

Compendium

Households, families and people (General Lifestyle Survey Overview - a report on the 2011 General Lifestyle Survey)

Includes chapters on health, smoking, drinking, households, families and access to vehicles.



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1 . Households, Families and People

The General Household Survey (GHS) has provided data about households, families and people since 1971. The General Lifestyle Survey (GLF) continues to collect these data. This chapter looks at how the composition of households and families has changed over the last 40 years.

How the data are used and their importance

An understanding of households and families is crucial for those involved in planning and decision making at the national and local level. In addition, family and social relationships are one of the most important factors contributing to well-being. Users of the data include: journalists; charities; the private sector; students; researchers and academics; and members of the general public.

GHS and GLF data are combined with other ONS data sources to present a picture of households and families living in Great Britain. Information about the different data sources is provided in the ONS Information note [Comparing data sources on families and households \(171.1 Kb Pdf\)](#), which is available on the ONS website. The note highlights the Labour Force Survey (LFS) as the preferred source for estimates on these topics due to its large sample size, timeliness, and because it provides estimates on a consistent basis for the whole UK. This is reflected in the [ONS Statistical Bulletin on Families and Households](#) that uses LFS and not GLF data. However, the GLF and GHS provide a longer time-series of data than the LFS (LFS data are only available from 1997 onwards) and are therefore important sources for analysing changes over the last 40 years. The Population Trends article, [The changing demography of mid-life from the 1980s to 2000s](#), is an example of where historical GHS data has been used to understand changes over a number of decades.

An overview of population statistics more generally is provided on the [ONS website](#).

The results

The analysis in this chapter looks at data from households, and the families and people who comprise households. In 2011 the definition of a household changed to reflect the change in the household definition used for the 2011 UK Census¹. A household is defined as a person living alone, or a group of people (not necessarily related) living at the same address who have the address as their only or main residence, and either share cooking facilities and share a living room or sitting room or dining area. A household can consist of more than one family. A family is a married, civil partnered or cohabiting couple, or a lone parent, and their never married children (who may be adult), provided these children have no children of their own. Please see [Appendix A. Definitions and terms \(75.4 Kb Pdf\)](#) for further information.

Notes for Households, Families and People

1. Prior to 2011 a household was defined as: “one person living alone or a group of people (not necessarily related) living at the same address with common housekeeping – that is sharing either a living room or sitting room or at least one meal a day”

2 . Household size

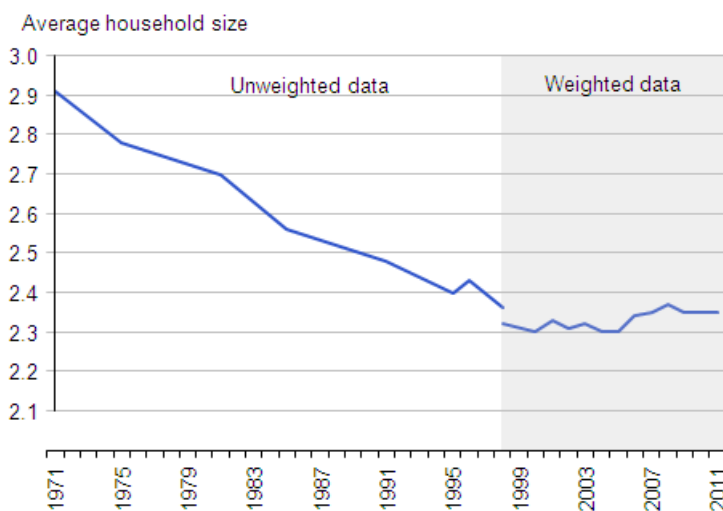
Over the 40 years between 1971 and 2011 the average size of a household in Great Britain has become smaller. In 1971 the average size of a household was 2.91 persons and in 2011 the average size was 2.35 persons. As Figure 3.1 shows average household size fell most rapidly between 1971 and 1991 (falling from 2.91 persons to 2.48 persons). The average household size continued to decline, though at a slower rate, throughout the 1990s falling to 2.32 by 1998, although it has changed little since then, the average household size has steadily increased, albeit slightly, since 2004.

The overall decline in average household size has resulted from a large increase in the proportion of one-person households, which almost doubled between 1971 and 1998 (increasing from 17% in 1971 to 29% in 1998). Since 1998 the proportion of one-person households has remained stable, with 31% of households in 2011 comprising of one-person. The increase in the proportion of households containing one adult is due to the increase of households containing one adult aged 16 to 59 years, which tripled from 5% in 1971 to 13% in 1998. Since 1998 there has been little change in this proportion, which has ranged between 13 and 16%; in 2011, 14% of households contained one adult aged 16 to 59 years. The proportion of households containing one adult aged 60 and over has remained stable over the forty years since 1971. In 2011 17% of households contained one adult aged 60 and over.

[Tables 3.1 and 3.2 \(394.5 Kb Excel sheet\)](#)

Figure 3.1: Average household size, 1971 to 2011<1>,<2>,<3>

Great Britain



Source: General Lifestyle Survey - Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. 2005 data includes the last quarter of 2004/2005 data as the survey changed from a financial year to a calendar year. Results from 2006 onwards include longitudinal data.
2. For 1988 unweighted and weighted data are shown for comparison purposes. Weighted data are not available before this point.
3. The survey was not run in 1997/98 or 1999/00. A linear trend has been drawn between the data point before and after these years.

