

Millennium Cohort Study

FAMILY DEMOGRAPHICS



Taken from Chapter 3 of *Millennium Cohort Study Second Survey: A User's Guide to Initial Findings*

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The Survey

The Millennium Cohort Study (MCS) offers groundbreaking large-scale information about children born into the new century and the families who are bringing them up in all four countries of the United Kingdom. It lays the foundation for a major new research resource.

For the first survey, conducted in 2001-2002, we interviewed the families of nearly 19,000 children aged nine months. A disproportionate number of these children came from families living in areas of high child poverty, and, in England, from areas with relatively high minority-ethnic populations¹. This survey looked at the circumstances of pregnancy and birth, as well as the social and economic background of the families into which these children were born.

The second survey marks the beginning of a series of follow-up surveys. Conducted in 2003-2005, it records how nearly 16,000 cohort children are developing at the age of three. For the first time, researchers have been able to chart the changing circumstances of families and relate children's outcomes at age three to earlier circumstances and experiences.

Introduction

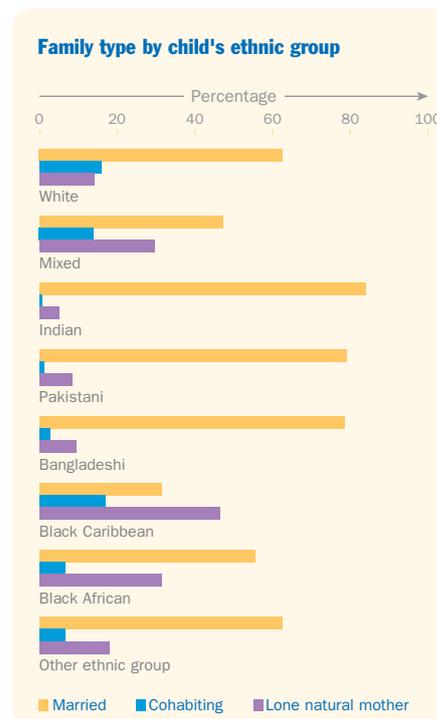
This briefing puts a spotlight on the family with whom the cohort children share a home, the setting in which so many aspects of the child's life take place. Whether they live with one or two parents makes many differences to the child's experience of growing up. It also affects whether the study is able to interview fathers as well as mothers.

This summary provides information on the number of parents in the home at the first and second surveys, parents living elsewhere, whether couples were married and whether the child had siblings or grandparents living at home.

Family type

- Most children were living with both their natural parents at age three. This proportion had fallen slightly from 86 per cent of families interviewed at nine months to 82 per cent of those interviewed in sweep 2.
- If children were not living with both of their natural parents, they were usually living with just their natural mother. The proportion in such families increased slightly from 14 per cent at nine months to 15 per cent at three years.
- Lone parenthood was more common among younger mothers; 43 per cent of mothers aged 16-24 and 20 per cent of those aged 25-29 were lone parents. Mothers aged 16-24 were also less likely to be married and living with the child's father; 2 in 10 compared to an average of 6 in 10.

- Variations by ethnicity are shown in the graph below:



Change in family type

For those families who took part in both sweep 1 and 2, we looked at change in family type defining 'parents' broadly as all 'parent-figures'.

- Overall, 93 per cent of two-parent families at sweep 1 still had two parents at sweep 2. Twenty-eight per cent of one-parent families at sweep 1 had acquired a second parent. Younger mothers (under 25) were significantly less likely to remain in two-parent families.

¹ Percentages reported here have been re-weighted to represent the population as a whole.

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- Almost a third (30 per cent) of parents who were cohabiting at sweep 1 had married each other by sweep 2. Cohabiting parents in Northern Ireland were most likely to marry (45 per cent), followed by England (30 per cent), Wales (27 per cent) and Scotland (24 per cent). The youngest and oldest cohabiting were least likely to marry.

