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\* EARLY PARENTHOOD AND PARTNERSHIPS IN NCDS4 \*  
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Main Customer: Department of Health and Social Security

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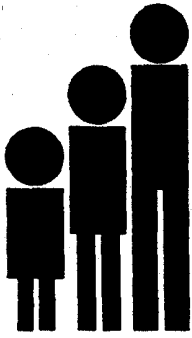
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NATIONAL CHILD DEVELOPMENT STUDY.

WORKING PAPER NO. 9.

Early Parenthood and Partnerships  
in NCDS IV.

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## Background to Working Papers from the National Child Development Study.

1. This Working Paper reports on the analysis of data relating to 12,538 23 year olds living in Great Britain who have been the subjects of a longitudinal study since their birth in 1958. The data were obtained by means of interview survey during late 1981 and early 1982. This survey and this Working Paper form part of the fourth follow-up of the National Child Development Study which is being sponsored by five Government departments - DHSS, DES, DE, MSC and DOE. Preparation for the survey began in May 1980 and the project is due for completion by December 1984.
2. The National Child Development Study (NCDS) is a longitudinal study which takes as its subjects all those living in Great Britain who were born between 3 and 9 March, 1958. Since the original birth survey in 1958 the National Children's Bureau has sought to monitor the social, economic, educational and health circumstances of the surviving subjects. To this end, major surveys were carried out in 1965 (NCDS1), 1969 (NCDS2), 1974 (NCDS3) and 1981 (NCDS4). For the purposes of the first 3 surveys, the birth cohort was augmented by including those new immigrants born in the relevant week and information was obtained with the active co-operation of parents, teachers and the schools' health service as well as members of the NCDS cohort. The 1981 survey differs in that no attempt was made to include new immigrants since 1974 and information was obtained from the subject only.
3. The target sample for the 1981 survey was a total of 16450 individuals - all those who had participated in NCDS1, NCDS2 or NCDS3, excluding those known to have emigrated or to have died. Following initial tracing by the Bureau, details of names and addresses were passed to NOP Market Research Limited and Social and Community Planning Research who carried out further tracing and subsequent interviews. The 12538 interviews obtained represent 76 percent of the original target sample and 93 percent of those traced and contacted by interviewers.

4. The interview survey was carried out by NOP and SCPR between August 1981 and March 1982. Each interview took approximately 90 minutes and information was obtained on employment, unemployment and periods out of the labour force; apprenticeship and training; post-school education; marriage, cohabitation and children; housing and household; family income, savings, investment and inheritance; respondent reported health and health related behaviour; and voluntary activity and leisure.
5. Completed questionnaires were visually checked by NOP and SCPR and the data then transferred by them to computer. Following preliminary computer editing by NOP and SCPR more detailed checks have been carried out by NCB. The majority of open-ended questions were coded by SCPR using coding frames developed by NCB. All open-ended questions related to health states were coded by NCB.
6. The form in which the data were collected has made it necessary to generate a number of derived or recoded variables, i.e. summary measures which combine two or more pre-coded variables. The use of these summary measures has enabled exploration of additional and more complex relationships than would have been possible using only information taken directly from the questionnaire. A description and explanation of the derived variables used in the cross-tabulations is presented in Appendix A, which is available on request.

INTRODUCTION.

1. This paper presents some preliminary information about people who became parents or entered a partnership when they were very young - namely, before they were 20. The paper compares these people with those who became parents or entered a partnership when they were 20 or older.
  
2. The paper will address the following questions:-
  - a. What is the prevalence of early parenthood, and early partnership?
  - b. What are the characteristics of those who become parents or enter a partnership before they are 20?
  - c. To what extent do those who become parents or enter a partnership before they are 20 differ from people who do so when they are older?

The prevalence of early parenthood.

3. By the time they were interviewed, 26 per cent of the cohort had become parents. Just under one third of these people became parents before they were out of their teens, but as Table 1 shows, this was twice as likely to be the case among mothers as fathers.

TABLE 1.

Age at birth of first child by sex.

(base = 3207 individuals who had become parents)

<u>Age at first birth:</u>	<u>Women.</u>	<u>Men</u>	<u>Total</u>
% Under 20	36	18	30
% 20 to 23	64	82	70
<hr/>			
N = 100%	2091	1116	3207

4. The prevalence of early parenthood is associated with marital status at the time of interview, as Table 2 shows. Among women, those whose marriage had ended in separation, divorce or death were considerably more likely (68 per cent) to have been teenage mothers than either the currently married (32 per cent) or those who had never married (39 per cent). Among men, those who were currently married were least likely (16 per cent) to have been teenage fathers.