A single person household can be either a person living in the accommodation on their own or sharing accommodation with other household groups or individuals. For example, four unrelated people who live together but do not share one meal a day or share living accommodation would be classed as four single person households. Unsurprisingly, as the proportion of single person households increased so too has the proportion of adults living alone.

The proportion of adults (aged 16 and over) living alone in 2011 is almost double the proportion found in 1973 (16% compared with 9%). The increase in the proportion of adults living alone occurred between 1973 and 1998 (9% of adults lived alone in 1973, compared with 16% in 1998), and the proportion has remained stable since then. Across the 40 years of the survey the proportion of adults aged 75 or over who live alone has remained very stable, ranging between 47% and 51% and was 50% in 2011. However, adults aged 25 to 44 were five times more likely to live alone in 2011 (10%) than in 1973 (2%), again this increase occurred between 1973 and 1998 and then remained stable.

[Table 3.3 \(394.5 Kb Excel sheet\)](#)

3 . Households and families with dependent children

In families with children, the status of the children can be classed as being either dependent or non-dependent. Dependent children are those aged less than 16 living with at least one parent, or aged 16 to 18 in full-time education, excluding all children who have a spouse, partner or child living in the household.

In 1996 the household composition categories were extended to show married and cohabiting family groupings separately. Over the 15 year period between 1996 and 2011 there has been very little change in the proportions of households containing married couples and those containing cohabiting couples. For example, in 2011, 18% of all households consisted of a married couple and their dependent children, while 4% consisted of a cohabiting couple and their dependent children.

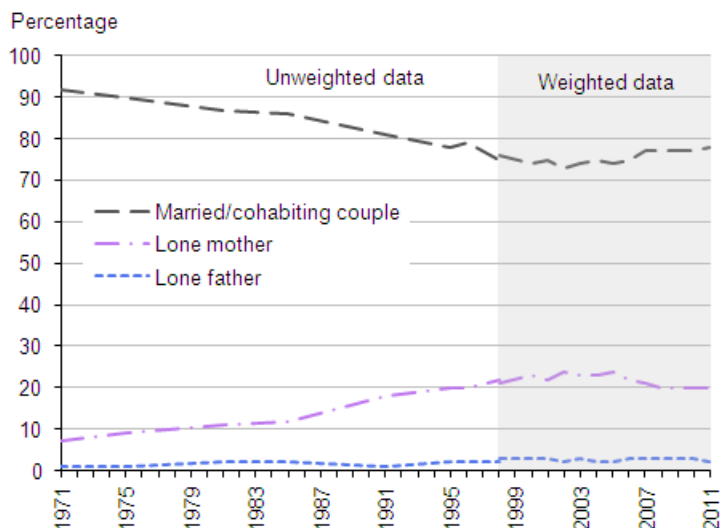
[Table 3.5 \(394.5 Kb Excel sheet\)](#)

The proportion of families with dependent children headed by a married or cohabiting couple has fallen over the 40 years between 1971 and 2011. In 1971 nine out of ten (92%) families with dependent children were headed by a married or cohabiting couple, by 2011 this proportion had fallen fewer than eight out of ten (78%) families. However, the decline in the proportion of these families headed by a married or cohabiting couple occurred between 1971 and 1998 and then remained stable until 2011. Over the same period, 1971 to 1998, there was a large increase in the proportion of lone parent families. Overall, the proportion of lone parent families tripled between 1971 to 1998, increasing from 8% to 25%. Again the proportion of lone parent families has remained relatively constant between 1998 and 2011, with 22% of families with dependent children being headed by a lone parent in 2011. The percentage of families with dependent children headed by a lone mother tripled between 1971 and 1998, increasing from 7% to 22% and this proportion has remained similar, ranging between 20% and 24% since then. In 2011, 20% of families with dependent children were headed by a lone mother. The rise in the proportion of this family type is mainly due to an increase in the proportion of lone mothers who have never married (single). In 1971 only 1% of families with dependent children were headed by a single lone mother, compared with 10% in 2011, again the increase in families headed by a single lone mother occurred between 1971 and 1998. The percentage of families headed by a lone father has remained very similar across the 40 years, increasing only slightly since the early 1970s from 1% to 2% in 2011.

[Table 3.6 \(394.5 Kb Excel sheet\)](#)

Figure 3.2: Families with dependent children by family type, 1971 to 2011<1>,<2>,<3>

Great Britain



Source: General Lifestyle Survey - Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. 2005 data includes the last quarter of 2004/2005 data as the survey changed from a financial year to a calendar year. Results from 2006 onwards include longitudinal data.
2. For 1988 unweighted and weighted data are shown for comparison purposes. Weighted data are not available before this point.
3. The survey was not run in 1997/98 or 1999/00. A linear has been drawn between the data point before and after these years.

The proportion of dependent children who are the only dependent child in their family has risen steadily over the last 40 years. Among all dependent children, 26% were the only dependent child in their family in 2011, compared with just 18% in 1972. This increase is reflected in the fall in average number of dependent children in families, from 2.0 in 1971 to 1.7 in 2011. This fall is likely to be related to both changes in the average number of children born per woman and the increasing age at which women are having children.

[Tables 3.7 and 3.8 \(394.5 Kb Excel sheet\)](#)

4. Background notes

1. Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available by visiting www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html or from the Media Relations Office email: media.relations@ons.gsi.gov.uk