1970 British Cohort Study

Partnership Histories (1986-2021)

User Guide (Version 5)

December 2025

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How to cite this guide

Peters, A. (2025) *1970 British Cohort Study, Partnership Histories (1986-2021) User Guide (Version 5)*. London: UCL Centre for Longitudinal Studies.

Data citation and acknowledgement

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About the 1970 British Cohort Study

The 1970 British Cohort Study (BCS70) is an ongoing, multi-disciplinary longitudinal birth cohort study, following a nationally representative sample of over 16,000 people born in Britain in a single week in April 1970.

We have surveyed cohort members throughout their childhood and adult lives on 11 separate occasions, mapping their individual trajectories and creating a unique resource for researchers. It is one of very few longitudinal studies following people of this generation anywhere in the world.

Featuring a range of objective measures and rich self-reported data, BCS70 covers an incredible amount of ground and can be used in research on many topics

Evidence from BCS70 has illuminated important issues for our society across five decades. Key findings include how reading for pleasure matters for children's cognitive development, why grammar schools have not reduced social inequalities, and how childhood experiences can impact on mental health in mid-life.

Every day researchers from across the scientific community are using this important study to make new connections and discoveries.

1. Introduction

This document has been prepared to accompany the data of the derived dataset of the BCS70 partnership histories from the fifth to eleventh surveys, that is, from Age 26 (1996), Age 30 (2000), Age 34 (2004), Age 38 (2008/9), Age 42 (2012), Age 46 (2016) and Age 51 (2021) follow-ups of the 1970 British Cohort Study (BCS70). These data are available as safeguarded data from the UK Data Service.

2. Project description

2.1 Overview

Data on live-in partnerships lasting one month or more have been collected in all BCS70 sweeps from sweep 6 (age 30) onwards, as well as data on current live-in partnership at sweep 5 (age 26). The purpose of the BCS70 partnership histories is to merge all data on live-in partnerships in successive sweeps into one longitudinal dataset.

A summary of the average number of partners per cohort member is found in the table below.

Table 1: Average number of partners for cohort members present in at least one sweep since 1996 (age 26)

	All		Male		Female	
	N	Average number of partners	N	Average number of partners	N	Average number of partners
Up to age 30 (2000)	12627	0.90	6172	0.83	6455	0.97
Up to age 34 (2004)	12885	1.08	6345	1.03	6540	1.13
Up to age 38 (2008)	13046	1.20	6441	1.16	6605	1.24
Up to age 42 (2012)	13621	1.35	6764	1.33	6857	1.38
Up to age 46 (2016)	13770	1.37	6851	1.34	6919	1.40
Up to age 51 (2021)	13862	1.43	6908	1.40	6954	1.45

2.2 Partnership data collected at each sweep

The partnership questions asked at each sweep cover each cohabiting partner since the previously reported current partner and focus on:

- the partnership start date

- whether married/became civil partner (sweep 8 and later) to this partner and if so the marriage/civil partnership dates

- whether still together with this partner and if not the date the partnership ended

- how the partnership ended

- if relevant whether divorced and divorce dates

- the sex, marital status and age at start of partnership of the partner.

Table 2: Detailed partnership data collected at each sweep and used in partnership histories

Sweep	Partnership data collected
Age 26 (sweep 5, 1996)	Current live-in partnership: • Start date of partnership • Whether married to live in partner
Age 30 (sweep 6, 2000)	Current and previous live-in partnerships: • Start date of partnership • Whether got married and if relevant marriage date • Partner's age and marital status when they started living together (current partner only) • If relevant; how the partnership ended and end date
Age 34 (sweep 7, 2004)	Current and previous partnerships since the latest previous sweep or aged 16: • Start date of partnership • Whether got married and if relevant marriage date • Partners age and marital status when started living together (current partner only) • If relevant; how the partnership ended and end date

Sweep	Partnership data collected
Age 38 (sweep 8, 2008)	Current and previous partnerships since the latest previous sweep (6/7) or January 2000: • Start date of partnership • Whether got married/formed a civil partnership and if relevant marriage/civil partnership date • Partner's sex • Partners age and marital status when started living together (current partner only) • If relevant; how the partnership ended and end date. • If relevant whether got divorced/ dissolved civil partnership and the date
Age 42 (sweep 9, 2012)	Current and previous partnerships since the latest previous sweep (6/7/8) or January 2000: • Start date of partnership • Whether got married/formed a civil partnership and if relevant marriage/civil partnership date • Partner's sex • Partner's date of birth or age at sweep • If relevant; how the partnership ended and end date • If relevant whether got divorced/ dissolved civil partnership and the date
Age 46 (sweep 10, 2016)	Data on current and previous partnerships since the latest previous sweep (8/9) or January 2008: • Start date of partnership • Whether got married/formed a civil partnership and if relevant marriage/civil partnership date • Partner's sex • Partner's date of birth or age at sweep • If relevant; how the partnership ended and end date • If relevant whether got divorced/dissolved civil partnership and the date
Age 51 (sweep 11, 2021)	Data on current and previous partnerships since the latest previous sweep (9/10) or January 2012: • Start date of partnership • Whether got married/formed a civil partnership and if relevant marriage/civil partnership date • Partner's sex • Partner's date of birth or age at sweep

