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DIVERSITY IN UK FAMILIES

Liberalization of public attitudes and policies

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The cultural and policy context of doing family

During the second half of the 20th century, the once dominant male breadwinner family has given way to a diverse set of family forms in the UK. In the majority of couples with children, both parents are now in paid work (Roantree & Vira, 2018). In the 1970s, the proportion of married couple families with children started to decrease, whereas divorce and re-partnering rates increased as well as one-parent families and non-marital cohabitation. At the end of the 20th century, Britain had one of the highest divorce rates in Europe, and the highest rate of one-parent families in Western Europe (Allan et al., 2001). Britain also featured a high rate of births outside marriage and high rates of unmarried teenage motherhood (Allan et al., 2001). During the last 20 years, some of these trends continued—like the declining rate of marriage and increasing numbers of non-marital cohabiting relationships—whereas others halted or reversed, most notably the proportion of one-parent families and the rate of divorce. At the same time, new family types have become recognized. These changes went hand-in-hand with changes in policies and public attitudes.

The UK has a liberal welfare regime according to Esping-Andersen's (1990) typology. The state has traditionally limited its interference in family life to a minimum. After the Second World War, the Beveridge Report led to the introduction of limited social security provisions for all families, assuming a male breadwinner model (Wasoff & Dey, 2000). The Conservative governments of the 1980s and 1990s upheld traditional family values. The "New Right" ideology pursued more reliance on private and family provision, with the state being considered a safety net if the family and market provision failed. Family policies became means tested and more targeted at "problem families" (Wasoff & Dey, 2000). The Labour governments from 1997 to 2010 were more tolerant of family

diversity. They emphasized parenthood, rather than partnership, which led to enhanced rights and responsibilities for fathers. In addition, a strong ethics of paid work bore policies that helped families to reconcile work and family life, including parental leave, subsidized formal childcare, and parents' right to flexible employment. The years after 2010 were marked by "austerity," including cuts to many welfare benefits and services, and increased work requirements for receiving benefits.

During the last few decades, attitudes in the British population toward sexuality, gender, and the standard family have liberalized remarkably. The earlier decline in the support for traditional gender roles continued in the new millennium. Whereas 17% of the population agreed in 2002 that it is a man's job to earn money and a woman's job to look after the home and family, only 8% did so in 2017 (Phillips et al., 2018). Between 2002 and 2012, a genuine moral shift occurred in the attitudes toward mothers' work, followed by relative stability in the following years (Phillips et al., 2018). It is now generally accepted that paid work is the norm for mothers, unless they have young children. Even in this situation, only one in five adults supported the male breadwinner model in 2018 (Curtice et al., 2019).

British people have also become more accepting of sex outside marriage. Three-quarters of respondents regard premarital sex "not wrong at all" in 2018 compared to 63% in 2000 (Curtice et al., 2019). Acceptance of cohabitation has also grown further. A comparison of data from 2006/2007 to 2018/2019 shows a drop in disapproval of non-marital cohabitation—from 14% to 8%—and of having children in non-marital unions—from 21% to 12% (Curtice et al., 2020). The same surveys also report a decline in disapproval of divorce when children are younger than 12 years from 28% to 16% (Curtice et al., 2020).

Another striking change in public attitudes regards the further rise in the approval of same-sex relationships. The percentage of respondents who thought that same-sex relationships were "not wrong at all" rose from 34% in 2000 to 66% in 2018 (Curtice et al., 2019).

Finally, there is a strong indication that racial prejudice has decreased in the family context. The proportion of the population that minded if a close relative were to marry a person of Black or West Indian/Asian background declined from 35% (Black) and 32% (Asian) in 1996 to 22% (Black) and 21% (Asian) in 2013 (Kelley et al., 2017). Similarly, in a 2020 survey, 89% of British adults agreed or strongly agreed that they were "happy for [their] child to marry someone from another ethnic group," and up from 75% in 2008 (Ipsos Mori, 2020).