TABLE 2.

Marital status by age at birth of first child by sex.  
(base \_ 3207 individuals who had become parents)

<u>Women:</u>	<u>Never married.</u>	<u>Separated, divorced or widowed.</u>	<u>Married.</u>
% Under 20	39	68	32
% 20 to 23	61	32	68
N = 100%	230	182	1679
<hr/>			
<u>Men:</u>			
% Under 20	29	30	16
% 20 to 23	71	69	84
N = 100%	99	82	935
<hr/>			
<u>Total:</u>			
% Under 20	36	56	26
% 20 to 23	64	44	74
N = 100%	329	264	2614

Current family situation.

5. Almost one third of parents who were unmarried or separated were living with a partner when interviewed, but the likelihood of cohabitation varied with the age at which they became parents (Table 3).
  
6. Among people who had never been married, only 27 per cent of those who became teenage parents were cohabiting, compared with 42 per cent living without a partner; this relationship was true for both women and men.
  
7. The situation among the separated, divorced or widowed was rather different. Very few of these men were cohabiting, and a very high proportion of these women had become parents before they were 20. It is therefore not surprising that there is very little difference between the proportions of separated, divorced or widowed women who had been teenage mothers living with a partner (65 per cent) and without a partner (69 per cent).

Current economic activity.

10. When interviewed, it was possible to establish whether members of the cohort were economically active (working full or part-time, or unemployed and seeking work) or economically inactive (out of the labour force and engaged in full-time housework, education, long-term sick or disabled, on extended holiday, in prison or borstal etc). The current economic activity of an individual is therefore the activity in which they were engaged at the time of the interview. The number of economically inactive people who were not engaged in full-time housework is relatively small, and for the purpose of this paper their various activities have not been separately distinguished, but grouped together as 'other economically inactive'.
  
11. The proportion of economically active fathers in this age group is considerably higher (98 per cent) than the proportion of economically active mothers (29 per cent) as Table 5 shows. Comparisons between the economic activity of teenage parents and those who became parents later will therefore be made within each sex.



TABLE 5.

Current economic activity by age at birth of first child by sex-  
(base = 3159\* individuals who had become parents).

<u>Age at 1st birth.</u>	<u>Working full-time.</u>	<u>Working part-time.</u>	<u>Unem- ployed.</u>	<u>House- work.</u>	<u>Other econom. inactive</u>	<u>N=100%</u>
<u>Women:</u> % Under 20	10	15	7	66	2	739
% 20 to 23	8	9	9	70	4	1314
<u>ALL WOMEN</u>	9	11	9	68	3	2053
<u>Men:</u> % Under 20	68	1	27	1	2	199
% 20 to 23	81	(7)**	18	-	1	907
<u>ALL MEN</u>	79	(9)	19	(3)	1	1106

\* Information on current economic activity is not available for 38 women and 10 men.

\*\* Raw figures have been bracketed where the percentage is less than 1.0.

12. Women who became mothers before they were 20 were rather more likely to be economically active than those who became mothers when they were older, although this difference was largely attributable to part-time working.
13. Among men, on the other hand, although the overwhelming majority were economically active, a higher proportion of teenage fathers were unemployed and seeking work - 27 per cent compared with 18 per cent.
14. As with current social position, it is not yet possible to establish definitively whether current economic activity is an outcome of the age at which individuals became parents. It will be necessary to compare economic activity prior to parenthood with economic activity subsequent to parenthood.

Partnerships of early parents.

15. The majority of people who had become parents and who had had a partner were still living with their first partner when interviewed, but the survival of the first partnership was associated with the age at which they became parents, as Table 6 shows.

TABLE 6.

Age at birth of first child by whether still living with first partner by sex.  
(base = 3202\* individuals who had become parents)

<u>Age at 1st birth.</u>	<u>Whether still with first partner.</u>			<u>Total.</u>
	<u>Yes.</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Never had a partner.</u>	
<u>Women:</u> % Under 20	31	66	38	36
% 20 to 23	69	34	62	64
N = 100%	1691	294	102	2087
<u>Men:</u> % Under 20	15	30	38	18
% 20 to 23	85	70	61	82
N = 100%	964	115	36	1115
<u>Total:</u> % Under 20	25	56	38	30
% 20 to 23	75	44	62	70
N = 100%	2655	409	138	3202

\* Information on the survival of first partnership, if any, is not available for four women and one man.