Sweep	Partnership data collected
	• If relevant; how the partnership ended and end date • If relevant whether got divorced/ dissolved civil partnership and the date

3. Construction of the partner and partnership histories

The BCS70 partnership and partner histories datasets were constructed using partnership data from sweeps 5 (1996, Age 26), 6 (2000, Age 30), 7 (2004, Age 34), 8 (2008, Age 38), 9 (2012, Age 42) 10 (2016, Age 46), and 11 (2021, Age 51). These data were stored in arrays allowing for comparison of each change reported. These arrays were then examined for data issues that require editing; duplication (where partnerships are reported again in a later sweep); cohabitation overlap and missing data.

3.1 Repaired partnership data from 2008/2012 interviews

3.1.1 Sweep 7 data issues

At sweep 7 (2004-5 follow-up), there were a number of problems with the routing of the questions in the relationship histories module, which led to flaws in the information obtained about the period between the 1999/2000 follow-up and the 2004/5 follow-up. Details of these data issues can be found in the BCS70 sweep 8 (2008-2009 follow-up) User Guide, 'Relationship histories' section. Cases with these issues were flagged as 'repair cases'.

In the sweep 8 (2008) data collection, or sweep 9 (2012) if not present at sweep 8, cohort members who had incomplete partnership data collected at sweep 7 are asked for their partnership histories back to sweep 6. The current partner, and unfinished unions with ex-partners are fed forward from sweep 6 rather than 7 in these cases

All sweep 7 data are ignored for repair cases (see duplicate partnership section below) unless data was not collected at sweep 6 and data collected at sweep 7 included data partnerships before January 2000.

3.1.2 Sweep 8 data on ex- and current partners from last sweep

The partnerships history program attempted to reconcile the sweep 8 data on ex- and last current partner with data collected from earlier sweeps. The following rules were used:

- Where there is a most recent ex- / current partner marriage with no start date, the sweep 8 data is used to update this/these.

- Where there is sweep 8 data on an ex-partner and there is no most recent ex-partner marriage with no start date, but there is a current partner at swp 6/7 and no data for current partner in swp8; the swp8 ex-partner information is used to update the current partner at swp6/7 (it is assumed that this previous current partnership had ended).

- Where there is sweep 8 data on an ex-partner and there is no ex-partner marriage with no start date; the swp8 ex-partner data is used to update the most recent non-married ex-partner (if divorce reported in swp8 then the update will set 'marriage after cohabitation' to 'yes' for this partnership).

- In repair cases sweep 7 data ignored unless there is no sweep 6 data, in which case the sweep 7 data is considered for matching with the ex-partner and current partner data in sweep 8.

3.1.3 Sweeps 9-11 data on ex- and current partners from previous interview

The partnerships history program attempts to reconcile the sweeps 9, 10 and 11 data on ex- and last current partner with partners collected from the earlier sweeps. The following rules are used:

- Where there is a most recent ex- / current partner with missing marriage/divorce dates, the sweep 9/10/11 data is used to update this/these.

- In repair cases, sweep 7 data ignored unless there is no sweep 6 or sweep 8 data in which case the sweep 7 data is considered for matching with the ex-partner and current partner data in sweep 9.

4. Description of the partnership history data

4.1 Partner Histories dataset

A summary of the data included in the partner histories is as follows:

- Participation in each sweep and if so whether any partner data at that sweep
- CM's sex
- Total number of partners and partner number
- Century months (since 1900) of latest interview and partnership start and end dates
- Partner duration in months (truncated at latest sweep)
- Partner type (marriage or cohabitation)
- Partner outcome (see above for categories)
- Partner attributes at start of partnership; sex, age, and marital status (see below)
- Partner start and end dates (month and year)
- Whether divorced, divorce dates and century month of divorce
- Case and partner errors
- Date of CM's interview at each sweep
- Sweep and slot number that partner was reported in

In the partner data, cohabitation then marriage with the same partner is contained within one row. The duration and start/end dates regard the entire period of cohabitation and the outcome relates to the end of the relationship.

