An Overview of the UK Family Today: Factsheet

Family structure

- In 2006, 77% of children lived with both their natural parents, compared to 85.8% in 2001/2.

- Of these parents, 62.5% were married, and 24% were cohabiting in 2007, compared to 62.5% and 14.2% in 2006.

- The number of single mothers increased in the same period, rising from 13.7% in 2001/2 to 17.2% in 2006.

- The average couple have 1.8 children (2006), compared to 2.0 in 1971.

Marriage

- In 1961, the average age at first marriage in England and Wales was 25.6 years for men and 23.1 years for women; by 2007 this had increased to 31.9 years for men and 29.8 years for women.

- The number of marriages and divorces fell in the decade between 1996 and 2006. In 1996 there were 278,875 marriages and 157,107 divorces; by 2006 there were only 239,454 marriages and 132,56 divorces.

- The median length of a marriage before divorce has changed little over the past 40 years: the earliest data available (1963) showed marriages lasted just under 12 years, while in 2000 the figure was 11 years. By 2004, this figure had risen to 11.5 years.

Parenting participation

- In 2006, 21.1% of non-resident fathers had contact with their child at least three times a week, while 28% had no contact at all with their offspring.

- 36.6% of non-resident fathers paid child maintenance regularly, while 54.5% made no financial contribution.

- In 2006, 90% of fathers were in employment, compared to 68% of mothers.

- 28% of grandparents provided childcare.

- 95.3% of women read to their child at least once a week, compared to 82.2% of men. When this figure is broken down, 52.5% of mothers read to their child every day, while only 15.7% of fathers did.

- 70% of families eat their evening meal at the table at least three times a week.

- From 2005-2007, the TV dinner became less popular: in 2005, 46% of families ate in the lounge/living room, 32% in the dining room; 19.8% in kitchen. By 2007, the balance was 39.8%, 37.2%, and 21.5% respectively.

Sources: Social Trends 39, 2009; Millennium Cohort Study (4), 2008