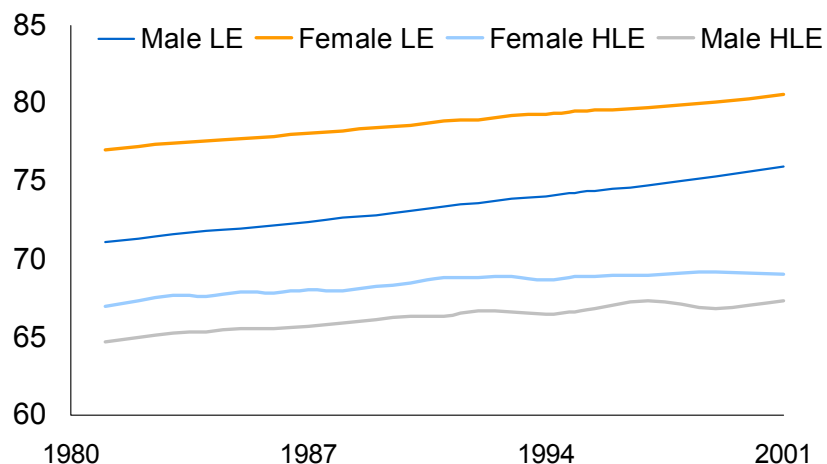
Circumstances

Trends

Drivers

## Life expectancy has increased, but healthy life expectancy is not keeping pace

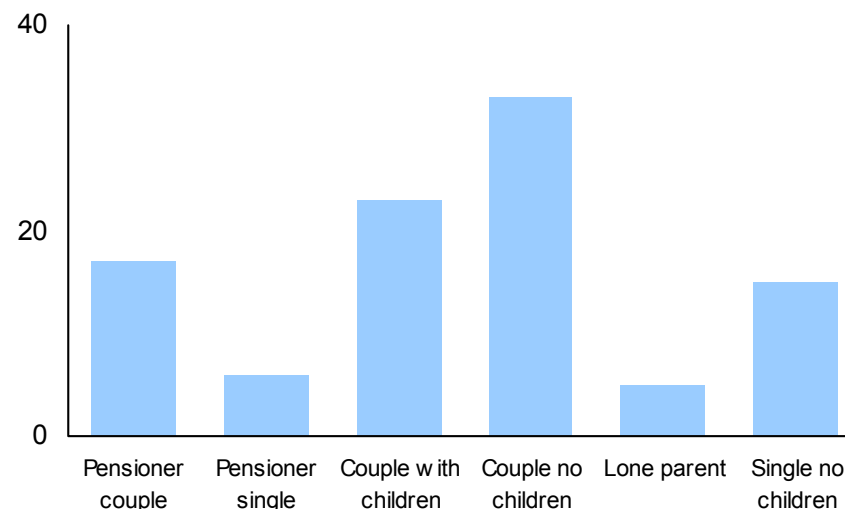
Life expectancy and healthy life expectancy in years England 1981-2001<sup>1</sup>



- Carers report considerable benefits of caring - 80% of care givers can identify at least one positive aspect of care-giving<sup>2</sup>
- However, caring intensively (20 hours+ a week) can have negative consequences for health and employment prospects<sup>3</sup>

## A significant proportion of carers have other family responsibilities

% of carers by family status<sup>3</sup>



- Around a third of (working age) carers also have dependent children – these carers face additional burdens<sup>4</sup>
- Equality is an issue as women are more likely to provide care. 11% of women compared to 9% of men are carers (of whom, 33% and 30% care over 20 hours a week respectively)<sup>5</sup>

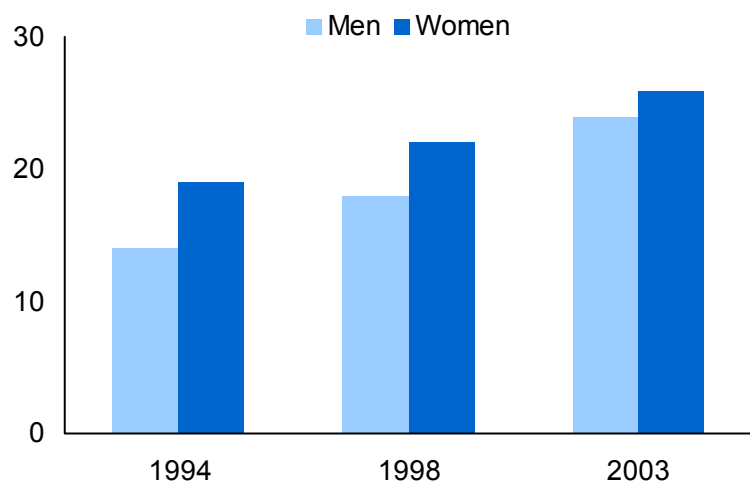


# The social context formed by the family is thought to be an important – in some cases the most important factor – for certain health outcomes

Circumstances
Trends
Drivers

## Obesity has increased in prevalence and family influences are important

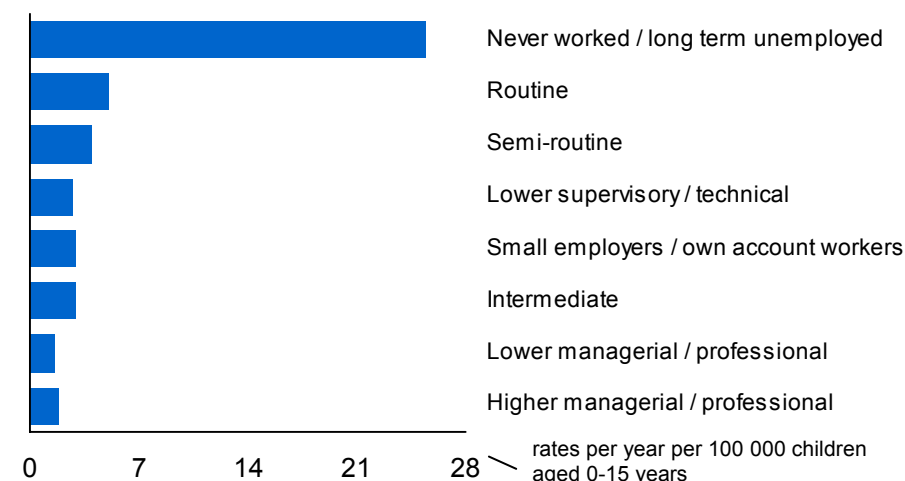
Prevalence of obesity, adults aged 16 and over<sup>1</sup>



- 23% of the UK population is now obese, a threefold increase since 1980<sup>1</sup>. In 1995, 11% of boys and 12% of girls were obese, but by 2005 this had risen to 18% for both boys and girls<sup>1</sup>
- Having an overweight parent has been identified as the strongest risk factor for childhood obesity<sup>2</sup>; evidence continues to suggest that the early life environment can determine later risk of obesity<sup>3</sup>

## The exclusion of the poorest families is reflected in increased death rates from injury in childhood

Deaths from injury and poisoning and rates per year per 100 000 children aged 0-15 years by eight class NS-SEC, 2001-3<sup>4</sup>



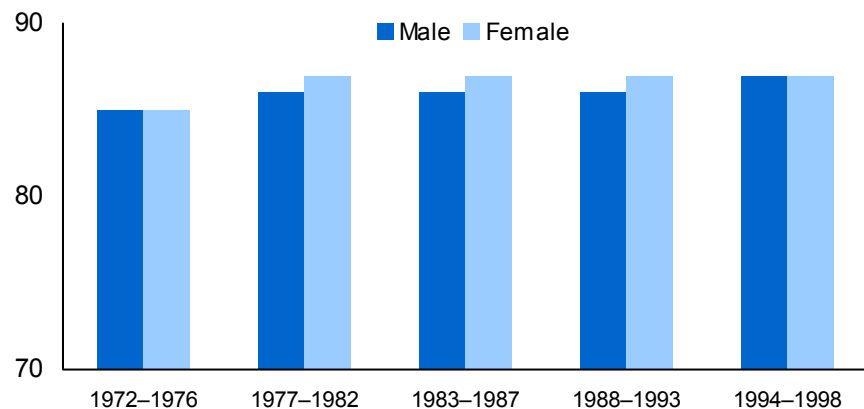
- Data from the 1970 birth cohort show that hyperactivity and conduct disorder, and to a lesser extent anxiety, increase with decreasing social class<sup>4</sup>
- Progress is being made - the 2004–2006 infant mortality rate for routine and manual groups is the same as the rate for the whole population in 1997–1999<sup>5</sup>

# The overall increases in prosperity and physical health, do not appear to have had significant effects on overall life satisfaction. This might be because we adjust to most circumstances, good and bad

Circumstances
Trends
Drivers

## Life satisfaction has shown only minor changes over 30 years

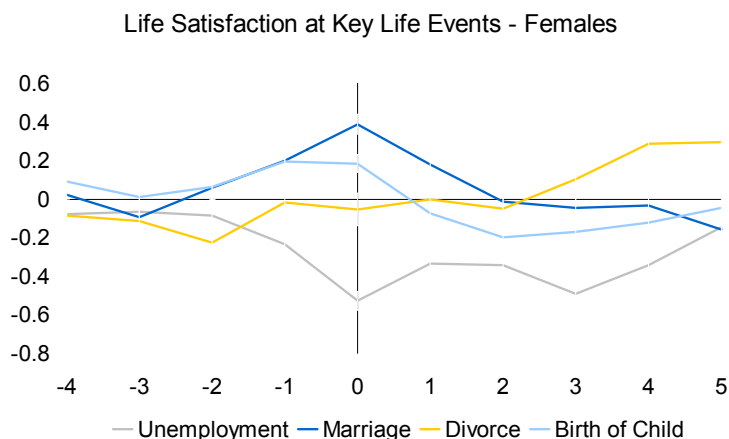
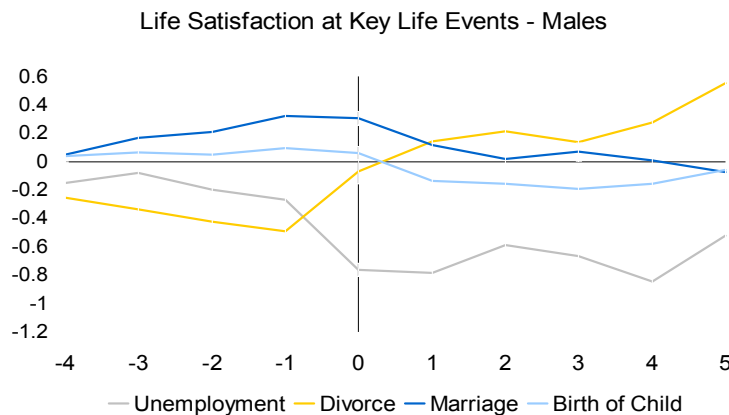
Are you satisfied with life? % answering 'Very' or 'Fairly' Great Britain<sup>1</sup>



- In 2006, 85 per cent of people responded to a Eurobarometer survey saying they were satisfied on the whole with the life they led<sup>2</sup>

## Life satisfaction tends to anticipate and adapt to key life events – male unemployment is one exception

Effect on Life Satisfaction, Fixed Effect 'Within' Regressions<sup>3</sup>

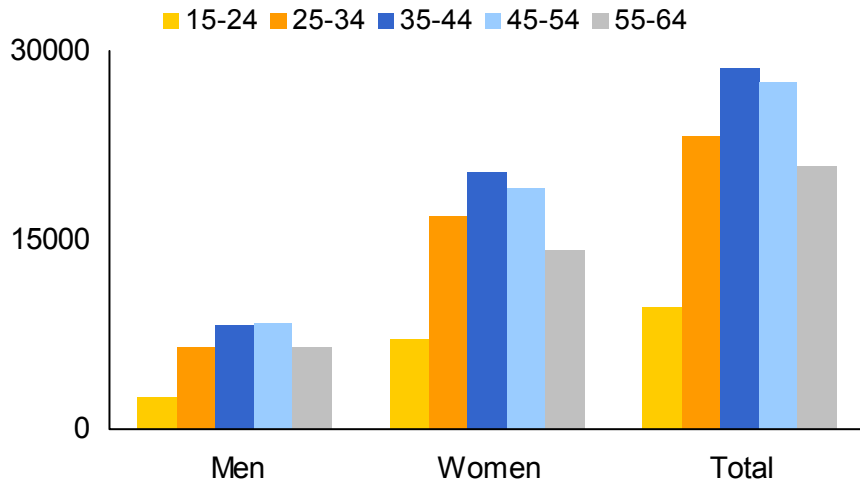


# However emotional wellbeing and physical wellbeing are closely related, and the consequences for those in a family where an individual suffers poor emotional wellbeing are considerable