With regards to the variables describing the partner's attributes, age at start of partnership and marital status at start of relationship are only collected for sweep 6 and sweep 7 current partners, sweep 8 new partners and sweep 9, 10, and 11

partners (marital status only). Therefore, these variables are set to -8 (don't know/ not enough info) for partner data collected in other slots.

The BCS70 partner histories dataset contains 1 record for each partner cohabitation. Note that re-cohabiting with a previous partner is counted as another partner. A cohabitation which has transformed into marriage is treated as one partner.

Table 3: Description of key variables included in the partner dataset

Variable Name	Variable description
NUMPARTS	Total number of partners
PARTNER	Partner number
PSTCMC	Partnership start century month
PENDCMC	Partnership end date century month
PDUR	Duration of partnership in months
PTYPE	Type of partnership
POUTCOME	Partnership outcome

In the dataset there are 25,549 partner records for 18,037 cohort members. 629 cohort members were known to have died before the age of 16 (one dummy record with variable NUMPARTS =-1) and of the rest, 5,136 cohort members, including those not present at sweeps 5-10, have no partnership data reported (one dummy record with variable NUMPARTS =0). All partner variables are set to -1 (n/a) on these dummy records.

Variable PTYPE holds the partner type:

Table 4: Values included in variable PTYPE in partner histories

PTYPE value	PTYPE category
1	Marriage
2	Cohabitation
3	Cohabitation then marriage

Variable POUTCOME describes the outcome of the cohabitation

Table 5: Values included in variable POUTCOME in partner histories

POUTCOME value	POUTCOME category
1	Separation
2	Death of partner
3	Remain a couple but no longer live together
4	Partnership still intact at latest sweep

12,272 cohort members have at least 1 partner reported (variable PARTNER=1) and report 2,824 marriages with no previous cohabitation, 7,909 ongoing or ended cohabitations that did not end in marriage and 9,052 cohabitations that did end in marriage (variable PTYPE=1,2,3 respectively).

See below an example of 4 cases with a subset of some partner variables

Table 6: Synthetic data showcasing examples of different partner types

BCSID	NUMPARTS	PARTNER	PSTCMC	PENDCMC	PDUR	PTYPE	POUTCOME
B10001N	1	1	1120	-6	191	1	4
B10005S	0	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1
B10009W	3	1	1075	1094	19	2	1
B10009W	3	2	1095	1153	58	2	1
B10009W	3	3	1231	-6	21	3	4
B10014T	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1

In these cases:

- Case B10001N has 1 partner reported, whom they married.

- Case B10005S is not known to have died before age 16 but has no partners reported.

- Case B10009W has 3 partners reported; cohabiting with the first two partners, then cohabiting and subsequently marrying the third partner.

- Case B10014T is known to have died before age 16.

4.2 Partnership Histories Dataset

In the partnership data, cohabitation and marriage with the same partner are treated as separate partnerships, with a new row for each partnership type. The duration and start/end dates relate to the specific type of partnership. A summary of the types of data variables included in the partnership histories dataset is as follows:

Participation in each sweep and if so whether any partnership data at that sweep

- CM's sex
- Total number of partnerships, partner number and partnership number
- Century months of latest interview and partnership start and end dates
- Partnership duration in months (truncated at latest sweep)
- Partnership type (marriage or cohabitation)
- Partnership outcome (see above for categories)
- Partner attributes at start of partnership: sex; age and marital status (see below)
- Partnership start and end dates (month and year)
- Whether divorced, divorce dates and century month of divorce
- Case and partnership errors
- Date of CM's interview at each sweep
- Sweep and slot number that partnership was reported in

With regards to the variables describing the partner's attributes, age at start of relationship and marital status at start of relationship are only collected for sweep 6 and sweep 7 current partners, sweep 8 new partners and sweep 9 partners (marital status only). Therefore, these variables are set to -8 (don't know/ not enough info) for partnership data collected in other slots.

The age at start of relationship and marital status at start of relationship relate to when the cohort member start living with that partner i.e. if cohabited before marriage then relates to the start of the cohabitation even if the partnership relates to the marriage.

The BCS70 partnership histories dataset contains 1 record for each partnership. Cohabitation transformed into marriage is recorded as 2 separate partnerships.