16. Of those who had never had a partner, 38 per cent of both men and women became parents whilst still in their teens. However, among those who had had a partner, only a quarter of those still living with their first partner had been teenage parents compared with over half of those whose first partnership had ended.
  
17. Among women, in particular, the likelihood of the first partnership ending was greater the earlier they had become parents. Thus, the majority of those still with their first partner became mothers in their twenties (69 per cent), whereas the majority of those whose first partnership had ended became mothers whilst still in their teens (66 per cent).
  
18. Of course, the breakdown of the first partnership may have preceded early parenthood or followed early parenthood, or the start of the first partnership may have followed parenthood. Further analysis will establish the sequence of these events.
  
19. Only five per cent of parents who had entered a partnership had lived with more than one partner and the likelihood of this happening was associated with the age at which they became parents, as Table 7 shows. This is not surprising, since the prevalence of early parenthood was particularly high among people who were separated, divorced or widowed, and over half of those people were co-habiting when interviewed.

TABLE 7.

Age at birth of first child by whether had more than one partner, by sex.

(base = 3201 individuals who had become parents)

<u>Age at 1st birth.</u>	<u>Whether had more than one partner.</u>			<u>Total</u>
	<u>Never had a partner</u>	<u>One partner only</u>	<u>More than one partner</u>	
<u>Women:</u> % Under 20	38	34	67	36
% 20 to 23	62	66	33	64
N = 100%	102	1866	119	2087
<u>Men:</u> % Under 20	38	17	25	28
% 20 to 23	61	83	75	82
N = 100%	36	1042	36	1114
<u>Total:</u> % Under 20	38	28	57	30
% 20 to 23	62	72	43	70
N = 100% *	138	2908	155	3201

\* Information on number of partners is not available for four women and two men.

20. The age at which men became parents had relatively little effect upon the number of partners they had had. However, among women, those who had had more than one partner were twice as likely (67 per cent) to have been teenage mothers as those who had had only one (34 per cent).

The prevalence of early partnership.

21. Although just over a quarter of the cohort had become parents, 57 per cent had had a partner, and the prevalence of early partnership is similar to the pattern of prevalence of early parenthood, as Table 8 shows. Almost a third of those who had

married or cohabited had entered their first partnership before they were out of their teens, but women were twice as likely (40 per cent) to have done so as men (20 per cent).

TABLE 8.

Age at start of first partnership by nature of partnership, by sex.  
(base = 7134 individuals who had had at least one partner)

<u>Age at start:</u>	<u>Nature of first partnership.</u>		
	<u>Cohabitation.</u>	<u>Marriage.</u>	<u>Total.</u>
<u>Women:</u> % Under 20	32	41	40
% 20 to 23	68	59	60
N = 100%	627	3669	4296
<u>Men:</u> % Under 20	23	19	20
% 20 to 23	77	81	80
N = 100%	507	2331	2838
<u>Total:</u> % Under 20	28	33	32
% 20 to 23	72	67	68
N = 100%	1134	6000	7134

22. The majority of people married their first partner and, overall, there was no association between the nature of the first partnership and the age at which it started. However, within each sex the pattern was different. Among women, more marriages (41 per cent) than cohabitations (32 per cent) started before the women were 20, whereas among men the situation was reversed.

Survival of first partnership.

23. Sixteen per cent of first partnerships were co-habitations and 84 per cent resulted in marriage. Nineteen per cent of people who married their first partner had lived with him or her before marriage, although it is not yet possible to establish when they started living together. In Tables 9 and 10, the survival of first partnerships which did not end in marriage is compared with those that did, and for this purpose age at marriage is the criterion.
24. Table 9 shows that 44 per cent of all first partnerships that were cohabitations had ended, but the likelihood of this happening was greatly increased if the cohort member was under 20 when the cohabitation started (80 per cent). Only one in four of co-habitations which started this early survived up to interview, whereas two out of three which started later had survived.

TABLE 9.