Circumstances
Trends
Drivers

## Poor mental health is one of the key causes of lost working days

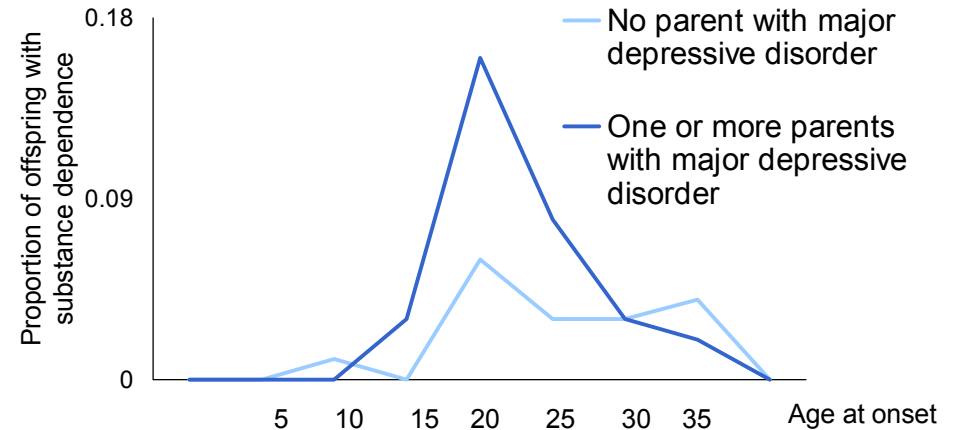
Working days lost owing to depression in 1999-2000<sup>1</sup>



- In 2000, non-employment was higher by nearly a fifth among working-age adults with any type of mental disorder than those without (39% versus 33%)<sup>2</sup>
- Poor mental health significantly increases the risk of poor physical health and premature death – risks of heart disease are estimated to be twice as high for people with depression or mental illness, and 1.5 times higher for those who are generally unhappy<sup>3</sup>

## The children of depressed parents constitute a high risk group for psychiatric and medical problems

Summary of associations throughout lifecourse<sup>4</sup>



- Higher levels of maternal depression are associated with adverse outcomes in infancy and early childhood such as language and cognitive deficits and behavioural problems<sup>5</sup>

## The following slides discuss the drivers of these trends in family circumstances

---



### Drivers

#### **What are the factors that influence family circumstances?**

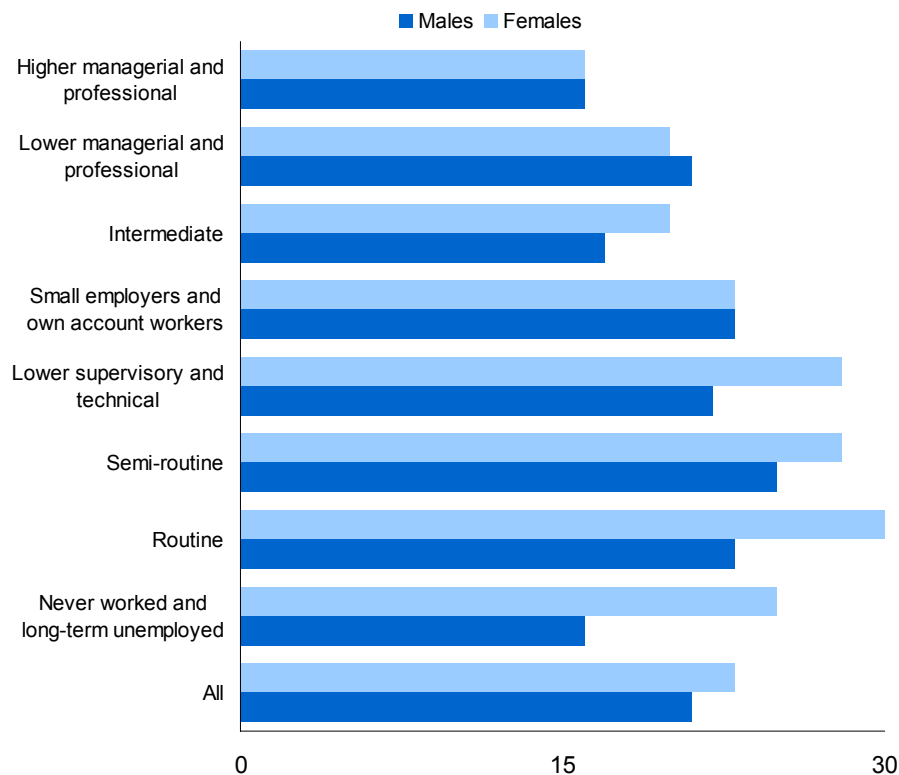
- How is material wellbeing interrelated with emotional distress and ill health?
- How does family composition restrict available resources to produce poor circumstances?
- What impact can policy have on families' circumstances?

# Family circumstances create conditions in which families thrive or struggle, and have knock-on effects for other outcomes – for example, material strain is associated with poor physical and emotional wellbeing

Circumstances
Trends
Drivers

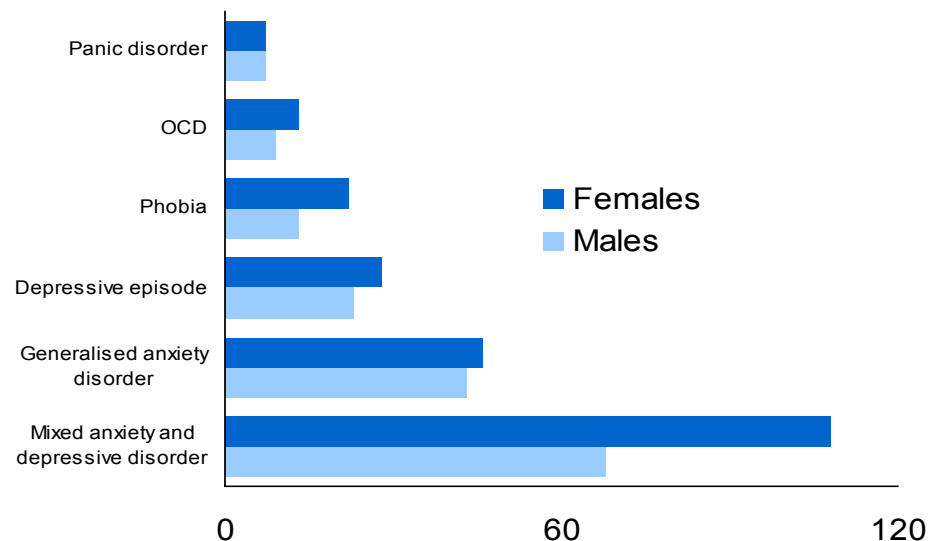
## Evidence suggests that obesity remains highest in the lower socio-economic groups

Obesity among adults(%): by sex and NS-SeC<sup>a</sup>, 2001<sup>1</sup>



## Neurotic disorders are associated with socio-economic adversity

Weekly prevalence of neurotic disorders: by sex, 2000<sup>2</sup>  
Rates per 1,000 adults

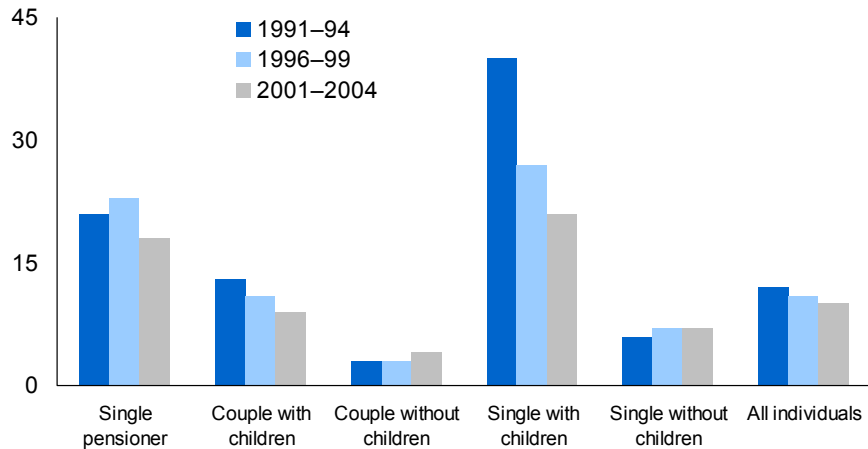


- Those with neurotic disorders are more likely to be living alone, acting as single parents, separated or divorced, and less likely to be married or cohabiting<sup>2</sup>
- Greater socio-economic adversity probably explains many of these associations<sup>2</sup>

# Family composition is associated with family circumstances. It is correlated with material and multiple disadvantage...

## The percentage of single parent families with persistently low income has decreased

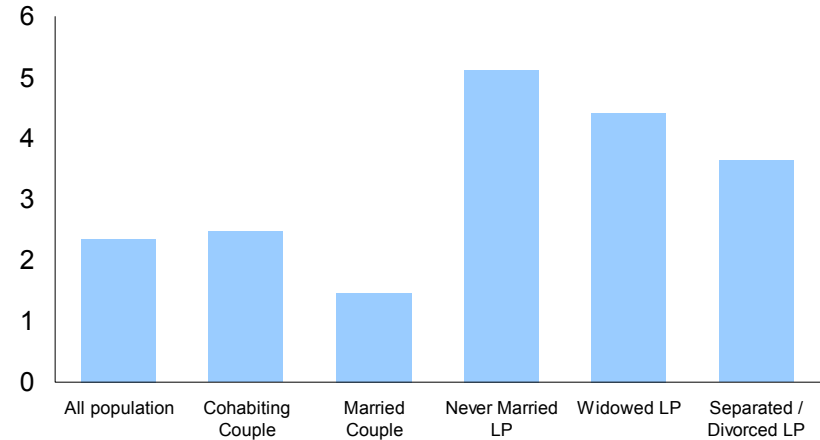
Persistent low income: % by family type, 1991–2004<sup>1</sup>



- Families with children, particularly lone parents, were more at risk of low income than childless counterparts<sup>2</sup>
- 39% of lone parent families had a gross weekly income of £200 or less; this compares with 7% of married and 9% of cohabiting couple families<sup>3</sup>
- Children living in a family headed by someone from an ethnic minority were more likely to live in low-income households<sup>2</sup>

## Single parents are at much greater risk of multiple disadvantage

Risk of multiple disadvantage (number of disadvantages)<sup>4</sup>

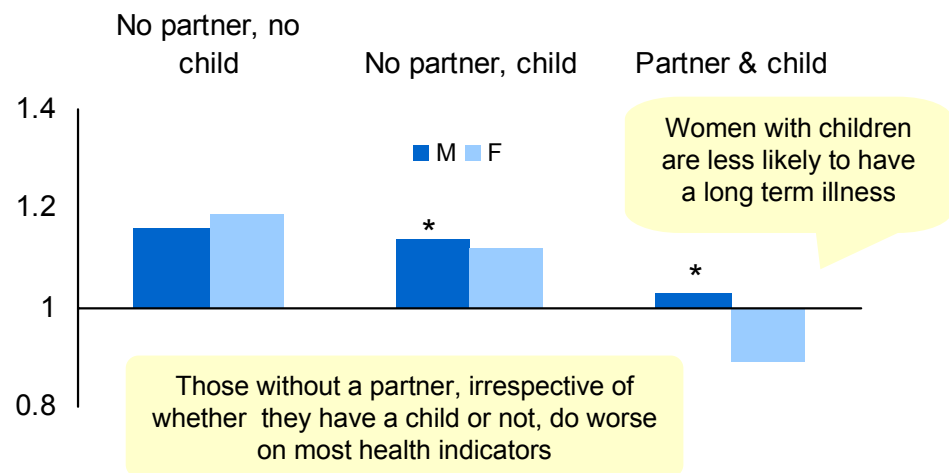


- Working-age adults living in families with at least one disabled adult or child were more likely to live in low-income households<sup>2</sup>
- Over half of individuals in low-income households lived in families reporting no savings<sup>2</sup>

# ....and with outcomes for physical and emotional wellbeing

## Having a partner is important for health

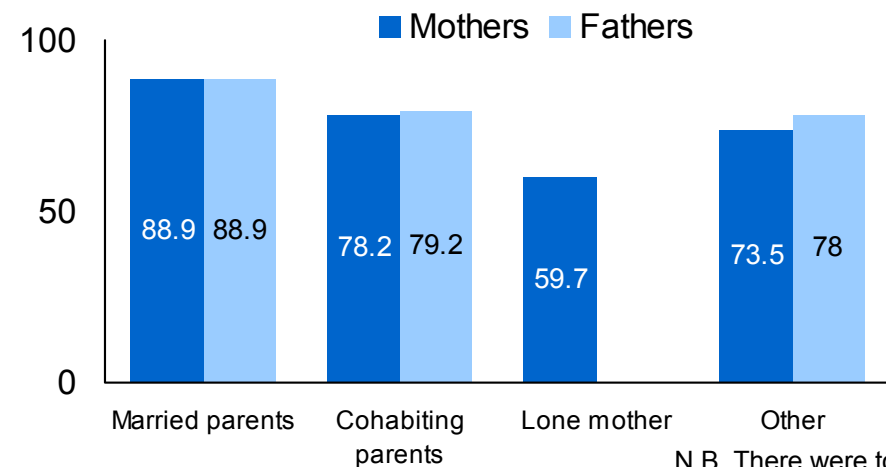
Relative risk of limiting long-standing illness by family type (with partner and no children = 1), Age group 20–64<sup>1</sup> (\* indicates not statistically significant)