In the dataset there are 34,015 partnership records for 18,037 cohort members. As with the accompanying partner dataset there are dummy partner records for 5,765 cases with no partners reported. The remaining 12,272 cohort members have at least 1 partnership reported (variable PSHIP=1) and report 11,112 marriages and 17,149 cohabitations between them (variable PTYPE=1,2).

Table 7: Description of key variables included in the partnership dataset

Variable Name	Variable description
NUMPSHPS	Total number of partnerships
PARTNER	Partner number
PSHIP	Partnership number
PSTCMC	Partnership start century month7
PENDCMC	Partnership end date century month2
PDUR	Duration of Partnership in months
PTYPE	Type of partnership
POUTCOME	Partnership outcome

The PARTNER variable indicates whether the cohort member has cohabited with, then married the same partner.

The categories included for PTYPE in partnership histories are

Table 8: Values included in variable PTYPE in partnership histories

PTYPE value	PTYPE category
1	Marriage
2	Cohabitation

Variable POUTCOME describes the outcome of the cohabitation

Table 9: Values included in variable POUTCOME in partnership histories

POUTCOME value	OUTCOME category
1	Marriage
2	Separation
3	Death of partner
4	Remain a couple but no longer live together
5	Partnership still intact at latest sweep

See below an example of 4 cases with a subset of some partnership variables

Table 10: Synthetic data showcasing examples of different partnership types

BCSID	NUMPS HPS	PARTNER	PSHIP	PSTCMC	PENDC MC	PDUR	PTYPE	POUTCOME
B10001N	1	1	1	1120	-6	191	1	5
.....								
B10005S	0	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1
.....								
B10009W	4	1	1	1075	1094	19	2	2
B10009W	4	2	2	1095	1153	58	2	2
B10009W	4	3	3	1231	1243	12	2	1
B10009W	4	3	4	1243	-6	9	1	5
.....								
B10014T	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1

In these cases:

- Case B10001N has 1 partnership reported: a marriage.

- Case B10005S is not known to have died before age 16 but has not partnerships reported.

- Case B10009W has 4 partnerships reported; 2 cohabitations that did not end in marriage and 1 cohabitation that did end in marriage. They had two partnerships with partner 3

- Case B10014T is known to have died before age 16.

5. Research Datasets

5.1 Licensing and data access

The partnership histories data have been processed by CLS and supplied to the UK Data Service. All data users need to be registered with the UK Data Service and to sign the UKDS End User Licence. Details. Details of how to do this are available at ukdataservice.ac.uk/get-data/how-to-access/registration.

The data are available from the UK Data Service as safeguarded data, which can be downloaded from the UK Data Service once the End User Licence (EUL) access conditions have been accepted by the user.

These safeguarded data exclude detailed data that are sensitive and/or present a high risk for disclosivity, such as:

1) Partner's name and personal details
2) Exact dates of cohabitation, marriage, divorce

If needed, these detailed data can be obtained by applying directly to the CLS Data Access Committee.

5.2 List of datasets

The BCS70 Partnership Histories available at the UK Data Service comprises two datasets, which differentiate between partner and partnership. Both are in long/hierarchical format, with the partner dataset containing one row per live-in partner, and the partnership file is one row per type of partnership (i.e. cohabitation/marriage). The differences between the two datasets are outlined in section 4.4.

Table 11: List of available datasets

Dataset name	Content summary
bcs70_age16-51_partner_ histories_long	Data on each partner, where cohabitation then marriage with the same partner is treated as one

Dataset name	Content summary
bcs70_age16-51_partnership_histories_long	Data on partnerships where cohabitation and marriage with the same partner are treated as separate partnerships.

Appendix 1 contains details of the amendments to the BCS70 Partnership histories since version 1.

5.3 Identifiers

The data are identified with the variable BCSID, which is the same research ID used for the rest of BCS70 cohort data available at the UK Data Service. This enables the data to be merged at cohort member level.

All partners are identified on the BCSID of the cohort member alongside the PARTNER number, ordered according to the start date of the cohabitation. The partner dataset has one row per PARTNER, while the partnership data contains one or more partnerships (PSHIP) per partner

The partner ID is independent of the relationship history and person grid numbers deposited at sweep level so data cannot be merged at partner level.

5.4 Missing values

Variables are set to missing value -1 (not applicable) where no data is expected, as in the case of dummy partnership records (added where a cohort member was reported to have died by age 16 or has had no activity data reported) or where a variable is not applicable for a particular partnership, for example divorce dates where no marriage has taken place.

Variables are set to -8 (don't know/ insufficient information) where data is expected but has not been collected.

End of partnership variables are set to -6 where a partnership is still intact at the cohort member's most recent sweep.