These changes in public attitudes toward diversification of family life are also reflected in several legal reforms. The 1967 Divorce Reform Act made a no-fault divorce possible on the grounds of irreconcilable differences. It indicated a new understanding of marriage and divorce as "issues of a couple's own making and unmaking, rather than subject to the 'higher' moral code of the church and state" (Williams, 2004, p. 26). This view also bore on the Children Act of 1989, which

separated marriage from parenting by stipulating mothers' and fathers' responsibilities for their children after the breakdown of their marriage.

Welfare policies continued to move away from the "male breadwinner family" to an "adult worker" model, where both men and women are active in the labor market (Lewis, 2001). Since the late 1990s, successive UK governments have implemented welfare policies that aim to move benefit recipients into paid work and provide financial support for working parents on low incomes. Under more recent governments, parents' benefits became increasingly conditional on their employment.

The Equality Acts of 2007 and 2010 protect people against discrimination based on sexual orientation. They led to further legal changes, for example, the extension of legal parentage following assisted conception to unmarried couples in 2008. Gay and lesbian couples could be recognized first through civil partnerships in 2004 and then through marriage in 2014. In contrast to these liberalization trends, more restrictive immigration policies and the UK's withdrawal from the European Union have raised barriers to family life in migrant and transnational families.

The liberalization of many public attitudes and laws regarding family behavior occurred together with an increasing cultural diversity of British society. Britain has become a more secular society. Between 2000 and 2018, the proportion of British people identifying as Christians declined from 55% to 38%; the proportion of non-Christians increased from 5% to 9%; and the proportion of people who do not regard themselves as belonging to any religion increased from 40% to 52% (Curtice et al., 2019). Britain's cultural diversity is partly due to successive waves of migration—from the former colonies in the period after the Second World War and since 2004 increasingly from the EU, when eight Central and Eastern European countries joined the EU (Matheson, 2009). The proportion of the UK population born abroad increased from 7.3% in 1991 to 8.8% in 2001 and further to 14.2% in 2018 (Migration Watch, 2020).

The cultural diversity of the UK is enhanced through its four constituent nations of England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Because of the devolved government, some official figures about family and population statistics are not available for the whole of the UK. In this situation, the chapter will often draw on publications about England and Wales (E&W), which together comprise 89% of the population of the UK, or report my own analyses from the UK Labour Force Surveys (LFS)(ONS, 2022b). Laws and policies can also differ among the four nations, and the chapter will flag some major differences.

Empirical patterns of various family forms

Union formation and dissolution

Like in many other European countries, in UK, marriage rates have fallen since their peak in the early 1970s when 8.5 marriages were contracted per 1,000

members of the population. In 2000, the marriage rate was down to 5.2, and in 2019, it reached 3.7 (see Table 9.1). Only 67% of women above age 15 had ever been married in 2020 and 62% of men. This long-term decline does not indicate a retreat from partnerships in principle, but rather reflects the delayed entry into marriage and the rise in non-marital cohabitation (Beaujouan & Bhrolchain, 2011). From 2000 to 2019, the mean age at first marriage has increased by nearly four years for women from 28.2 to 32.1 years and for men from 30.5 to 33.9 years. The figures for 2019 include same-sex marriages, which are entered, on average, at higher ages than different-sex marriages (ONS, 2017a). Premarital cohabitation has become a normative life event as about four in five people who married at 50 years or younger report having lived together with their partner prior to marriage (Beaujouan & Bhrolchain, 2011).