- Almost half (47%) of lone mothers smoked, compared with one-fifth (21%) of mothers in couple families<sup>2</sup>
- Lone parents working for 16 hours or more a week were twice as likely to drink alcohol at least three times a week compared with lone parents working less than 16 hours or not in work (22% and 9%, respectively)<sup>2</sup>

## Of couples with children, married couples report higher life satisfaction

% rating life satisfaction 7 or above (1-10 where 10 is highest satisfaction)<sup>3</sup>



N.B. There were too few lone fathers to report

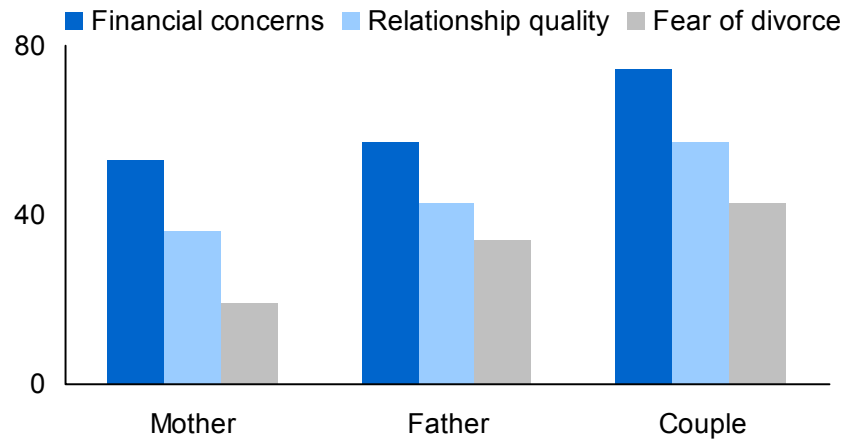
- Problems in the immediate neighbourhood, such as vandalism, graffiti and other deliberate damage to property or vehicles, were reported more frequently by lone parent families than couple families (25% compared with 14%)<sup>2</sup>

# However the direction of causality is not as straightforward as might appear. International evidence shows that family circumstances can deter or precipitate changes in family composition and vice versa

Circumstances
Trends
Drivers

## In the US, financial concerns affect people's decision to marry

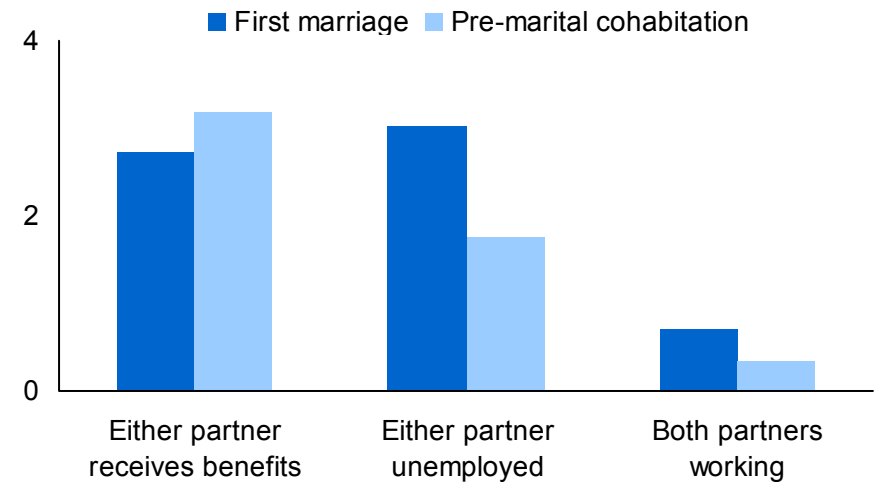
% mentioning each obstacle to marriage US (n = 47)<sup>1</sup>



- The Millennium Cohort Study found a strong link between partnership status and poverty. Married parents were least likely to be in poverty (14.5% of respondents). 30.4% of cohabiting respondents were in poverty<sup>2</sup>

## In the UK, parents who both work are less likely to break up

Odds ratios of breakdown, UK BHPS 92-95<sup>3</sup>



- There is a higher risk of couples splitting when they are hit by economic shocks such as unemployment<sup>4</sup>
- Divorce risks for spouses with little formal education and in manual worker occupations were found to be specific to marriages of relatively short duration<sup>5</sup>
- In contrast, such factors as unemployment, wife's high income, and living in a rented dwelling were found to increase divorce risk at all marital durations<sup>5</sup>

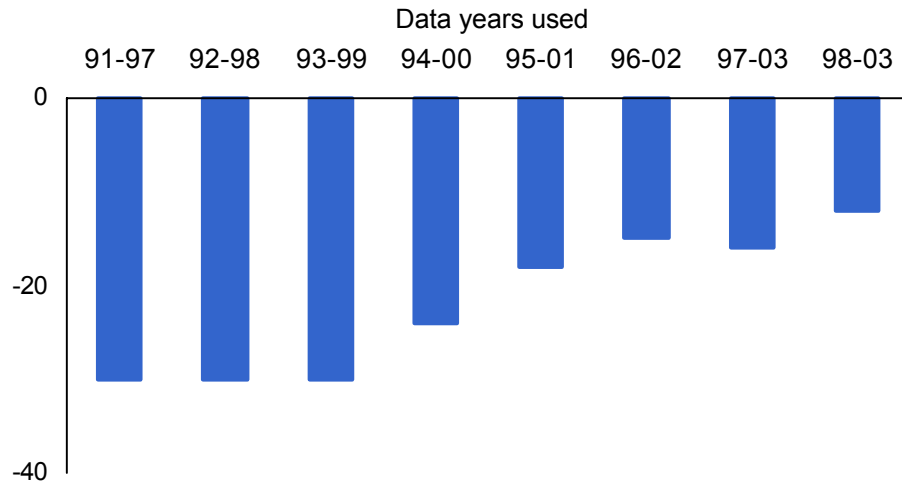


# Policy is a key driver of family circumstances. Supporting families facing difficult circumstances – whatever their form – will have positive implications for other outcomes

Circumstances
Trends
Drivers

## Every family experiences a drop in income when parents break up – policy can reduce the impact

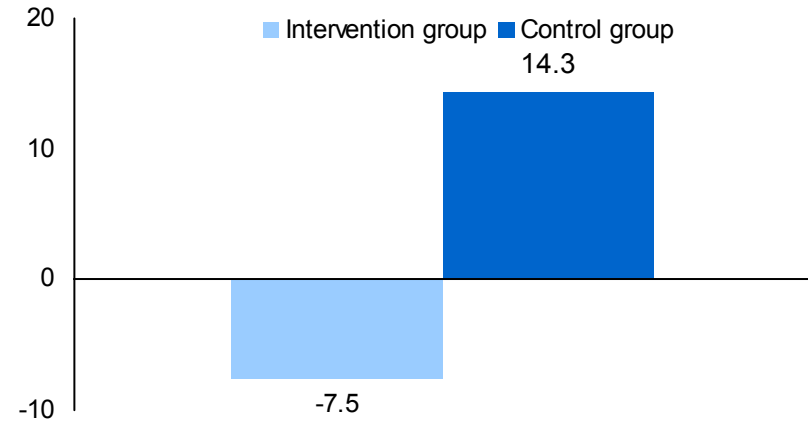
Median percentage change in net income by wives with 1+ kids experiencing marital split, BHPS wave t (91-97) to wave t+1 (98-03)<sup>1</sup>



- Analysis suggests this has most likely due to the increased lone parent employment rate associated with the introduction of Working Families Tax Credits<sup>1</sup>
- US studies show the sudden drop in income experienced by most lone-parent families after break up is the single most important factor explaining underachievement of young people<sup>2</sup>

## Family-based treatments for weight problems have been shown to be effective

Decreases in the percentage of those who were overweight over 10 years<sup>3</sup>



- The four most common health problems related to obesity are high blood pressure, coronary heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and certain cancers<sup>4</sup>
- Many people are not in employment as a direct result of obesity, either on health grounds or for other reasons, including, possibly, discrimination in the workforce<sup>5</sup>

# Contents

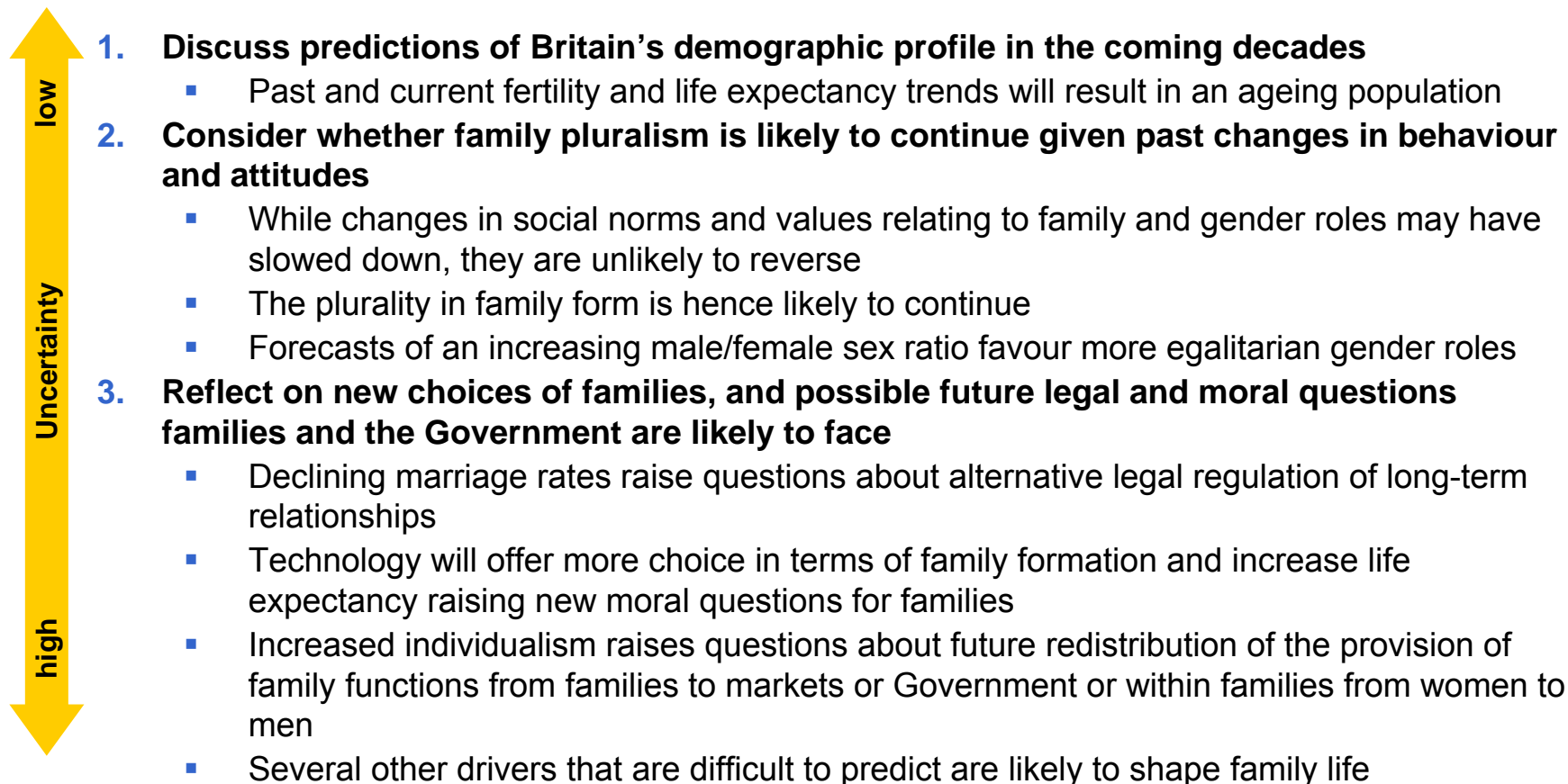
---

- 1 Ministerial Foreword
- 2 Executive Summary
- 3 Family Matters
- 4 Family Composition
- 5 Family Process
- 6 Family Circumstances
- 7 The Future for Families**
- 8 Implications
- 9 A Modern Family Policy

# This chapter discusses the potential future challenges for families

Future
Demographics
Family pluralism
New choices

This section will:

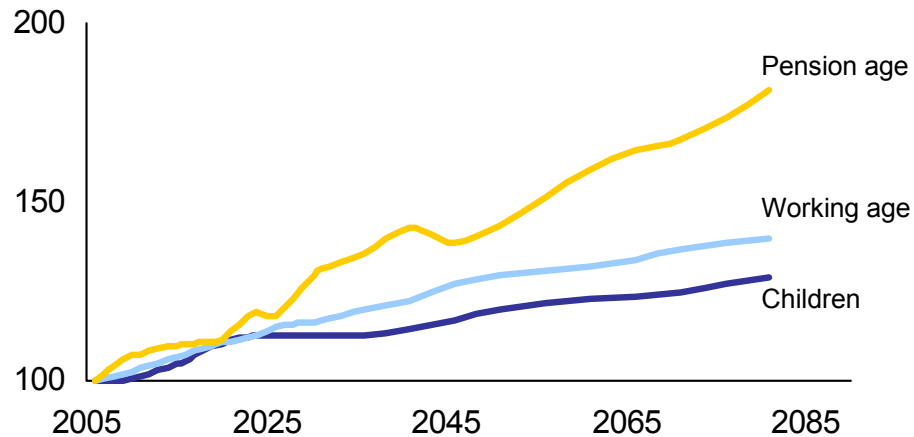
- 
- 1. Discuss predictions of Britain's demographic profile in the coming decades**
    - Past and current fertility and life expectancy trends will result in an ageing population
  - 2. Consider whether family pluralism is likely to continue given past changes in behaviour and attitudes**
    - While changes in social norms and values relating to family and gender roles may have slowed down, they are unlikely to reverse
    - The plurality in family form is hence likely to continue
    - Forecasts of an increasing male/female sex ratio favour more egalitarian gender roles
  - 3. Reflect on new choices of families, and possible future legal and moral questions families and the Government are likely to face**
    - Declining marriage rates raise questions about alternative legal regulation of long-term relationships
    - Technology will offer more choice in terms of family formation and increase life expectancy raising new moral questions for families
    - Increased individualism raises questions about future redistribution of the provision of family functions from families to markets or Government or within families from women to men
    - Several other drivers that are difficult to predict are likely to shape family life

# Britain's past demographic profile will result in a growing proportion of elderly people. This will have implications for public services and the role of family in society

Future
Demographics
Family pluralism
New choices

## The number of pensioners will grow more rapidly than those of working age

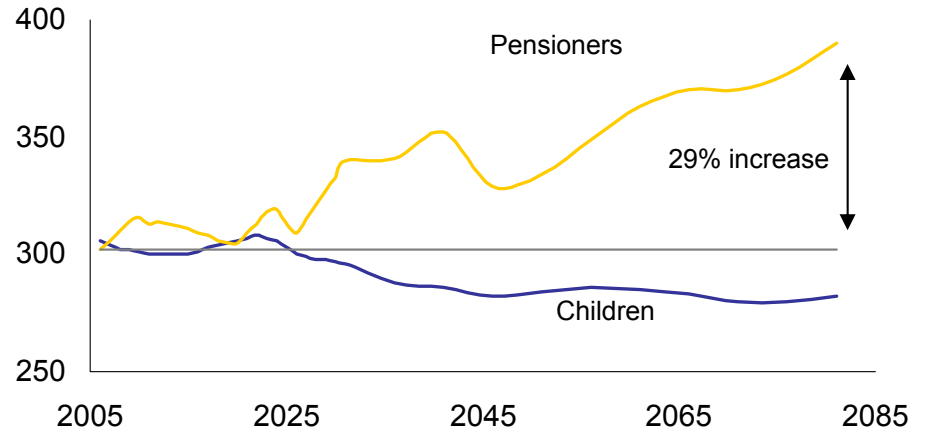
Index, 2006 = 100<sup>1</sup>



- By 2031 the UK's population will have grown by 6.5 million—of which 85% will be over 65<sup>1</sup>
- Of the estimated 5.5m Britons living abroad around 17.5% are there for retirement<sup>2</sup>
- Married couples are significantly more likely to emigrate than non-married<sup>3</sup>
- There should continue to be adequate numbers of carers in terms of demographics and willingness<sup>4</sup>

## It is therefore predicted the ratio between pensioners and workers that will increase

Dependents per 1,000 workers<sup>1</sup>



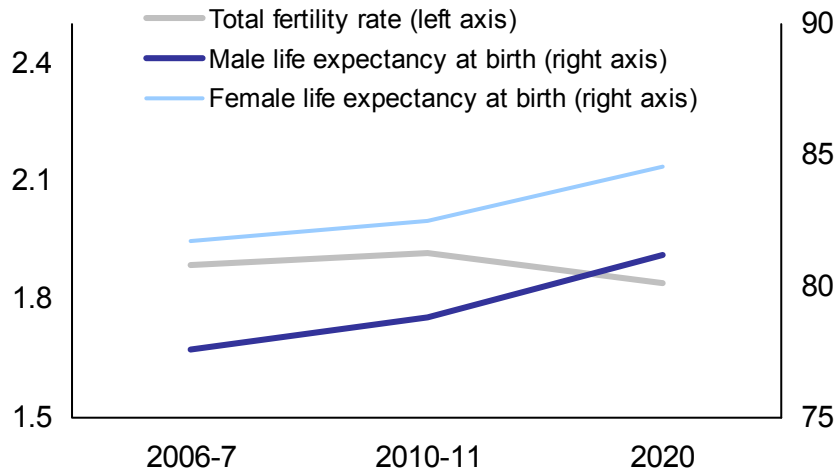
- The future population is likely to be more ethnically diverse
- The proportions of older people likely to be married will grow substantially due to the marriage boom of the 1970s and increased life expectancy of men
- It is estimated about a third of those aged 35-65 in 2031 will have no co-resident partner

# The total fertility rate is unlikely to decline to very low, unsustainable levels. However, a lower proportion of the population will be under 20

Future
Demographics
Family pluralism
New choices

## The fertility rate is likely to remain stable while life expectancy will increase further

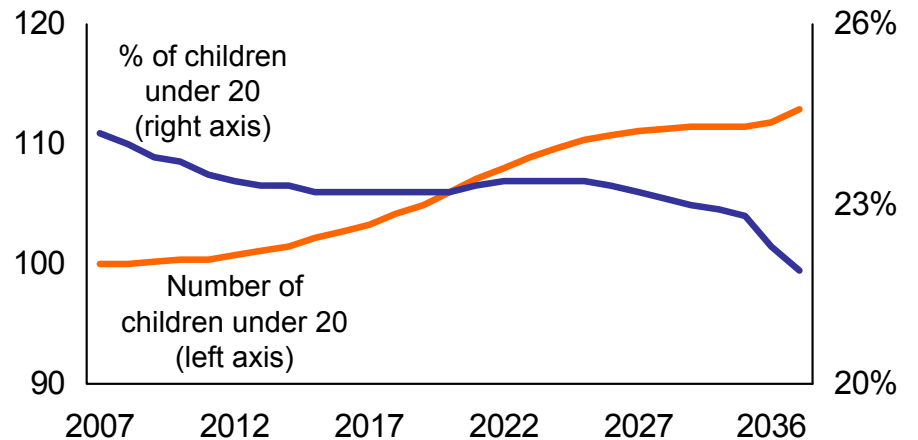
Average no. of children per women (left axis), Life expectancy at birth in years (right axis)<sup>1</sup>



- Overall fertility levels are predicted to be just below replacement rate<sup>1</sup>
- Differences in fertility levels between population groups are unlikely to narrow unless preferences shift dramatically or combining work and family becomes easier<sup>2</sup>
- The increase in life expectancy is predicted to continue<sup>1</sup>

## A lower proportion of the population will be under 20

Projections, index of number of children (left), per cent of children (right)<sup>3</sup>



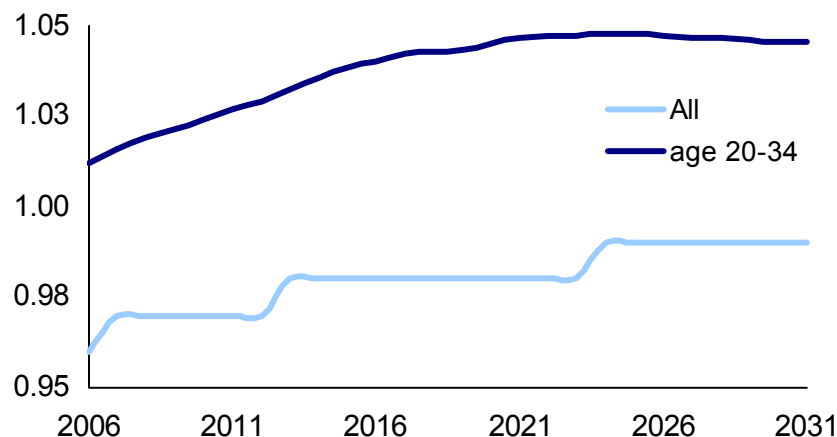
- By 2050 the average man will live to 89 whilst women on average will live into their early 90s<sup>3</sup>
- A lower proportion of the population will be under 20 affecting the age structure of society<sup>3</sup>. This will have implications for the ability to raise taxes to pay for an ageing society

# Trends towards gender equality and plurality in family forms may slow down but are unlikely to reverse. More single-person households will have implications for public services

Future
Demographics
Family pluralism
New choices

## The sex ratio is predicted to increase, especially among age groups of family formation

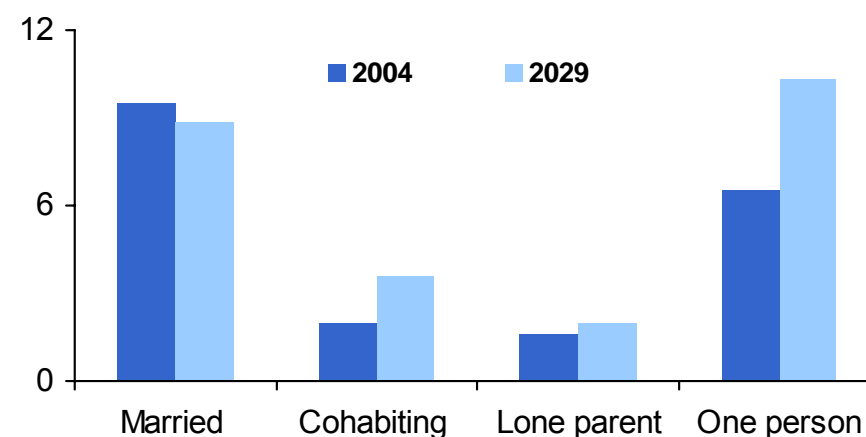
2006-based projections of ratio of males to females, England, 2006-31<sup>1</sup>



- Due to the narrowing gender gap in life expectancy, the sex ratio (male/female) of people at childbearing age is predicted to increase to 1.05<sup>2</sup>
- Evidence suggests this will increase gender equality bargaining power within households<sup>3</sup>
- Simultaneously, the trend towards more egalitarian gender role expectations is unlikely to reverse<sup>4</sup>

## Single and co-habiting households are on the increase<sup>5</sup>

Household estimates and projections: (millions) England, 2001-29



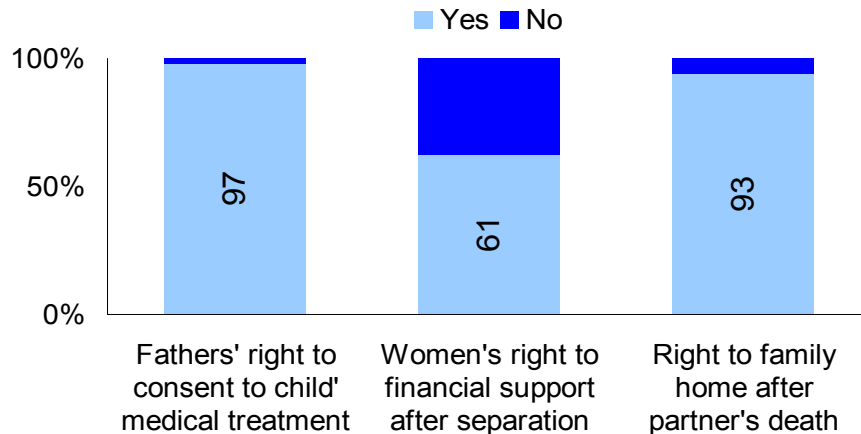
- The number of cohabiting couples, estimated to be 2 million in 2003, is projected to rise to 3.8 million by 2031 (90% increase in 25 years)<sup>1</sup>
- The number of households in the UK will rise from 24 to 30 million by 2021, of which over a third will be single person households. This will have implications for public services such as housing<sup>1</sup>

# Other countries have responded to greater pluralism in family forms with alternative legal arrangements

Future
Demographics
Family pluralism
New choices

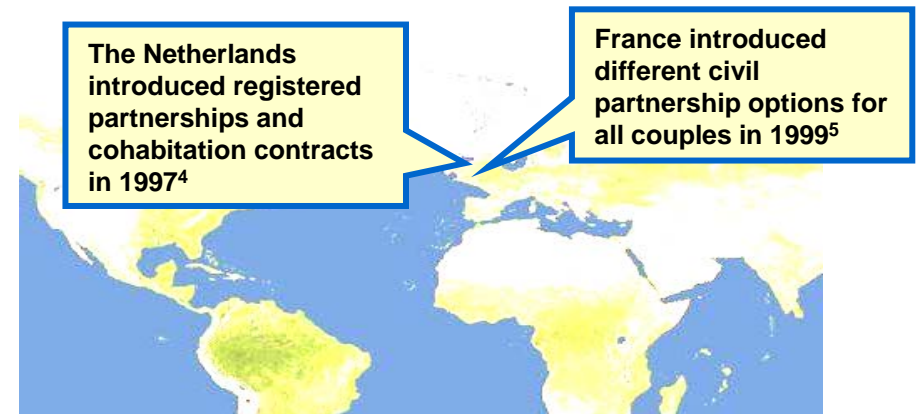
## Most British people think cohabitants should have the same rights as married couples