Survival of early cohabitation by age at start by sex.  
(base = 1134 whose first partnership was a cohabitation)

<u>Age at start</u>	<u>First partnership is:</u>		
	<u>Continuing.</u>	<u>Ended.</u>	<u>N=100%</u>
	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	
<u>Women:</u> Under 20	23	77	201
20 to 23	68	32	426
<b>ALL WOMEN</b>	54	46	627
<u>Men:</u> Under 20	14	85	117
20 to 23	68	32	390
<b>ALL MEN</b>	55	45	507
<u>Both:</u> Under 20	20	80	318
20 to 23	68	32	816
<b>MEN AND WOMEN</b>	56	44	1134

25. The chance of early cohabitations surviving were better among women than among men. Twenty-three per cent of women who started cohabiting before they were out of their teens were still with the same partner, compared with 14 per cent of the men.
26. In Table 10, it is clear that the chances of an early marriage surviving were very much greater than the chances of an early cohabitation surviving. However, the likelihood of the marriage ending was over three times as great if the individual married his or her first partner before the age of twenty, among both men and women.

TABLE 10.

Survival of early marriages by age at start by sex.  
(base = 6000 who married their first partner).

<u>Age at start.</u>	<u>First partnership is:</u>		
	<u>Continuing.</u> %	<u>Ended.</u> %	<u>N=100%.</u>
<u>Women:</u> Under 20	81	19	1504
20 to 23	96	4	2165
<b>ALL WOMEN</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>3669</b>
<u>Men:</u> Under 20	82	18	443
20 to 23	94	6	1888
<b>ALL MEN</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>2331</b>
<u>Both:</u> Under 20	82	18	1947
20 to 23	95	5	4053
<b>MEN AND WOMEN.</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>6000</b>

Start of current partnership and current social position.

27. Just over half of the people who were cohabiting, and 91 per cent of those who were married, were still living with their first partner. Of course, some of those whose first partnership had ended were married to or living with another partner when interviewed. However, in order to compare the current social position of those who entered a partnership before they were out of their teens with those who entered one later, this section will discuss current partnerships. For the reasons given above (paragraph 8) this section will present comparisons within each sex, rather than overall comparisons.
28. Table 11 shows that, particularly among women, the age at which the current partnership started was associated with the current social position of the individual. Irrespective of the type of partnership, those in the manual group were more likely than those in the non-manual group to have entered their current partnership before they were 20.

TABLE 11.

Age at start of current partnership by current social position by sex.

(base = 6176 currently partnered individuals who had had at least one job).

Current partnership by current social position.

<u>Age at start:</u>	<u>Cohabiting</u>			<u>Married.</u>		
	<u>Non Manual.</u>	<u>Manual.</u>	<u>Total.</u>	<u>Non Manual.</u>	<u>Manual.</u>	<u>Total</u>
<u>Women:</u> % Under 20	8	20	12	26	46	32
% 20 to 23	92	80	88	74	54	68
N = 100%	296	151	447	2275	1056	3331
<u>Men:</u> % Under 20	6	7	7	7	17	14
% 20 to 23	94	93	93	92	83	86
N = 100%	120	198	318	632	1448	2080



29. The association between age at the start of the current partnership and current social position varied according to whether the partnership was a marriage or a cohabitation, particularly among women. Married women in the manual group were more than twice as likely (46 per cent) as cohabiting women in the manual group (20 per cent) to have entered the partnership before they were 20. However, it should be remembered that early partnerships were more likely to be marriages than cohabitations, and that early marriages were more likely to survive than early cohabitations.
30. The association between age at the start of the partnership and social position was non-existent among cohabiting men. Of course, fewer men than women entered their first partnership before they were out of their teens.

Start of current partnership and current economic activity.

31. In Tables 12 and 13, the current economic activity of cohabitees is compared with that of married people. Because the pattern of economic activity differs markedly between men and women, the economic characteristics of early and later partnerships will be examined separately within each sex.
32. Among cohabiting women, the pattern of economic activity is associated with the age at which the partnership started, as Table 12 shows. Nearly half the women who started cohabiting before they were 20 were economically inactive - the majority of whom were engaged in full-time housework, compared with only 18 per cent of those who started cohabiting later. On the other hand, those who started cohabiting in their twenties were considerably more likely to be economically active, and working, than

those who entered the partnership earlier.

TABLE 12.

Current economic activity by age at start of current cohabitation by sex.  
(base = 778 currently cohabiting individuals).

<u>Age at start.</u>	<u>Current economic activity.</u>				<u>N=100%</u>
	<u>Employed.</u>	<u>Unemployed.</u>	<u>Housework.</u>	<u>Other econ. inactive.</u>	
	%	%	%	%	
<u>Women:</u> Under 20	32	20	46	2	76
20 to 23	75	6	13	5	370
<b>ALL WOMEN</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>447</b>
<u>Men:</u> Under 20	59	36	-	4	22
20 to 23	79	16	-	5	309
<b>ALL MEN</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>331</b>

33. Those who started cohabiting before they were out of their teens were much more likely, particularly the women, to be unemployed and seeking work, than those who entered the cohabitation later.