The 1967 Divorce Reform Act and the changing social climate facilitated a strong rise in divorce rates in the subsequent years. In 1985, the UK had the highest divorce rate of Western European countries, and in 2000, it was second

TABLE 9.1 Selected demographic indicators for UK 2000 and latest available data

	2000	Latest available data	
Crude marriage rate	5.2	2019	3.7
Mean age at first marriage			
Women	28.2	2019	32.1
Men	30.5	2019	33.9
Crude divorce rate	2.6	2020	1.7
Remarriage rate ^a			
Women	17.1	2019	10.6
Men	17.4	2019	20.9
% of adults > 15 never married	28.3	2020	35.3
Women	25.3	2020	32.9
Men	31.5	2020	37.7
Total fertility rate	1.64	2020	1.56
Mean age at first birth ^a			
Women	26.5	2020	29.1
% non-marital births	39.5	2017	48.2
% of women aged 40–44 who have born no children ^a	18.5	2020	17.2
Cohorts	1950		1970
Completed fertility/cohort ^a	2.07		1.91
% of women aged 40–44 who have born no children for cohorts (only) ^a	14		17

a The statistic refers to England and Wales.

Sources: OECD (2022); ONS Dataset “Marriages in England and Wales; ONS 2022b, Labour Force Survey, Individual files, own calculations; ONS (2021); ONS Dataset ‘Births by parents’ characteristics”; ONS Dataset “Fertility rates by parity” 1934 to 2020, England and Wales; ONS Dataset “Childbearing for women born in different years.”

only to Belgium (Lappegård, 2014). However, in the mid-1990, the trend started to reverse (ONS, 2019a). The crude divorce rate fell between 2000 and 2020 from 2.6 to 1.7. In addition, the remarriage rate dropped from 37.4 to 20.9 for men and from 17.1 to 10.6 for women between 2000 and 2019.

Fertility patterns

The UK total fertility rate (TFR) had been declining at the end of the past century (Berrington et al., 2021) and was 1.64 in 2000. In the following years, it increased to 1.91 in 2008, stayed at about this level until 2012, and then decreased to 1.56 in 2020.¹ Analyses for England and Wales have suggested that the main factors that led to rising levels of fertility were a catching up at higher ages by women who had previously postponed childbirth, and an increase in the number of births by foreign-born women (Tromans et al., 2009). The decline of fertility rates after 2012 has been related to real and perceived higher uncertainty about employment and lower career opportunities as well as cuts to benefits (ONS, 2015).

The rise and fall of the TFR in the past two decades happened despite a very persistent increase of the mean age at first birth from 26.5 to 29.1. The proportion of women aged 40 to 44 years who had born no children increased in all years since the early 1990s to reach a plateau at about 20% in 2002. Since 2010, the proportion has declined. Women born in 1950 had, on average, 2.07 children, whereas women born 20 years later had on average 1.91 children. The proportion of women who have born no children was 14% for women born in 1950, increased to 20% for women born in 1961 to 1966, and declined to 17% for women born in 1970.

The proportion of children born out of wedlock had started to rise rapidly in the 1980s. By 1990, it had reached 27.9%, 39.5% in 2000, and 46.9% in 2010. During the last ten years, the increase slowed down markedly, attaining 48.2% in 2017. About two-thirds of children born outside marriage or civil partnership were born to cohabiting parents (ONS, 2017b).

Changes in household composition and living arrangements

Table 9.2 presents information about the living arrangements of the adult population for the two selected time points and different age groups. Whereas 55.5% of adults lived with a spouse in 2000, fewer than half of all UK adults did so in 2019/2020. The older the individual, the more likely they were to live with a spouse. In each age group, the proportions are lower in 2019/2020 than in 2000, which may be because more people are postponing or forgoing marriage.

Most of the drop in living with a spouse is made up by an increase in the proportion of individuals living with a partner, which was particularly strong for individuals aged 25–34. Among the 25-to-34-year-olds in 2019/2020, about equal numbers lived with a spouse as with a partner. Individuals younger than

TABLE 9.2 Population in living arrangements in UK 2000 and latest available data

% of adults are living	2000			2019/20		
	Total	Age 18–24	Age 25–34	Total	Age 18–24	Age 25–34
With spouse	55.5	5.4	43	49.3	2.0	32.4
With partner	9.1	15.2	20.8	14.2	17.7	31.1
Child of householder	9.5	56	12.2	10.8	62.5	17
Alone	15.6	4.8	10.6	15.8	3.5	7.3
With other relatives ^a	3.1	18.1	2.7	4	23.7	5.2
With non-relatives	2.6	12.6	4.3	3	13.1	6.3

a “Other relatives” comprise any relatives except spouses, partners and own children unless the child is married, divorced, separated or has a child.