Percentage who agree or disagree<sup>1</sup>



- For heterosexual couples, currently marriage is the only option to obtain legal safeguards for the case of separation or death of one partner except for making a written agreement on specific issues
- The Scottish Family Law Act 2006 has given cohabitants similar rights but this option lacks conscious decisions to enter into a contract by either partner<sup>2,3</sup>

## Some countries have introduced legal alternatives to marriage or different marriage contracts



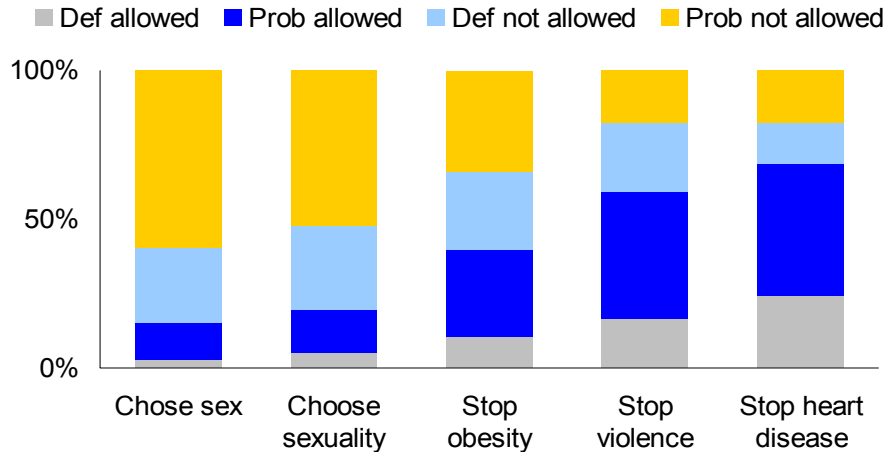
- In some countries marriage contracts offer a choice between different rules for dividing up property<sup>6</sup>
- Many countries recognise prenuptial agreements, which are similar but only apply to the specific issue addressed<sup>7</sup>
- Some countries have introduced different civil partnership agreements for same sex and heterosexual couples

# Technology has created new opportunities for families e.g. through IVF and increased life expectancy, but has also created new ethical dilemmas

Future
Demographics
Family pluralism
New choices

## Fertility treatments have become commonplace; the next step may be human genetic engineering

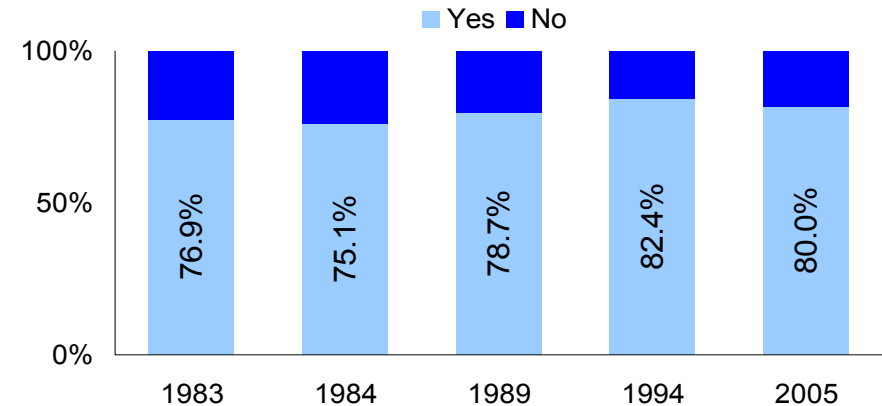
Percentage saying should / should not be allowed<sup>1</sup>



- In Vitro Fertilisations (IVF) and Donor Inseminations have increased, 32,000 IVF treatments gave rise to 11,000 children in 2004<sup>2</sup>
- In the future, human genetic engineering will raise difficult questions for families
- The majority of British people believe that genetic engineering will probably be allowed to stop heart diseases or violence but not to choose a child's sex or sexual orientation<sup>3</sup>

## Consistently high numbers think doctors should be allowed to end patients' life at their request

Percentage who agree or disagree, BSA, 1981-2001<sup>1</sup>



- It is unclear whether people will live longer, healthier lives or longer but more disabled lives<sup>4</sup>
- If parents are suffering unrelievably, ending their life at their request is legal only in a few countries but practiced in many<sup>5</sup>; moral and legal debates about this are likely to grow

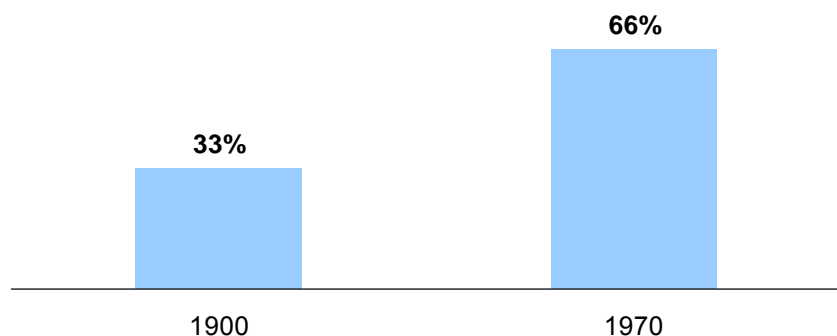


# The trends towards greater individualism may increase the demand for Government or private and voluntary sector provision of family functions. The future mix of provision is however highly uncertain

Future
Demographics
Family pluralism
New choices

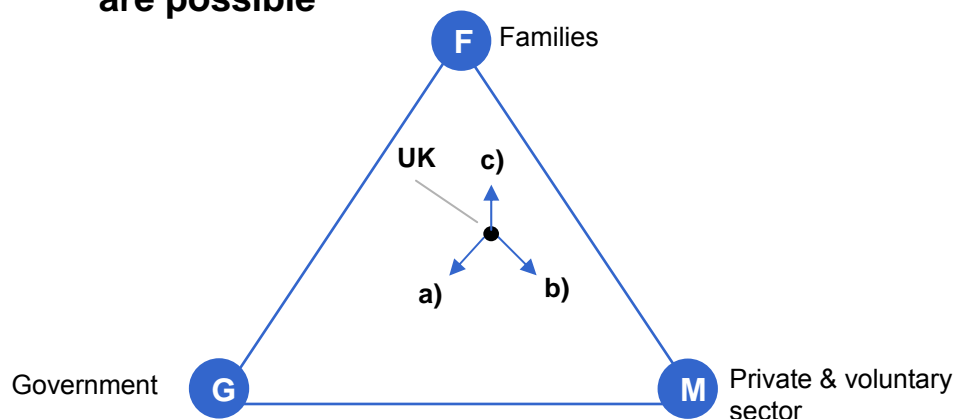
## The cultural ideal of marriage has become more individualised<sup>1</sup>

Proportions of popular articles on marriage emphasising themes of self-development and independence, percent



- Increasing levels of individualism can be observed in terms of:
  - Higher expectations of love, independence and self-development in relationships<sup>2,3</sup>
  - Women's reduced willingness to forgo earnings for informal care in a world of high family instability<sup>4</sup>
- These changes may increase the demand for Government or market provision of family functions<sup>5</sup>

## A different balance of provision by families, Government and the private and voluntary sector are possible



- a) More functions are provided by the Government (e.g. LA care). Could imply higher Government spending<sup>a</sup>
- b) More functions are provided by the private & voluntary sector either purchased by families or commissioned by government. Implies possible equity issues and/or higher Government spending<sup>a</sup>
- c) Same or more functions are provided by the family. Probably will require some rebalancing of gender roles.<sup>6</sup> Still implies considerable role for others to support this transition and strengthen families' capabilities<sup>a</sup>

# Several other drivers are likely to impact on family life in the future. However most of these are highly uncertain and difficult to predict

Future
Demographics
Family pluralism
New choices

## Other drivers<sup>1</sup>

## Uncertainty<sup>2</sup>

- 1. Intergenerational incomes and relations:** transmission of advantage and disadvantage is important for social mobility and life chances. What will be the relative impact of families?
- 2. Employment and consumption:** how work-life balance and new working patterns develop will greatly affect family life and gender inequalities. This will also be connected with our desire for consumption. Will consumption continue to accelerate, and will we be able to satisfy our wishes?
- 3. Equality of life chances and quality of life:** Future trends will be highly dependent on policy e.g. in terms of investment in education and skills and access to health and social care. To what extent will policies be targeted at disadvantaged groups?
- 4. Identity / new forms of adulthood:** will there be common and defined points of entry into adulthood, or will we understand adulthood through multiple markers in a highly individualistic world?
- 5. Cultural mix:** how diverse will the cultural mix be? Will diversity be characterised by integration or segregation and how does family matter for the provision of identity?
- 6. Migration:** what will be the balance between immigration and emigration? What impact will immigration have on community support, cohesion and the diversity of family types?



Notes: (1) These drivers have been identified by key stakeholders during a one day workshop; (2) The level of uncertainty should be seen as indicative.

# Contents

---

- 1 Ministerial Foreword
- 2 Executive Summary
- 3 Family Matters
- 4 Family Composition
- 5 Family Process
- 6 Family Circumstances
- 7 The Future for Families
- 8 **Implications**
- 9 A Modern Family Policy

# Changes in family life in Britain are interesting in their own right. But Government is mainly concerned with the impact they have on vulnerable family members and on wider society

Impact

Composition

Processes

Circumstances

## Summary of evidence presented in this chapter<sup>1</sup>:

- Increased pluralism of family structures need not lead to poorer outcomes, since evidence suggests that the quality of relationships and families' circumstances have a greater effect on outcomes than the legal structure
- Poorer outcomes of lone-parent families are often connected to consequences of relationship breakdown and time constraints rather than the family form. For step-families, children's relationship with the new partner seems to be a key driver of outcomes
- Parental conflict and loss of income after separation results in negative outcomes for families
- Women's financial independence and changing gender role expectations regarding the division of domestic labour increase choice but also provide challenges to family stability. Communication and commitment seem to be key to coping with differences in expectations.
- Parents' responsiveness and the quality of the home learning environment are key to children's behavioural and cognitive outcomes
- Poor material circumstances, emotional distress, and ill health reinforce material and other disadvantages for children and adults. This effect is partly indirect through poorer adult and child-parent relationships

Notes: (1)These implications are discussed in a wider context in:

- SU (2008) *Getting on, getting ahead – a discussion paper: analysing the trends and drivers of social mobility*
- Foresight (2008) *Mental Capital and Wellbeing project*

# Marriage is associated with successful outcomes. However, evidence on causation is weak

Impact

Composition

Processes

Circumstances

## A Marriage is associated with successful outcomes

- Married couples tend to have higher incomes<sup>1</sup>, lower risk of poverty and accumulate more wealth<sup>2</sup>
- They are happier, less prone to depression and suicide and live longer<sup>2</sup>
- Cohabiting couples are more likely to separate than married couples.<sup>12</sup> US data suggests they are also less satisfied with their relationship, even after they make the transition to marriage<sup>13</sup>
- Children living with cohabiting biological parents had more behavioural and emotional problems and lower school engagement than those in married households<sup>3</sup>

## B Certain characteristics are associated with higher probabilities to marry

- Male partners' earnings, occupation, or education are positively associated with the transition to marriage<sup>4</sup>
- Low income seems to be a major reason for long-term cohabitation rather than marriage in the UK and the US<sup>5</sup>
- Other reasons include regarding relationships as a personal rather than a public commitment<sup>6</sup>

## C But other relationship types seem equally able to match these effects

- The reasons given by many academics<sup>7</sup> for the better outcomes of marriage include:
  - social expectations, security and expectations of long-term stability
  - promotion of extra efforts on behalf of partners to improve the relationship (and the absence of factors that weaken it)
- However, it is also the case that people with more money, better relationships, more commitment, higher education and better mental wellbeing are more likely to get married, and these variables may be central to these better outcomes:
  - studies that control for variables such as income, wealth, attitudes, education and relationship duration show a much smaller effect<sup>8,9</sup>. One study of Norway demonstrated a virtual elimination of the effect<sup>10</sup>
- But capturing all relevant variables is difficult. For example the level of commitment is rarely observed and therefore not taken into consideration in studies. The evidence is ambiguous whether this can explain the remaining effect.
- Generally, evidence suggests that the quality of relationships matters most regardless of the legal form<sup>11</sup>

# Lone-parent families experience more problems than two-parent families. However, this is mainly driven by problems around the relationship breakdown, and the financial consequences

