



Divorces in England and Wales, 2009

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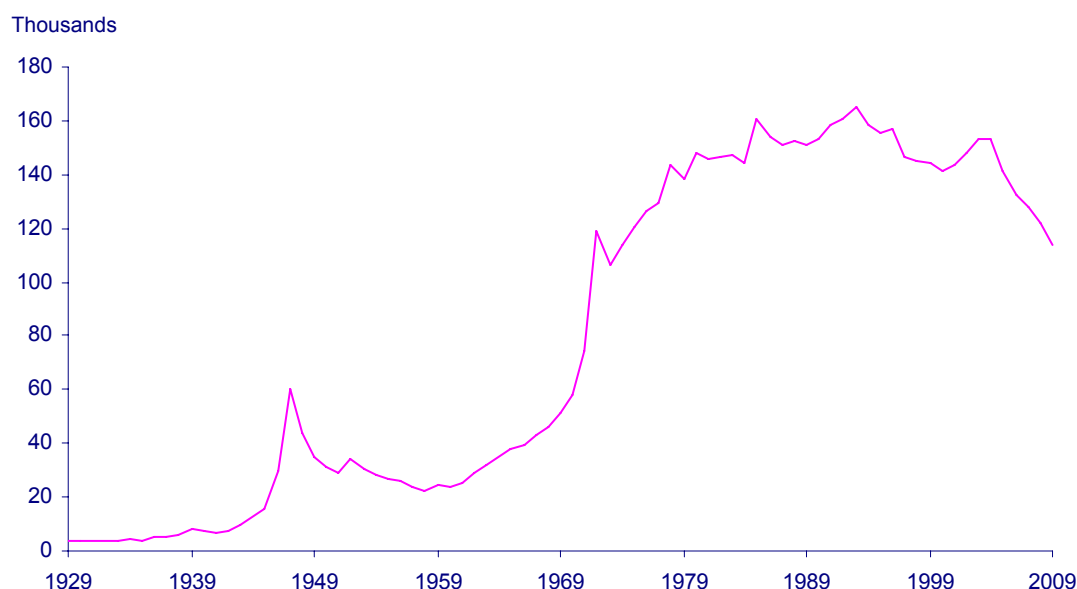
Coverage: England and Wales **Theme:** Population

This bulletin presents statistics on divorces which took place following court orders in England and Wales in 2009.

Key findings

- The number of divorces in England and Wales in 2009 was 113,949, a decrease of 6.4 per cent since 2008 and the lowest since 1974 when there were 113,500 divorces
- The divorce rate fell in 2009 to 10.5 divorcing people per thousand married population from 11.2 in 2008
- Twenty per cent of marriages in 1969 had ended by the 15th wedding anniversary, whereas 33 per cent of marriages in 1994 had ended after the same period of time

Number of divorces in England and Wales, 1929–2009



Source: Office for National Statistics

Number of divorces

The number of divorces in England and Wales fell by 6.4 per cent in 2009 to 113,949 compared with 121,708 in 2008. This is the sixth consecutive year that the number of divorces has fallen,

from a peak of 153,065 in 2003, and is the lowest number since 1974 when there were 113,500 divorces. The number of divorces was highest amongst men and women aged 40 to 44.

Divorce rates

In 2009 the divorce rate in England and Wales decreased by 6.3 per cent to 10.5 divorcing people per thousand married population, compared with 11.2 in 2008. The 2009 divorce rate is the lowest since 1977, when there were 10.3 divorcing people per thousand married people.