Source: Labour Force Survey (LFS) Household files, own calculations. For the second time point, the pre-pandemic surveys from the last three quarters of 2019 and the first quarter of 2020 were analyzed.

35 years increasingly lived with their parents and relatively fewer lived alone in 2019/2020 compared to 2000. In the UK, this trend reflects economic uncertainty in young adulthood and pressure on the housing market, which makes it unaffordable for many young people to buy their own home (Berrington et al., 2017). In addition, young people returned to the parental home in connection with unemployment or partnership breakdown (Stone et al., 2014).

Table 9.3 presents the distribution of different household types in the UK in the years 2000 and 2019/2020, giving the distribution in the total population and for four ethnic groups. According to the Office for National Statistics (ONS), a household is

one person living alone, or a group of people living at the same address who share cooking facilities and share a living room, sitting room or dining area. A household can consist of a single family, more than one family or no families in the case of a group of unrelated people

(ONS, 2022c, p. 2)

The ONS defines a family as “a married, civil partnered or cohabiting couple with or without children, or a lone parent with at least one child, who lives at the same address” (ONS, 2022c, p. 2). Children can be “dependent”—under the age of 16 years, or 16 to 18 years and in full-time education—or “non-dependent”—aged 19 years or older or 16 to 18 years and not in full-time education (ONS, 2022c). Children who are married, partnered, or divorced, or have a child are excluded from both categories.

In Table 9.3, the first eight rows of data refer to single-family households. Looking at the distribution for the UK overall, at both points in time, the most common type of household was formed by different-sex married couples. The proportion of these households dropped by nearly 6 percentage points between

TABLE 9.3 Households in UK 2000 and latest available data

<i>Indicator</i>	<i>2000</i>					<i>2019/20</i>				
	<i>Total^a</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>Black/ British Black</i>	<i>Indian</i>	<i>Pakistani/ Bangladeshi</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>Black/British Black</i>	<i>Indian</i>	<i>Pakistani/ Bangladeshi</i>
Different-sex spouses	48.6	49	28	59	60	42.9	42	29	62	61
with dep. kids ^c	19.2	19	17	36	50	16.8	15	19	39	49
w/out dep. Kids	29.4	30	11	23	10	26.1	27	10	23	12
Different-sex partners	7.7	8	8	2	1	11.2	12	7	3	2
with dep. Kids	3	3	4	1	1	4.4	5	4	1	1
w/out dep. Kids	4.7	5	4	1	1	6.8	7	3	2	1
Mother only with dep. kids	5.8	5	21	4	9	5.1	5	20	4	7
Father only with dep. kids	0.6					0.6				
Same-sex couple ^d	0.2					0.8				
One person living alone	28.6	29	27	14	7	29.5	30	27	15	9
Other	8.5	8	16	21	22	9.9	9	17	15	20

a The results for “Mixed ethnic group” and “Other ethnic group” are not shown.

b Households are classified according to the ethnic group of the household reference person.

c Dependent children are children under the age of 18.

d This indicator counts all households with a same-sex couple, irrespective of the household composition.

Data source: Labour Force Survey (LFS) Household files, own calculations. For the second time point, the pre-pandemic surveys from the last three quarters of 2019 and the first quarter of 2020 were analyzed.

2020 and 2019/2020, affecting couples with dependent children and those without. More than half of the decline was balanced by an increase in different-sex partnerships with and without dependent children.