Impact

Composition

Processes

Circumstances

A

## Lone parenthood is associated with less successful outcomes

- Children of single-parent families do less well at school<sup>1</sup>
- 25% of families with children are lone parents; 71% of families in the lowest income decile<sup>1</sup>
- 62% of lone parents are poor compared to 16% of two-parent families<sup>1</sup>
- 35% of single mothers in the MCS\* showed signs of depression compared to 23% of partnered mothers<sup>2</sup>
- 70% of young offenders are from lone-parent families<sup>2</sup>
- Adolescents in the US who lived apart from one parent at some time, were twice as likely to drop out of high school<sup>3</sup>

B

## Lone parents face more difficulties in fulfilling the full range of roles

- By definition lone parent families are cut off from some family functions
- They are often disadvantaged in finding the time for breadwinning and caring and have to rely more heavily on extended family members
- Mothers and fathers have different roles and relationships in the family – an absent parent can be associated with adverse material and emotional outcomes<sup>4,5</sup>

C

## Lone parents can encounter problems that reduce the potential to maximise outcomes of families

- Lone parent families are formed in many ways—the most common is separation or divorce<sup>6</sup>
- The drop in income and the deterioration in parenting resources experienced by most lone-parent families after break up are the most important factors explaining poorer cognitive and emotional outcomes of children<sup>3</sup>
- Good relationships with both parents can have a separate positive effect on children's outcomes through the qualitative different roles that mothers and fathers have with their children<sup>4,5</sup>
- Irrespective of custody arrangements, where a mother and father cooperate over parenting children adjust more easily to divorce<sup>6</sup>
- Research comparing intact families experiencing high conflict with lone parents found children fared less well in intact families<sup>7</sup>
- Recently, a small but growing number lone mothers are single from the start by choice. This group is likely to suffer fewer negative psychological risks from break-up<sup>6</sup>
- The evidence therefore suggests that it is not being a lone parent itself that is problematic but rather the relationship problems that led to breakdown and the financial consequences that often follow

# Step-families face greater challenges as a result of the consequences of relationship breakdown and the presence of a new partner

Impact

Composition

Processes

Circumstances

A

## Stepfamilies are associated with less successful outcomes than biological two-parent families

- Children in stepfamilies show more psychological and behavioural problems than children in biological two-parent families<sup>1</sup>
- Their outcomes are similar to those growing up in lone parent families<sup>2</sup>
- Remarriage is associated with substantial recovery of the financial position faced by women and their children following an earlier marriage dissolution<sup>3</sup>

B

## Step-families face particular challenges due to their family history and composition

- Children in step-families have experienced their parents' relationship breakdown and are faced with a new step-parent
- While step-families face fewer time constraints in breadwinning and caring than lone parents, the presence of a step parent often creates challenges for the relationships between family members

C

## Step-families can encounter problems that reduce the potential to maximise outcomes of families

- US studies found girls were much happier when their mother remained unmarried, because of difficult relationships with new step-fathers<sup>4</sup>
- Older children find it harder to adapt than younger children and often display disruptive and demanding behaviour characterised by hostility and resentment towards a step-father<sup>5</sup>; there are some indications that girls get on better with their step-mothers as time goes on<sup>6</sup>
- The British Avon study found children's psychological problems associated with step-families had more to do with their circumstances (e.g. depressed mother, poor relationships with mother and father and economic hardship<sup>7</sup>) rather than the family composition
- However, a follow up of this study found parents were more affectionate towards their biological children<sup>8</sup>
- The evidence therefore seems to support the view that the negative outcomes are more due to the lasting impact of experiencing relationship breakdown and difficult relationships with a new family member

# Healthy family stability and good relationships between partners result in positive outcomes for families. In some cases separation is the best solution for families in conflict

Impact

Composition

Processes

Circumstances

A

## Relationship breakdown is associated with various child and adult outcomes

- Divorced individuals have poorer physical and emotional well-being compared to the married<sup>1</sup>
- However rates of suicide and domestic violence are higher within marriage than those who divorced<sup>1</sup>
- Parental separation is associated with a range of adverse childhood, adolescent and adult outcomes for children e.g. in terms of cognitive development, education and labour market disadvantages<sup>2</sup>
- 75% of couples experiencing high levels of conflict choose not to separate<sup>3</sup>

B

## Relationship breakdown is often accompanied by conflict, financial and emotional loss

- The drop in income after relationship breakdown is usually larger for women than for men<sup>4</sup>; however men also experience negative employment effects<sup>5</sup>
- Conflict resolution and regulation predict longitudinal outcomes in relationships<sup>6</sup>
- Stable economic, emotional and physical circumstances also contribute to relationship quality before and after separation<sup>7</sup>

C

## There are numerous negative effects of separation – most seem the result of conflict and financial consequences

- Although conflict may be part of family life, intense parental conflict has been identified as a key mediating variable in reducing parenting quality and producing negative outcomes for children, including those in intact families<sup>6</sup>
- Commitment, communication skills, ability to solve conflicts and intimacy and emotional support are therefore key factors for relationship quality and stability<sup>8</sup>
- Amicable relationships between parents are reported to reduce negative outcomes of divorce on children<sup>9</sup>
- The drop in income experienced by most lone-parent families after break up explains a lot of the adverse consequences for young people<sup>10</sup>
- British women's incomes recover on average after three years albeit not to the previous level<sup>5</sup>
- Women's life satisfaction on average recovers more quickly than men's<sup>11</sup>
- The evidence suggests that healthy relationship stability rather than family type has a causal effect on positive parenting and better outcomes for children<sup>12,9</sup> Most of the negative effects of family breakdown on children however seems due to worsening financial circumstances and problems in the relationship between children and parents



# Women's financial independence and changing gender role expectations regarding the division of domestic labour provide challenges as well as opportunities for family

Impact

Composition

Processes

Circumstances

## A Changing gender roles are associated with relationship and parenting quality

- Women's employment is associated with higher family incomes but greater instability<sup>1</sup>
- 88% of single women are looking for gender equality in a relationship compared to only 76% of men; 45% of women however still want their partner to assume a protecting role<sup>2</sup>
- More highly educated parents are more likely to be authoritative and positively responsive in their parenting style<sup>3</sup>
- The more educated fathers are, the more likely they are to read to their children regularly<sup>11</sup>

## B Women's work and care choices are interrelated with expectations and family circumstances

- Women's and men's relationship expectations influence their partner choice but there is often a gap between expectations and actual division of labour<sup>4</sup>
- Families' circumstances e.g. material and emotional stress are important mediators of the effect couples' division of labour has on outcomes for children and either parent<sup>5</sup>

## C The effects of the division of labour on outcomes depend on expectations and a combination of pressures

- Women's financial independence through employment increases their ability to leave an unhappy relationship, which should have positive effects on women's material and emotional wellbeing
- The positive effect of women's employment and resulting financial independence on divorce risk is not significant for women who hold egalitarian gender role attitudes, suggesting that for these women employment may at the same time have a positive effect on relationship quality<sup>6</sup>
- Most studies find no or only a weak negative effect of mothers' employment on children's development, which is more than offset by positive effects of family wealth<sup>7</sup>
- Lack of help with domestic work from husbands is associated with higher risk of maternal distress after birth<sup>8</sup>
- Perceptions of unfairness in the division of domestic work lower women's relationship satisfaction and wellbeing<sup>9</sup>
- Long work hours and overload can reduce relationship and parenting quality for men and women<sup>10</sup>
- Although selection effects are difficult to fully account for, the evidence suggests that the division of labour is causally related to outcomes of families but the direction of the effect depends on women's expectations and on the resulting total workload for both partners

# Parents' responsiveness and the quality of the home learning environment are key to children's behavioural and cognitive outcomes

Impact

Composition

Processes

Circumstances

## A Parenting quality and child outcomes

- Children whose parents are predictably responsive to their needs form more secure attachments<sup>1</sup>
- Secure attachment increases the likelihood of positive peer interaction and good behavioural outcomes in preschool and early school years<sup>1</sup>
- More parental time spent on stimulating child-centred activities is associated with better behavioural and cognitive outcomes for children<sup>2</sup>

## B Parenting quality seems interrelated with relationship quality, education, and working hours

- Good relationship quality between mother and father are positively associated with the warmth of the parent-child relationship<sup>3,4</sup>
- More educated parents spend more time playing and reading to their children<sup>5,6</sup> and are more positively responsive in their parenting style<sup>7</sup>
- Fathers with long work hours and in professional occupations are found to spend less time on childcare<sup>8</sup>

## C The effect of parental time on child outcomes is mediated by a variety of factors

- There is evidence that very little parental time with children may reduce children's wellbeing<sup>9</sup> but there is little evidence that more time is always better
- How parents interact with their children (parenting style) and the quality of parental time seems more important for child development than reduced time through mothers' employment
- Positive responsive parenting style facilitates a secure attachment which makes positive behavioural outcomes for children more likely<sup>1</sup>
- Child temperament is likely to account for some of the variation in parenting style but there is probably an independent causal effect<sup>12</sup>
- Parents' time spent with children on playing, reading or homework has a positive effect on children's behavioural and school outcomes<sup>5,10</sup>
- Poor economic circumstances and stress can lead to a less responsive parenting style and less child-centred activities and hence probably account for part of the socio-economic differences in child outcomes<sup>11</sup>
- While there are exceptions, generally early childhood attachment is a strong predictor of adolescent behaviours and later education and labour market outcomes<sup>12</sup>

# Poor material circumstances are transmitted across generations, and are associated with other disadvantages. This effect is partly indirect through poorer spousal and child-parent relationships

Impact

Composition

Processes

Circumstances

## A Material disadvantage is associated with a range of poor outcomes for adults and children

- Patterns of intra- and intergenerational transmission of poverty persist: people who experience poverty at some point are more likely also to be poor in the future and so are their children<sup>1</sup>
- Depression is widely agreed to be affected by socioeconomic disadvantage: Children from the lowest social classes, especially from families where no parent has ever worked, are most likely to have a mental disorder<sup>2</sup>

## B Material circumstances are interconnected with family composition and family processes

- Families with children, particularly lone parent families, are more at risk of low income than their childless counterparts<sup>3</sup>
- Economic disadvantage is associated with relationship instability; with more coercive parenting; and less parent-child shared activities that enhance child development<sup>4</sup>

## C The effect of parental time on child outcomes is mediated by a variety of factors

- There is some evidence for a direct impact of material factors on adult and child outcomes - unemployment and poor housing contribute to negative physical and mental health<sup>5,6,7</sup>; child obesity rates in disadvantaged areas may be linked to lack of quality recreation facilities<sup>8</sup>
- Despite methodological concerns in establishing causation<sup>9</sup>, the impact of family circumstances on child outcomes is principally mediated through relationships between partners and parenting. Disadvantaged circumstances especially men's low earnings have a negative impact on relationship stability<sup>10,11</sup>
- Economic factors also affect family functioning. Economic deprivation leads to higher rates of depression in mothers which is associated with less responsive parenting<sup>12,13</sup>. Male unemployment is associated with domestic violence<sup>10</sup>
- Families' low income seems to lead to poorer behavioural and cognitive outcomes for children, through inability to invest in time and buy goods and services for children and through increased stress and coercive parenting styles<sup>14,12</sup>
- Evidence shows that increasing family incomes alone can have a positive effect on child outcomes, e.g. on educational attainment<sup>15</sup>

# Emotional distress and ill health also directly and indirectly affect child and adult outcomes. Again family processes are an important mediator. Both are closely interrelated with material deprivation

Impact

Composition

Processes

Circumstances

## A Physical and emotional health are associated with a variety of outcomes

- Working-age adults living in families with at least one disabled adult or child are more likely to live in low-income households<sup>1</sup>
- Some family circumstances drive and reinforce each other i.e. disability and neurotic disorders are associated with material disadvantages<sup>2</sup>
- Parental obesity is associated with a higher risk of obesity among children<sup>3</sup>