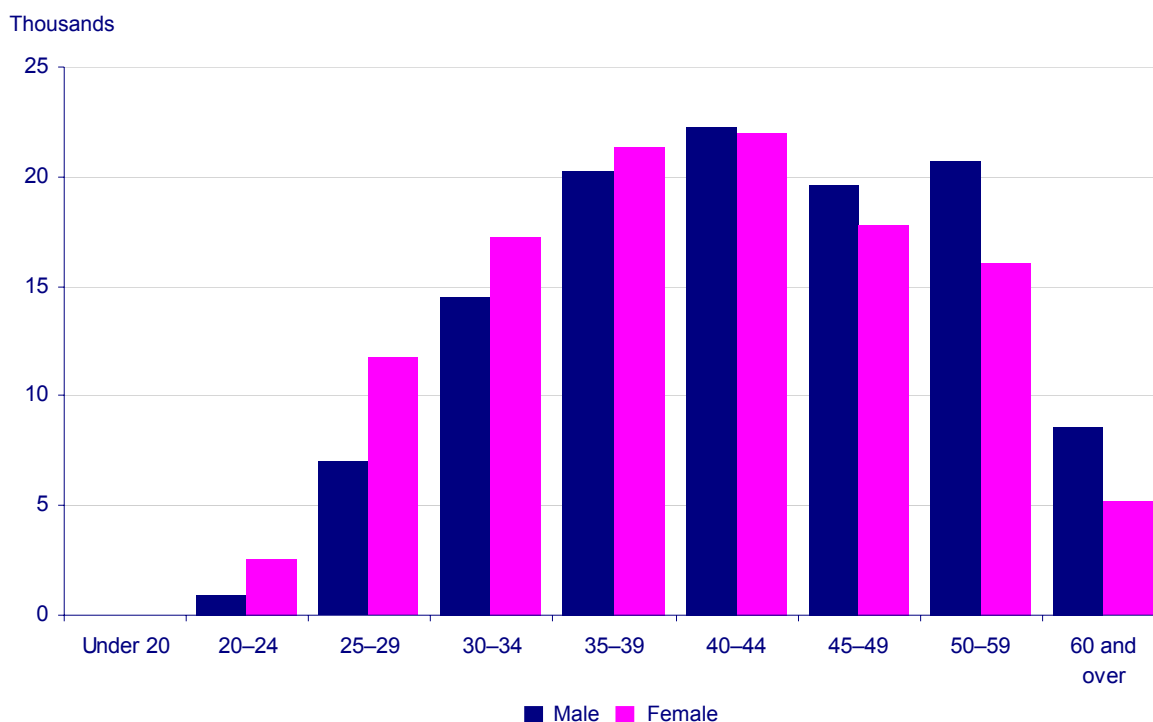
Compared with 2008, divorce rates in England and Wales fell across all age groups in 2009 for both men and women.

For the fifth consecutive year, men and women in their late twenties had the highest divorce rates of all age groups. In 2009 there were 21.7 males divorcing per thousand married men aged 25 to 29 and 25.1 females divorcing per thousand married women aged 25 to 29. This compared with 15.6 males divorcing per thousand married men aged 45 to 49 and 13.7 females divorcing per thousand married women aged 45 to 49 in 2009.

Divorces by age

The chart below shows the age of men and women at divorce in 2009. At younger ages there were more women than men divorcing, however at older ages more men than women divorced. This trend reflects the differences seen in age at marriage of men and women.

Number of divorces by age at divorce, 2009 England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

The average (mean) age at divorce increased for both men and women in 2009. The mean age for men divorcing was 44.0 years in 2009, an increase from 43.9 years in 2008. For women this increased from 41.4 years in 2008 to 41.5 years in 2009. Since 1999 the mean age at divorce for both men and women has increased by 3.1 years, from 40.9 years for men and 38.4 years for women.

The median duration of marriage for divorces granted in 2009 was 11.4 years, a very slight decrease from 11.5 years in 2008 and an increase from 10.5 years in 1999.

Marital status before marriage

In 2009, 20 per cent of men and women divorcing had a previous marriage ending in divorce. These proportions have doubled since 1980 when they were 10 per cent. Out of all divorces in 2009, 70 per cent were to couples where the marriage was the first for both parties, while the remaining 30 per cent were to couples where at least one of the parties had been divorced or widowed.

Fact proven at divorce

In 2009 of all decrees awarded to one partner (rather than jointly to both), 67 per cent were awarded to the wife. In over half of the cases where the divorce was granted to the wife, the husband's behaviour was the fact proven. Of the divorces granted to the husband, the most common facts proven were the wife's behaviour (35 per cent of cases) and two years' separation with consent (33 per cent of cases).

Children of divorced couples

Just under half of couples divorcing in 2009 had at least one child aged under 16. There were 99,543 children aged under 16 who were in families where the parents divorced in 2009, a decrease of 33 per cent from 1999 when there were 147,721 children. Over a fifth (21 per cent) of the children in 2009 were under five and 63 per cent were under eleven. In 2009 there was an average of 1.76 children under 16 per divorcing couple (that had children aged under 16). This compares with 1.86 in 1999.

Proportion of marriages ending in divorce

The percentage of marriages ending in divorce has generally increased for those marrying between the late 1960s and the early 1990s. For example, 20 per cent of marriages in 1969 had ended by the 15th wedding anniversary, whereas 33 per cent of marriages in 1994 had ended after the same period of time.

Divorces in the UK

The number of divorces in the UK fell by 7.0 per cent in 2009 to 126,496 compared with 135,994 in 2008.