After 2001, the proportion of one-parent households increased in the UK until 2012 and decreased thereafter (ONS, 2022a). A possible explanation for the decline is the stabilization of marriages (Berrington, 2014). The proportion of one-parent households in 2019/2020 was very similar to their proportion in 2000, but there has been a shift toward one-parent households with only non-dependent children. The proportion of mother-only households with dependent children has declined from 5.8% in 2000 to 5.1% in 2019/2020. At the same time, the proportion of mother-only households with only non-dependent children has increased from 2.2% to 2.8%. Father-only households contributed about 1.3% of all households at both points in time, consisting of 0.6% of father-only households with dependent children and 0.7% of father-only households with only non-dependent children at both points in time. It is important to note that some one-parent families live with other family members and might count toward “Other” households.

Table 9.3 shows an increase in the proportion of same-sex couple households from 0.2% in 2000 to 0.8% in 2019/2020. In 2019/2020, but not in 2000, they include civil partnerships and married same-sex couples. After a strong increase in the proportion of one-person households in Britain from 12% in 1961 to 29% in 2001 (Macrory, 2012), the proportion of one-person households fluctuated between 28.5% and 29.5% in the UK in the first two decades of the new millennium (ONS, 2022a).

In 2019/2020, the proportion of “Other” households was somewhat higher than that in 2000. Other households comprise multi-generation family households, which account for about 1% of households (LFS, own calculations). Other households include households where a grandparent is the household reference person. In the UK, there were about 250,000 such grandparent households in 2017, constituting 3.2% of all households with dependent children (ONS, 2019b). About 0.4% of all households with dependent children consisted of a grandparent as household reference person and their grandchild(ren) only.

Table 9.3 also reports the distribution of the different types of households separately for four ethnic groups. Households are classified according to the ethnic group of the household reference person, using a six-category classification of ethnicity. The samples are too small to present separate statistics for the Black Caribbean and Black African ethnic groups, which is why they are combined into the category “Black or Black British.” Two further categories of ethnicity (“Mixed ethnic group,” “Other ethnic group”) are not shown. Because of changes to the ethnicity questions in the UK LFS, the ethnicity categories are not fully comparable over time (Smith, 2002).

Past research has highlighted the high marriage rates and low divorce rates of Indians, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis (Berrington, 1994; Platt, 2009). Correspondingly, the proportion of different-sex married couple households is highest

among these households (about 60%) and lowest in Black or Black British households (about 28%).

In 2000, the proportion of different-sex partner households was about the same in White households as in Black or Black British households, but it was less common in South Asian households. Only in the White population, the proportion of these households has markedly increased in 2019/2020 compared to 2000. Compared to White and South-Asian ethnic groups, it was far less common to live with a spouse or partner among people of a Black or Black-British origin, which confirms earlier findings (Berrington, 1994; Platt, 2009).

Mother-only households with dependent children were far more common in Black or Black-British households than in the other groups. Interestingly, the prevalence of mother-only households was similar in Indian and White populations. With 9% in 2000 and 7% in 2019/2020, the proportion of only mothers with dependent children was higher in Pakistani/Bangladeshi households than in White households. This corresponds to earlier observations that the Muslim population had higher than average proportions of lone parenthood (The Muslim Council of Britain, 2015). The raised levels of marital instability in British-Pakistani families have been related to transnational spouse selection and the tradition of arranged marriages (Qureshi et al., 2014).

It is also noteworthy that Other households are more common in ethnic minority groups than among Whites, especially among families from a South-Asian origin, where multi-generation households are more prevalent. The drop from 21% to 15% of Other households with Indian heritage from 2000 to 2019/2020 might indicate a trend away from multi-generational households in this group, in contrast to Pakistani or Bangladeshi groups. There are also large differences among ethnic groups in the likelihood of living alone. It is most common among the Black or Black British and Whites, where 27 to 30% of households were one-person households, compared to only about 15% among Indians and 7 to 9% among Pakistanis/Bangladeshis.