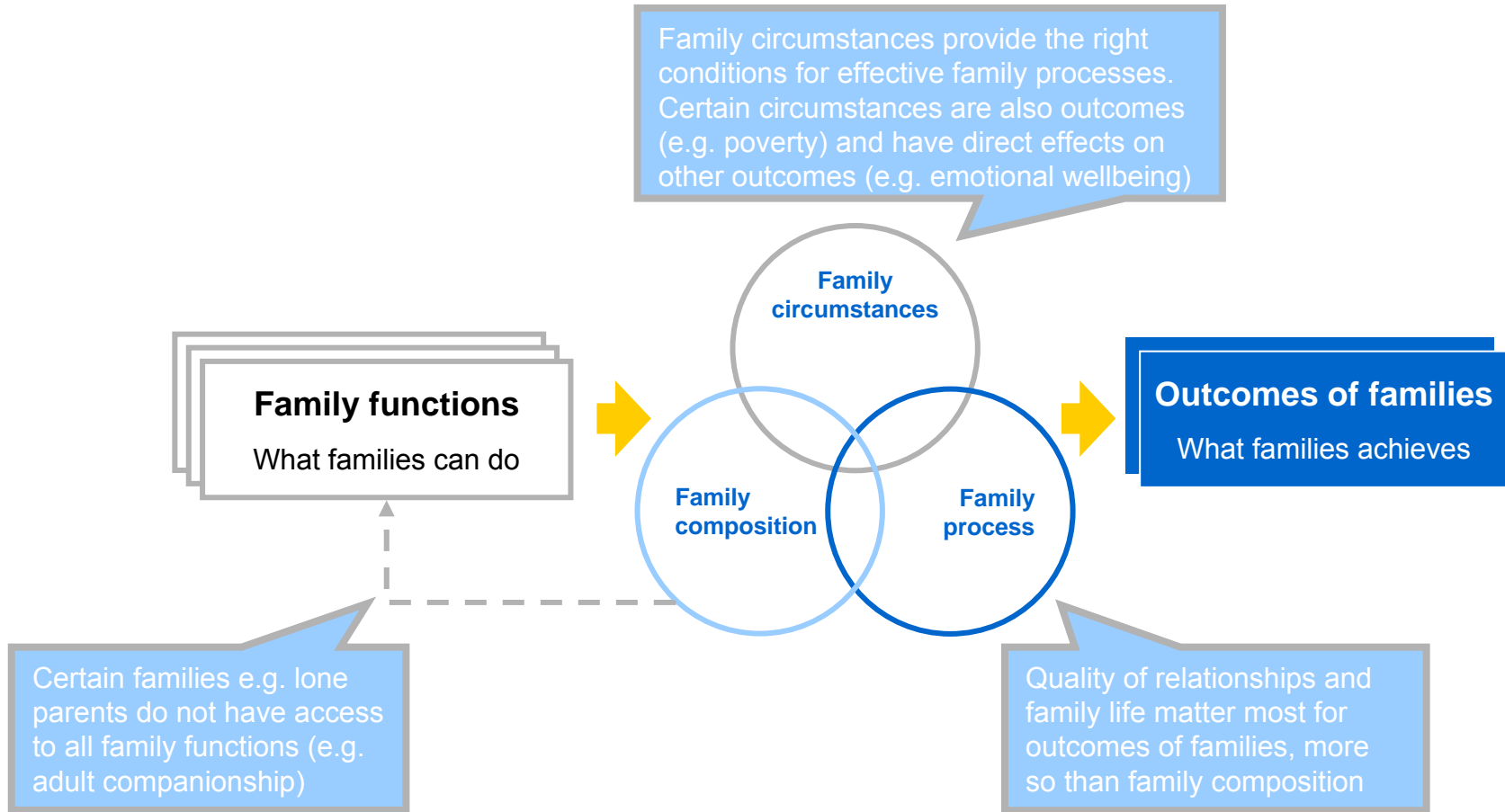
## B Emotional wellbeing is also associated with the quality of family processes

- Emotionally distressed adults are less likely to have highly satisfying relationships with their partner and tend to be less positive and responsive in their parenting styles<sup>4</sup>
- Evidence suggests that the early life environment can determine later risk of obesity<sup>5</sup>

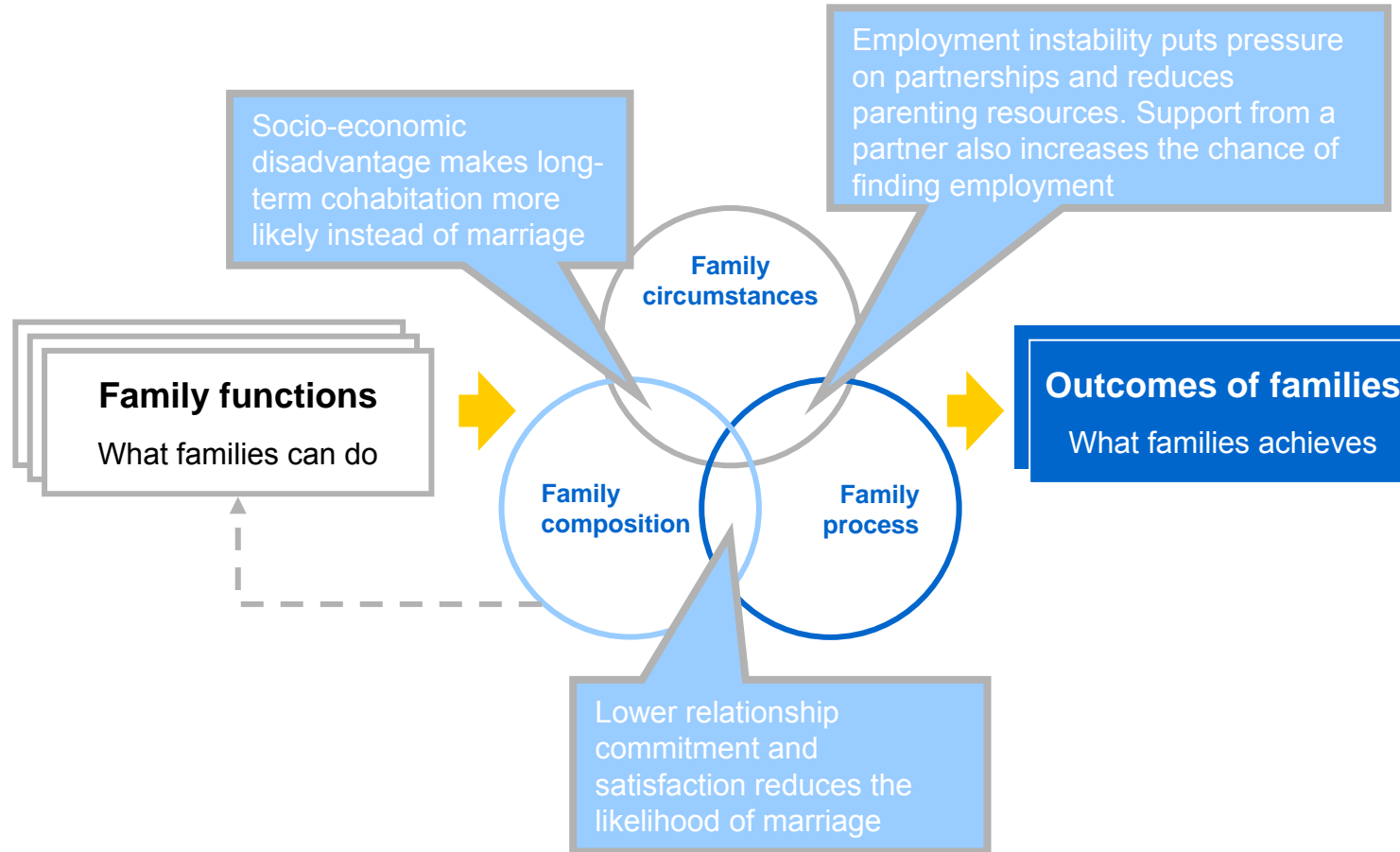
## C Emotional wellbeing drives outcomes of families, partly through its influence on family processes

- There is some evidence for a direct impact of emotional distress and poor physical health on adults' material outcomes (i.e. through greater likelihood of unemployment) and on child wellbeing (i.e. through genetic inheritance)
- However part of the effect is likely to work through partner relationships and parenting
- High levels of depressive symptoms at marriage are linked to low marriage quality; increases in depression are accompanied by decreases in marriage quality<sup>6</sup>
- Causality is difficult to establish, as lower initial marriage quality also predicts greater subsequent depression<sup>7</sup>
- Maternal depression diminishes children's wellbeing, partly as a result of less nurturing and less engaged parenting (more use of harsher disciplinary practices, less time reading). This has been linked with greater behavioural problems of children such as aggression and acting out, withdrawal and anxiety<sup>8,9</sup>

# In summary, family processes and family circumstances matter most for outcomes. But certain family forms face more challenges



# And there are complex interdependencies between the three factors



For example, parental separation is a life event that negatively affects families. However, it is not separation itself that has a negative effect but the way it affects family processes and circumstances

Impact

Summary

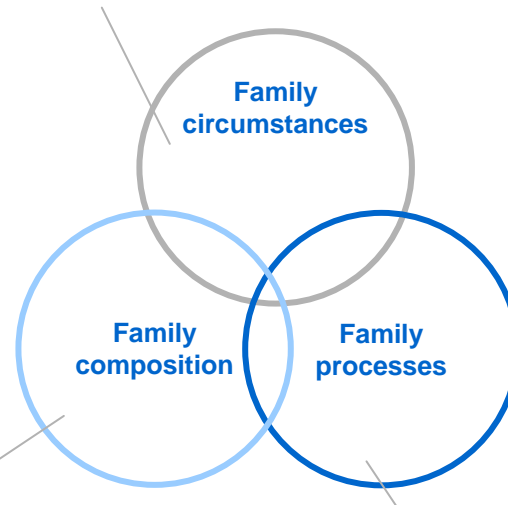
Event

Consequence

Outcome

3 But it is the resultant drop in income for a single parent and in some cases the upheaval of changing home or school...

1 Parental separation ...



Outcomes of families

What families achieve

5 ... which accounts for most of children's adverse outcomes



2 ... is a change in family composition

4 ... together with conflict and poorer parenting and sometimes the loss of contact with one parent ...

# Contents

---

- 1 Ministerial Foreword
- 2 Executive Summary
- 3 Family Matters
- 4 Family Composition
- 5 Family Process
- 6 Family Circumstances
- 7 The Future for Families
- 8 Implications
- 9 **A Modern Family Policy**



## The aim of this section is to articulate Government's role in supporting families, in light of the evidence presented

### This section will:

#### Why

#### Set out why Government has a role in supporting families

- Explore how issues in families' decisions in terms of lack of information, insufficient consideration of effects on society and inequity can elucidate the role of Government

#### When

#### Identify when Government should support families

- Not all families require the same level of support at all times
- But Government can help families to continuously build strong and healthy relationships
- Individuals in families have rights and responsibilities towards each other, but in difficult circumstances, Government can provide support to families through challenging times

#### How

#### Explore how Government can most effectively support families

- Government works best in partnership with families, and the private and voluntary sector
- Government can help families to develop the right capabilities and reduce pressures
- A number of principles can be derived from the evidence to inform policy development
- Examples of policies focussing on pressures and capabilities around childbirth and during the early years are used to illustrate the application of the four policy principles

It is beyond the scope of this paper to evaluate existing or new family policies. Reference to certain policies will be made by way of illustration, but the main focus is to provide a framework to think about family policy. It does not discuss issues of policy implementation, which are covered elsewhere e.g. Think Family Report<sup>1</sup>

# Economic concepts of market failure can be used to elucidate the case for Government support and involvement in family life, in pursuit of the best outcomes for children, adults, the community and society

Policy

Why

When

How

## Externalities

- Outcomes of families have positive or negative effects on wider society:

### Examples:

- Good parenting reduces crime and promotes the productivity of the next generation
- Family care provision reduces fiscal costs of old age care
- Some parents may be unable to provide their children with a safe and nurturing home to maximise their life chances

## Information

- Information on how to achieve good family outcomes is insufficiently available:

### Examples:

- Parents seeking advice on parenting skills
- People underestimate the long-term happiness from healthy relationships and under-invest in the short-term
- Families underestimate the impact of stress points such as childbirth

## Equity

- Families differ in their resources and abilities from the start and children do not choose their parents:

### Examples:

- Children in low income families find it harder to succeed in education
- Disabled children may face discrimination
- Persistent gender pay gaps constrain women's (and men's) choices

Identifying these factors does not in itself justify intervention – the available levers must also be assessed

# Life-events can pose particular challenges for families – even if they are generally desired such as the birth of a child. Government has a range of tailored policies to support families at these points

Policy

Why

When

How

## Examples of life-events and support to families:

Life event

Marriage/  
cohabitation

Birth of  
child

Divorce/  
Separation

Ill health

Unemployment

Possible support

- Relationship advice & skills
- Legal rights & responsibilities
- Financial advice

- Pre-natal classes
- Parenting advice and support
- Childcare

- Legal support
- Financial rights for children of separated parents
- Counselling services