5.5 Data errors and inconsistencies

Users should be aware of the following data corrections and details

5.5.1 Duplicate partnerships

For each cohort member all the partnerships are compared with each other to identify duplicates. Partnerships are considered to be duplicates if the names, if these exist, of the partners are similar (first 3 characters the same) and:

- Duplicate type 1: The partnerships are reported in different sweeps and have the same start dates or the same marriage dates. If end dates exist these should also match.
- Duplicate type 2: The partnerships are reported in different sweeps and their start dates are within 15 months of each other and the end date of each is not before start and marriage date of the other.
- Duplicate type 3: The partnerships are reported in different sweeps, one of the sweeps being sweep5 and the start dates are within 18 months of each other and at least one of the partnerships has an end date and this is not before the start date of the other partnership

In the case of duplicates, the dates reported in the later sweep are used (as opposed to the earlier sweep dates being used in previous versions). Non-date data are taken from duplicated partnerships where missing in the latest version. Data is only taken from the earlier duplicated partnerships if this is consistent with later data.

Partnerships which are duplicated by partnerships from later sweeps are omitted from the deposited datasets.

5.5.2 Cases reported separated at sweep 6 but no previous partnership data

In some cases there are no partnership data prior to sweep 6, yet the martial status at sweep 6 is reported to be separated. In these cases, a dummy partnership is added, with all variables set to -8 (don't know), and flagged with variable PERROR13=1. All records for such cases are flagged with CERROR1=1.

5.5.3 Partnership / partner start and end dates

Where a marriage date is before the partnership start date, the start is edited to be the same as the marriage date, but only if the partnership was first reported before sweep 9 or the marriage date is less than 6 months before the start date. For the majority of the partnerships where the marriage date is left as earlier than the start date, the cohort member is re-cohabiting with a previous spouse /civil partner.

If date of marriage/civil partnership is unknown, it is set to the partnership start date. If date of marriage/civil partnership is after the partnership end date, it is set to the partnership end date.

If a cohort member does not report divorcing an ex-spouse / ex-civil partner a divorce will be deduced if the cohort member subsequently gets married or enters another civil partnership or reports their marital status to be divorced.

5.5.4 Partnership / partner durations

Where a subsequent partnership/ partner starts before the reported end of a partnership, the partnership duration is truncated to end before the subsequent partnership/ partner starts. Where a partnership has no end date reported, it is truncated at the latest sweep that it was current at. This may result in zero duration partnerships. Zero durations partnerships also result from cohort members reporting start and end dates of partnerships to be the same month in the same year.

Zero duration partnerships have been included in the dataset for completeness.

Appendix 1: Amendements since version 1

Version 1

The first version of the BCS70 partnership histories, deposited at the UK Data Service in May 2011, included partnerships, reported by cohort members, up to and including the 2008 data sweep.

Version 2

The second version, deposited in June 2016, included changes to a small number of identifiers to realign them to previous sweeps of data.

Version 3

A revised version of the BCS70 partnership histories (1986-2008), deposited in November 2016, updated both data files to include partnership data from the 2012 sweep (Age 42). That revised version also incorporated BCS70 death data updates, individual case data cleaning and included an edit to the BCS70 partnership histories program, allowing unfinished marriages or civil to be flagged as divorced or dissolved if the cohort member's marital status is set to divorced at the current or a later sweep or the cohort member reports being divorced from that ex-partner or the partnership legally dissolved at sweep8 (2008).

Version 4

This fourth version of the BCS70 partnership histories dataset includes data on partnerships, reported by cohort members, up to and including the 2016 data sweep (Age 46).

Following sweep 9 (2016, age 46), longitudinal datasets have been streamlined by removing cases which have never participated in any main sweep survey and are no longer being issued.

There are also some edits to the pre 2016 sweep partnership history data as follows:

If the cohort member responded "don't know" when asked if still with their most recent partner and that partner is reported to still be in the household, it is assumed that they are still living with that partner.

In previous versions, partnership records, which duplicate earlier partnerships but have different start and / or marriages dates to the duplicated partnerships, were edited to be the same as the duplicated partnership. In the latest versions these different start and/or marriage dates are no longer edited to match earlier duplicated partnerships, as some earlier data may be unreliable, or the cohort member may have corrected the data in later sweeps.

In previous versions, where a marriage date is before the partnership start date, the marriage date was edited to be the same as the start date, in this latest version the start is edited to be the same as the marriage date as it is felt that it is more likely that the cohort member will report the marriage date correctly.

Version 5

The latest version includes partnerships up to age 51 (2021, sweep 11).