34. Comparing Tables 12 and 13, we see that women who married in their twenties were somewhat less likely (70 per cent) than those who started cohabiting in their twenties (81 per cent) to be economically active. However, those who married in their teens were very much less likely (6 per cent) to be unemployed and seeking work than those who started cohabiting in their teens (20 per cent); this was also the case among married men (17 per cent compared to 36 per cent).

TABLE 13.

Current economic activity by age at start of current marriage, by sex.

(base = 5530 currently married individuals)

<u>Age at start.</u>	<u>Current economic activity.</u>				<u>N=100%</u>
	<u>Employed.</u>	<u>Unemployed.</u>	<u>Housework.</u>	<u>Other econ. inactive.</u>	
	%	%	%	%	%
<u>Women:</u> Under 20	34	6	59	(10)*	1084
20 to 23	64	6	27	3	2281
ALL WOMEN	54	6	37	2	3365
<u>Men:</u> Under 20	82	17	-	(3)	306
20 to 23	90	9	(2)	1	1859
ALL MEN	89	10	(2)	1	2165

\* Raw figures have been bracketed when the percentage is less than 1.0.

Early parenthood and early partnership.

36. The similarity in the prevalence of early parenthood and early partnership has been discussed above (paragraph 22). People who became parents before they were 20 also share some of the characteristics of those who entered partnerships before they were 20.
37. Among women, both early parenthood and early partnerships were associated with current social position. Those in the manual group were twice as likely as those in the non-manual group to become mothers before they were 20 and twice as likely to enter a partnership before they were 20.
38. Considerably more people had entered at least one partnership than had become parents, and so it is not surprising that the patterns of economic activity differed somewhat. Nevertheless, the majority of

women who entered their current partnership whilst still in their teens, and the majority of women who became teenage mothers, were engaged in full-time housework. On the other hand, women who became parents in their twenties were very much less likely to be economically active than those who entered their current partnership in their twenties. Of course, the presence of young children born within the previous three years is more likely to have precluded work outside the home than the presence of a partner.

39. Finally, the likelihood of the first partnership surviving was greater if it started when the cohort members were in their twenties, and, among those who had had children, very much greater if they had become parents in their twenties.

SUMMARY.

40. About a third of those who became parents did so whilst still in their teens, but women were twice as likely as men to have become teenage parents. The prevalence of early partnership followed the same pattern.
41. Separated, divorced or widowed people, particularly women, were more likely than those who had never married or those currently married to have become parents before they were 20.
42. People who became teenage parents, particularly women, were more likely to be living without a partner; their first partnership - if any - was more likely to have broken down; they were more likely to belong to the manual social group; and they were more likely to be economically active than those who became parents in their twenties.

43. Individuals who entered their first partnership whilst still in their teens were more likely than those who entered it later to experience the breakdown of that partnership - particularly if it was a cohabitation. Women who entered their current partnership whilst still in their teens were more likely to belong to the manual social group, and were much less likely to be economically active than women who entered the partnership in their twenties.
44. Early parenthood and early partnership, then, share a pattern of prevalence and social composition. And the likelihood of a first partnership surviving was reduced the earlier it started or the earlier the individual became a parent.
45. It is planned that further analysis will examine:
- (a) The social position, educational status, economic activity and family situation of individuals prior to the birth of the first child, for people who became parents at different ages. This will enable us to examine factors which may predispose towards teenage parenthood.
  - (b) The social position, educational status and economic activity of individuals prior to the start of the first partnership, for people who entered their first partnership at different ages. We will then be able to examine factors which may predispose towards teenage marriage or cohabitation.
  - (c) The effect of social position, educational status, economic activity, parental status and age at the start of the first partnership, on the duration of the partnership. Life table methods will enable us to examine the extent to which the likelihood of the first partnership ending depends on the above factors.

(d) The prevalence of low birth weight and infant death among first children born before the parent was 20.

(e) The current housing and financial circumstances of those who became parents, or entered their first partnership before they were 20, relative to those who became parents, or acquired their first partners, later.

(f) The prevalence of ill-health among individuals who became parents or acquired their first partners before they were 20.