Siblings

At age three, a quarter of children did not have any brothers or sisters, in the same household, compared to 43 per cent at nine months. Just under half (48 per cent) of all children had just one sibling and 8.8 per cent had three or more.

- Children in Northern Ireland were the least likely to still have no siblings (23 per cent) and the most likely to have three or more siblings (14 per cent).
- Indian children were least likely to have three or more siblings (5 per cent) while Pakistani and Bangladeshi children were least likely to have no brothers and sisters (14 and 16 per cent respectively).
- Children in England and Scotland were most likely to have younger siblings only (18 per cent each), whereas children in Northern Ireland were most likely to have both older and younger siblings (14 per cent).

Grandparents

- Overall, 4 per cent of children were living with at least one of their grandparents; the proportion was highest in Northern Ireland (5 per cent) and lowest in Wales and Scotland (3 per cent). Among Asian families the proportion was much higher (Indians, 28 per cent; Pakistanis, 19 per cent; and Bangladeshis, 17 per cent).
- Children of younger mothers were more likely to be living with their grandparents, with nearly 10 per cent of children of mothers aged under 25 living with their grandparents.

Natural father in household

- The proportion of children who were not living with their natural father increased from 14 per cent at sweep 1 to 18 per cent at sweep 2. This increase applies in all countries, except Northern Ireland, where the share fell from 17 to 16 per cent.
- 47 per cent of Black Caribbean, 33 per cent of Black African and 32 per cent of mixed-ethnic-background children lived apart from their natural father, in contrast to 9 per cent of Pakistani, 7 per cent of Bangladeshi

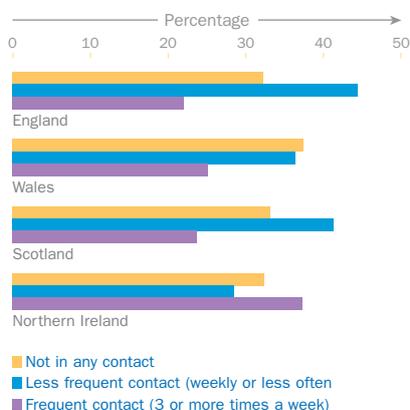
and 5 per cent of Indian children.

- Almost 20 per cent of natural fathers who were not living with their child at sweep 1 had moved into the household by sweep 2. This was more common in Northern Ireland (28 per cent) and Scotland (25 per cent).

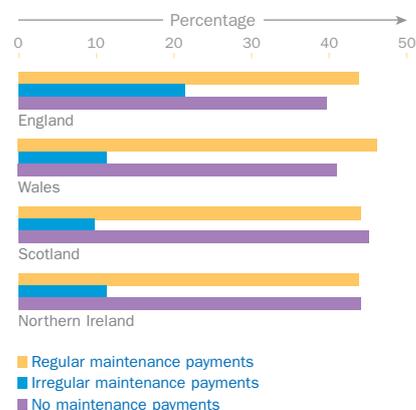
Contact and maintenance payments

Variations in contact and maintenance payments by country can be seen in the two graphs below:

Contact with non-resident natural father by country



Maintenance payments by non-resident natural father



Conclusion

The second MCS survey presents a picture of both stability and change in the membership of the families to which the cohort child belonged. By age three, just over a quarter of the children had gained a younger brother or sister. Around 6 per cent of families interviewed at both surveys had parted company with one of two parents present the first time, and 3 per cent had gained a second parent. Well over half the 'new' parents were natural fathers not living in the family at sweep 1. Among natural fathers who were not living with the child at sweep 2, only one-third had no form of contact. As relatively few lone mothers

could escape from the economic risks of their situation through finding new partners, it is all the more important, in most cases, to recognise and preserve contacts between the children and their absent parents. There were, however, signs of stabilisation in family life. The proportion of couples who were legally married had increased, and the vast majority of the cohort families still comprised two natural parents.

Millennium Cohort Study Second Survey: A User's Guide to Initial Findings is available at www.cls.ioe.ac.uk