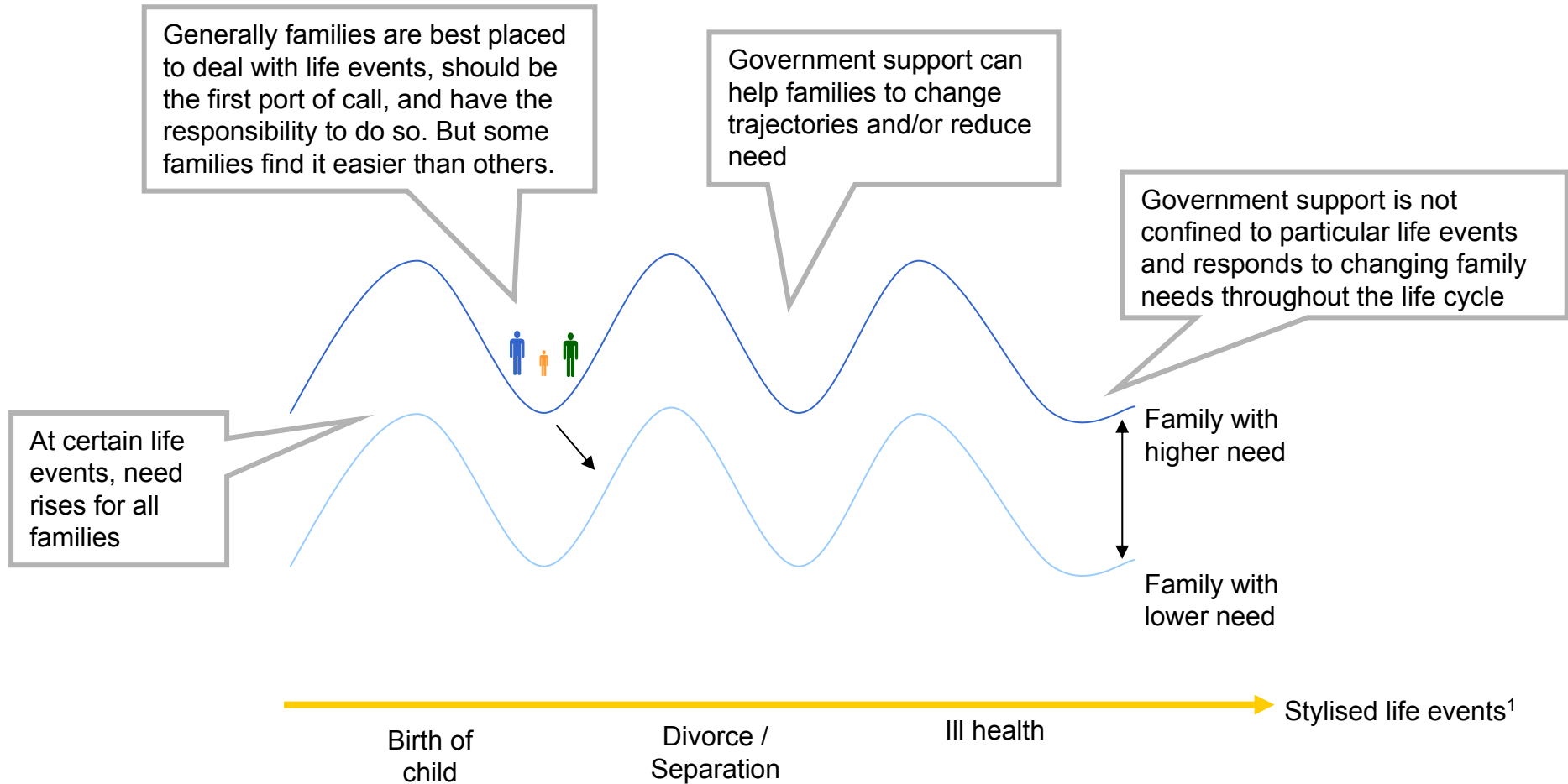
- Health care and emotional support
- Respite for carers
- Protection against income loss

- Job search support and advice
- Financial benefits in relation to childcare costs
- Skills and training

The extent of government support and intervention at each life event responds to family needs

# But for a given life-event, public services should respond according to families' abilities to fulfil their responsibilities, alongside family need

Policy
Why
When
How



Note: (1) This figure is only for illustrative purposes and cannot be used to compare family needs at different life events.

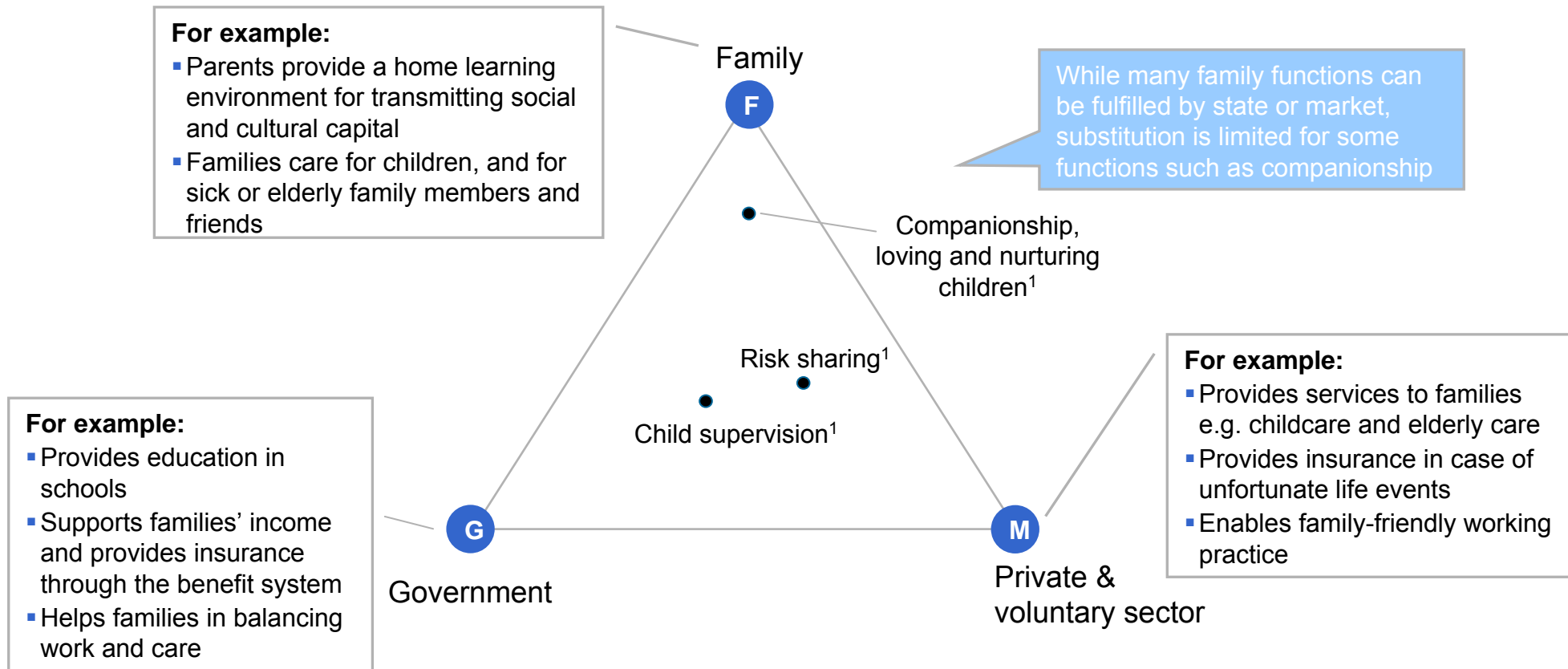
# Most family functions can not only be provided by families. In reality, the provision of family functions is more diverse with Government working in partnership with families and others

Policy

Why

When

How



The degree of partnership should be informed by efficiency considerations and differ for social groups or policy areas

# To make the most of the partnership, Government's role is twofold: reduce families' pressures and enhance their capabilities. In most policy areas both approaches are taken

Policy

Why

When

How

## Reduce pressures



- Rights & legal protection
- Financial support
- Support in kind

## Enhance capabilities



- Information & guidance
- Skills & training
- Intervention

Example: child birth

- Access to maternity and paternity leave reduce families' time pressures after birth
- Flexible working and childcare help parents to balance work and care
- Targeted benefits such as childcare tax credits support families that experience the greatest financial strain

- Before and after birth, universal health visitors provide information and training for women and their children
- Parenting initiatives provide support for parents to promote child development and healthy relationships between partners
- Family Intervention Programmes provide targeted training for families at greatest risk and disadvantage

# The evidence in this paper suggests that a modern family policy should be informed by a number of guiding principles, against which policy options that reduce pressures and enhance capabilities are tested

Policy

Why

When

How

Policies that seek to reduce pressures and enhance capabilities must be informed by the evidence presented earlier in this paper about what matters for outcomes

The following policy principles are intended to distil the evidence into a form that can guide future policy development across government institutions

These principles are complementary and there are often trade-offs between them

Examples of existing policies are given to illustrate the application of the principles

## Government policy should ...

- 1 **empower families to achieve their potential**
- 2 **be proportionate**
- 3 **support families regardless of form or structure**
- 4 **be socially equitable**

**Each of these principles will be discussed in more detail in the following slides**

## Principle one – a modern family policy empowers

### The evidence suggests ...

---

- Family is a unique institution in terms of its ability to provide a wide range of functions
- Family as an institution has a remarkable ability to adapt to changing circumstances
- Families are best placed to make decisions according to their individual circumstances in an increasingly diverse society

### ... Government should therefore

---

- Provide families with information so they can make informed decisions
- Support a fair balance of entitlements and responsibilities
- Raise families' aspirations to achieve their full potential

**The Parenting Early Intervention Programme** aims to increase support for the parents of 8 -13 years olds at risk of negative outcomes (particularly anti social behaviour) and help them to improve their parenting skills



## Principle two – a modern family policy is proportionate

### The evidence suggests ...

---

- Family has benefits and costs for its members but also wider society
- Therefore family has responsibility not only to its members but also to wider society

### ... Government should therefore

---

- Work in a partnership with families based on fair rules: respecting privacy but expecting, and in some cases enforcing, families to fulfil their responsibilities too
- Intervene if the well-being of vulnerable family members especially children or the community is at risk

65 **Family Intervention Projects** are currently working with around 2000 families a year to improve the lives of families involved in persistent anti-social behaviour

## Principle three – a modern family policy should not exclude families based on form or structure

### The evidence suggests ...

---

- All family forms can achieve good outcomes though some family forms face more challenges
- However, there is strong evidence that what matters most is the quality of relationships

### ... Government should therefore

---

- Provide support not on the basis of family form or structure
- Ensure good life chances for all children regardless of their family form

The Government's introduction of **civil partnerships** means that same sex couples now have access to many of the state and private pension rights enjoyed by married couples

## Principle four – a modern family policy ensures equal opportunities

### The evidence suggests ...

---

- Certain families are more likely to face multiple disadvantage e.g. parents of disabled children
- Material disadvantage is often interdependent with emotional distress; both increase the risk of relationship breakdown
- Experiencing disadvantage in childhood affects children's outcomes as adults, and these, in turn, affect their children, thus creating inter-generational cycles of disadvantage

### ... Government should therefore

---

- Provide universal support for every family
- Target those in genuine need more to help create equal opportunities – material and legal – to achieve their full potential and improve social mobility

Government's determination to **tackling child poverty** is clear, and the commitment to eradicate child poverty by 2020 will be enshrined in law. Support is target at those in particular need.

# However, tensions can arise between different policy aims. The policy principles are instructive for identifying the trade-offs involved in policy-making

Policy

Why

When

How

For example, tensions may arise between policy principles ...

## 3 support families regardless of form or structure

## 4 be socially equitable

Evidence

- All families irrespective of family form experience particular pressure after childbirth in terms of care burden and financial strain

- Lone parents have by definition less resources to provide and care for their children and may need extra support
- At the same income level, they can be equally good parents

Policy implication

- Maternity and paternity leave rights and child benefit should not discriminate against any family form

- Fair rules suggest that while families have responsibilities to help themselves, Government also has a role to play in providing equitable life chances e.g. through financial support

Options will have to be weighed up

Tension

# These policy principles are the foundations of a modern family policy. Using the example of childbirth and early years, we illustrate how the policy principles can be applied to guide and inform policy options

Policy
Why
When
How



Policy aim	Evidence	Policy responses	Match with policy principles
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure good child development in terms of emotional and cognitive outcomes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parents need time to form secure attachment</li> <li>Responsive parenting styles and child-centred activities promote child development</li> </ul>	<b>Reducing pressures</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maternity/paternity leave rights</li> <li>Availability of childcare helps parents' work-care balance with targeted childcare tax credits</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maternity/paternity leave rights reduce pressures for all family forms (Principle 3) ✓</li> <li>Childcare tax credits for low income parents make it easier to pay for additional childcare (Principle 4) ✓</li> </ul>
		<b>Enhancing capabilities</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parent Know How provides parents with information</li> <li>Family intervention programmes work with at-risk families to improve anti-social behaviour</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parent Know How empowers parents and children to establish the best possible relationship (Principle 1) ✓</li> <li>Family intervention programmes are proportionate to families' abilities to meet their responsibilities (Principle 2) ✓</li> </ul>

## This pack sets out the Government's family narrative that will inform forthcoming Government publication

---

### Next steps.....

---

- The aim of this analytical discussion paper is to raise awareness of the importance of the family, and the issues the family faces in the 21<sup>st</sup> century
- The paper provides a foundation for taking forward a discourse on how best to promote the family in the 21<sup>st</sup> century
- The Government has indicated that this discussion will be taken further through a number of subsequent steps:
  - **Children's Plan One Year On** – published in December 2008
  - **Relationship summit** – on 18 December 2008
  - **Social Mobility White Paper** – to be published in January 2009