Current empirical research on the various family forms

Reconstituted families (stepfamilies)

About 13% of couple families with dependent children in England and Wales were stepfamilies in 2001, dropping to 11% in 2011 (ONS, 2014a). The decline might be related to women's rising age at first birth (ONS, 2014a). It is also possible that divorced or separated parents increasingly prefer living apart together (LAT) relationships—intimate relationships where the partners live at separate addresses. LAT relationships allow individuals to experience couple intimacy and at the same time maintain personal autonomy and pre-existing commitments, for example, to children from their previous relationship (Duncan & Phillips, 2011). Especially women favor a LAT relationship after the experience of a divorce

(Lampard & Peggs, 2007). The majority of stepfamilies include children from the woman's previous relationship. Only 4% of stepfamilies included children from both partners' previous relationships (ONS, 2014a).

Stepparents have no legal rights regarding their stepchildren. The 1989 Children Act introduced the option of a parental responsibility agreement or a parental responsibility order in England and Wales, which give the stepparent the right to make decisions about the care and upbringing of the child.² As a result, a stepchild can have legal relationships with three adults (or even more) at one time. The parental responsibility agreement/order has been designed as an easier option than adoption. Adoptions have further consequences, like a removal of parental responsibility from the birth parent who is not living with the child and an end of legal relationships to the child's other parent's birth family, including rights of inheritance.

The 1989 Children Act has been centrally important for the situation of post-divorce families in Britain. The act separates the marital relationship from the parent-child relationship; a divorce no longer means the end of a parent's responsibility as mother or father (Williams, 2004). As a consequence, divorce also "no longer means emotional or financial freedom from a former spouse" (Smart, 2004, p. 403). Smart and Neale's (1999) analysis of post-divorce parenting found that many parents were not ready to take on their full parenting (father) and economic (mother) roles, raising issues of fairness of the new legal framework. For example, by insisting on joint custody, fathers devalued mothers' earlier "sacrifice" of giving up their career for the sake of the children and left the mother struggling economically. Other fathers demanded joint custody but did not rise to the demands associated with the shared responsibility for the child.

Analyses of stepfamily relationships often draw on the concept of negotiation (Allan et al., 2011). Two interview-based UK studies demonstrate some limitations to this approach. Ribbens McCarthy and colleagues (2003) noted that parents and stepparents agreed that children took priority; romantic love was subordinated to the needs of the children. Allan, Crow, and Hawker (2011) observed instances of "token negotiations," where more powerful people exercised their advantage. Some family tensions could not be solved by negotiations but by avoiding conflict, for example by keeping parts of the stepfamily networks apart.

The same research also highlights class-based understandings of parenting within and across households (Ribbens McCarthy et al., 2003). Middle-class families emphasized the biological parenthood across households, while working-class interviewees were more concerned with parenting as a practice in the (step)family. Working-class fathers were more likely than middle-class fathers to cut back contact with their child when the mother of their children re-partnered. These differences are important because recent legal and policy reform favors the middle-class emphasis on biological ties.

One-parent and cohabiting families

Compared to other European countries, except Ireland, lone mothers are, on average, rather young in the UK because of a high proportion of young unpartnered mothers (Letablier & Wall, 2018). In the 1970s, the teenage birth rate in the UK was similar to that in other Western European countries (SEU, 1999). However, whereas the rates fell in the other countries, they remained high in the UK. In 1995, the UK recorded 28 births per 1,000 women aged 15–19 years, falling to 12 births in 2019 (OECD, 2022). The decline has been partly attributed to the comprehensive “Teenage Pregnancy Strategy for England” launched in 1999, which combined measures for a better prevention of teenage pregnancy with more support for teenage mothers to enter education, training, and employment. Despite the decrease, adolescent fertility rates in the UK remain among the highest in developed countries (OECD, 2022). Research shows the many challenges experienced by lone mothers when striving to sustain work and care (Millar, 2019) (see Box).

Non-marital cohabitation presents another alternative to married-couple families. The increase in non-marital cohabitation should not belie the continuing legal differences between cohabitation and marriage (Perelli-Harris & Gassen, 2012). These differences are relatively small in England when it comes to taxation, even after the introduction of a new tax allowance for married couples in 2015 to privilege marriage. The differences are also small in access to health care and parenting rights. However, major legal differences between marriage and cohabitation persist in inheritance and the division of property after separation or divorce. In addition, marriage and civil partnership, but not non-marital cohabitation, with a UK citizen gives immigrants privileged access to citizenship (Perelli-Harris & Gassen, 2012).