The number of divorces in Scotland fell by 9.9 per cent, from 11,513 in 2008 to 10,371 in 2009. The number of divorces in Northern Ireland also decreased. In 2009, there were 2,176 divorces, 22 per cent less than in 2008 when there were 2,773.

Further information

Divorces data released today are available at:

www.ons.gov.uk/ons/publications/re-reference-tables.html?edition=tcm%3A77-210936

For further information on data quality, legislation and procedures relating to divorces see the metadata document which can be found at:

www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/vsob1/divorces-in-england-and-wales/2009/index.html

A Summary Quality Report for divorces is available at:

www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/method-quality/quality/quality-information/social-statistics/index.html

Statistics on divorces in Scotland are available at:

www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/theme/vital-events/divorces-and-dissolutions/index.html

Statistics on divorces in Northern Ireland are available at:

www.nisra.gov.uk/demography/default.asp25.htm

Quarterly and annual statistics on divorces are also available from the Ministry of Justice at:

www.justice.gov.uk/publications/courtstatisticsquarterly.htm

www.justice.gov.uk/publications/judicialandcourtstatistics.htm

Background Notes

1. More data on divorces in England and Wales in 2009 are available on the Office for National Statistics (ONS) website: www.ons.gov.uk/ons/publications/re-reference-tables.html?edition=tcm%3A77-210936.
2. A marriage may be either dissolved, following a petition for divorce and the granting of a decree absolute, or annulled, following a petition for nullity and the awarding of a decree of nullity. In this release the term divorce includes both decrees absolute and decrees of nullity.
3. ONS divorce statistics are collated from D105 forms used to record decree absolutes. These paper forms are supplied to ONS for processing by the courts. Ministry of Justice (MoJ) also publish a summary of divorce figures as part of their Judicial and Court Statistics. MoJ receive divorce data electronically from HM Court Service (HMCS) through the FamilyMan system.
4. Divorce figures published for England and Wales differ slightly from those previously published. In 2008/9 both ONS and MoJ revised their divorce figures back to 2003, due to the identification and removal of duplicate records. Following further quality work on divorce data during 2010, ONS found a small number of additional duplicates still in the datasets which the original duplicate check had not identified. The revision to ONS figures was conducted by identifying the duplicate records and then retaining the latest record in the duplicate set.
5. The number of divorces, as indicated by ONS and MoJ statistics, while similar do not match exactly. For example, in 2009 the total ONS divorce figure was 113,949 compared with the MoJ figure of 116,576, a difference of 2,627 (2.3 per cent). The two sets of figures do not count precisely the same cases. For example:
 - ONS divorce figures include annulments while MoJ figures do not. The number of annulments in 2009 published by MoJ was 199
 - Since 2007 divorce figures published by MoJ have included dissolutions of civil partnerships, these are not included in ONS figures. The number of civil partnership dissolutions in 2009 published by ONS was 327. Further information on civil partnership dissolutions can be found at www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/vsob2/civil-partnership-statistics--united-kingdom/2009/index.html

There are some other differences arising from the way the data are collected and processed. These include:

- differences in the number of late divorce records excluded from ONS and MoJ annual datasets
- differences in the process to remove duplicate records
- differences between the number of records entered onto the FamilyMan system and the number of paper records received by ONS from courts

ONS, MoJ and HMCS are working together to reconcile these figures as closely as possible.

6. The mean ages presented in this release have not been standardised for age and therefore do not take account of the changing age structure of the population.
7. The median duration of marriage at divorce in this release is represented by the middle value when the data are arranged in increasing order.
8. The Divorce Reform Act 1969 came into effect in England and Wales on 1 January 1971. The Act, subsequently consolidated in the Matrimonial Causes Act 1973, made it possible for the first time for divorce to be petitioned for on the couple's separation.
9. The Matrimonial and Family Proceedings Act 1984 came into effect in England and Wales on 12 October 1984. The Act made two changes, the first replaced the discretionary time bar (minimum time interval between the date of marriage and being able to file a petition for divorce) of three years by an absolute time bar of one year. No petition can now be filed within the first year of marriage. The second change meant the Act no longer required courts to try to place the divorced spouses in the financial position they would have enjoyed, had the marriage not broken down.
10. The Family Law (Scotland) Act 2006 came into effect on 4 May 2006. The Act reduced the separation periods for divorce with consent to one year (previously two years) and without consent to two years (previously five years). It also removed desertion as a ground for divorce.
11. Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available from the Media Relations Office.
12. National Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. They undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure that they meet customer needs. They are produced free from any political interference.
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