It is an open question whether growing up in married-couple families is advantageous for children compared to cohabiting-couple families. Children whose parents were married, instead of cohabiting, at birth show some advantages in cognitive and emotional development and physical health (Crawford et al., 2012; Jarvis et al., 2021; Panico et al., 2019). Some studies find that these advantages reflect differential selection rather than causal effects of marriage (Crawford et al., 2012; Panico et al., 2019) but in other studies, part of the differences persists even when controlling for a large range of factors (Jarvis et al. 2021).

BOX: One-parent families

Before 1997, the UK had a maternalist policy, supporting mothers as full-time carers (Millar, 2019). One-parent families were entitled to state benefits without condition if they had a child up to age 16 (Millar, 2019). The high poverty rates of one-parent families in the mid-1990s in the UK (Nieuwenhuis & Maldonado, 2018) made these families a target for government intervention.

From 1998 onward, New Labour's "New Deal for Lone Parents" offered lone parents support to enter paid work by providing advice, information, and training opportunities. At the same time, New Labour launched the National Childcare Strategy that increased affordable childcare and early education places for three and four-year-olds, initially in marginalized communities. Although these policy changes were welcomed by many lone mothers, they often failed to provide financial security (Millar, 2010).

Since 2009, lone parents have been required to be available for work from when their youngest child reaches the age of 10 (Klett-Davies, 2016). In the following years, the work requirements for lone parents were extended and benefits were cut (Millar, 2019). In parallel to these policy changes, lone mothers' employment rate has increased from 42% in 1993 to 70% in 2017 (Roantree & Vira, 2018). However, many fail to earn enough income to stay above the poverty line (Klett-Davies, 2016; Millar, 2010; Zagel et al., 2021).

To understand family life under conditions of poverty, Daly and Kelly (2015) interviewed 51 low-income families in Northern Ireland, including 21 lone-parent families. These families expended a lot of energy on money and its management, which Daly and Kelly termed "poverty work." Budgeting decisions did not only follow a rational economy that prioritized essential items for the family as a whole but also a moral economy that prioritized expenditure for children over those for adults and comprised selfless giving of parents to children. Managing in circumstances of poverty and low income is "not just about keeping a household functioning" but also about "maintaining a sense of family integrity and loyalty to family" (Daly & Kelly, 2015, p. 77).

Sex gender minority families (SGM)

Although homosexual acts were legalized in England and Wales in 1967³ and the age of consent reduced stepwise to 18 years in 1994 and 16 years in 2001, non-heterosexuals arguably did not enjoy full citizenship at the end of the 20th century in the UK because legislation and policies were too often based on the traditional family model (Donovan et al., 1999). However, gay and lesbian campaigning for partnership recognition and parenting rights and the vulnerability of the LGBTQA+ community apparent in the HIV/AIDS epidemic prepared the ground for major legal changes. In 2005, the Civil Partnership Act came into effect in the UK, which allowed same-sex couples aged 16 and older to obtain a legal recognition of their relationship. Civil partners rights include taxes and benefits, financial orders available at the dissolution of a civil partnership, and the right to apply for parental responsibility for their civil partner's child. After a peak of the number of civil partnership formations at 14,943 in 2006, the numbers stabilized around 6,000 civil-partnership formations in the following years

(ONS, 2020). From 2013 onward, the number of civil partnership formations in England and Wales declined because the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 came into effect in 2014.⁴ About 68,000 same-sex marriages have been recorded by 2018 (ONS, 2019c). In 2019, there were 212,000 same-sex families in the UK (ONS, 2019d), of which 57,000 were married-couple families (including 10,000 with dependent children), 46,000 civil partnerships (of which 5,000 had dependent children), and 109,000 same-sex cohabiting families (including 3,000 with dependent children) (ONS, 2022a).

The Adoption and Children Act from 2002, which came into force in England in 2005, allowed same-sex couples to jointly adopt children and to adopt the child of their partner.⁵ The British Social Attitudes Survey shows, however, that only a minority of British people approve of same-sex couples adopting children (Ross et al., 2011). Nevertheless, same-sex couples have embraced the opportunity to adopt. As many as one in six adoptions of children looked after by a local authority in England were by same-sex couples (Department for Education, 2021a). Other milestones toward the equal treatment of SGM families were the Equality Acts from 2007 and 2010, which include sexual orientation as a protected category and prohibit direct and indirect discrimination.

SGM families have to invent their identities and lifestyles because the narratives of traditional families do not fit their situation (Weeks et al., 2004). Dunne's studies on lesbian motherhood (2000) and gay fatherhood (2001) demonstrate how these groups challenge heteronormativity norms and extend the boundaries of what would normally be motherhood or fatherhood. Dunne's (2001) exploratory study on the experiences of married and divorced non-heterosexual fathers also draws attention to the bonds of affection between gay men and the mothers of their children with whom they continued to raise their children after coming out.

Almack (2011) describes how having a child in a lesbian parent family requires the mothers to work out the new kin relationships between the newborn child and the mothers' families of origin and the extent to which these relationships are recognized and validated. Display work was central in these processes. The lesbian mothers saw themselves as rejecting convention and seeking legitimacy at the same time.

Adoptive and foster families

During the last three decades of the 20th century, the number of children adopted in England and Wales dropped strongly because of new abortion laws and changed attitudes to single motherhood. Since the Adoption and Children Act from 2002, adoption orders could be made in favor of civil partners, same-sex couples, and unmarried couples, as well as single people and married couples (ONS, 2013).

An increasing proportion of adoptions concern older children who are looked after by local authorities, that is, local government (Jones & Hackett, 2011).

In 2000, 2,710 of these “looked-after” children were adopted. The number increased until 2015 but then declined in response to court rulings, according to which adoption orders should only be the last resort when alternatives, such as placing a child with birth relatives, were not available. In 2021, 2,870 looked-after children were adopted (Department for Education, 2021a). The numbers of intercountry adoptions into England have been falling during the last decade, reaching 53 adoptions in 2020 (WhatDoTheyKnow, 2021).

Among the children adopted from local authority care, more than three quarters were one to four years old. Only 6% of the children were less than one year old (Department for Education, 2021b). Compared to the English population under 18 years of age, fewer White children are in local authority care, and more are adopted from local authority care. Asian or Asian British children are underrepresented both among children under local authority care and among those adopted. Children of mixed heritage form 5% of the under-18 population but 10% of children in local authority care and 10% of children in local authority care who were adopted.

Instead of adopting a child, people with a close relationship to the child can obtain a special guardianship order (SGO), which gives them parental responsibility until the child grew up. It does not remove parental responsibility from the child’s birth parents. In 2021, 3,800 children left local authority care as the subject of an SGO (Department of Education, 2021a). Most of these were granted to relatives or friends, and about 10% to foster carers.

Jones and Hackett (2011) have studied family practices and displays of family in the creation of adoptive kinship, drawing on 23 qualitative interviews with adoptive white mothers and fathers. Adoption practice has moved away from a model of substituting one family with another to one of an extended kinship network of adopted children, birth relatives, and adopters (Jones & Hackett, 2011, 2012). Adoptive parents retain significant relationships with the child’s birth relatives through direct contact or indirect contact via adoption agencies. Maintaining relationships with the birth parents requires active efforts from adoptive parents and sometimes includes negotiations of the boundaries of kinship.

After a dramatic decline of using children’s homes in the 1980s, about three-quarters of children looked after by local authorities in England tend to be in foster care (Narey & Owers, 2018). Since 1994, the number of looked-after children and the number of children in foster care have continuously increased, the latter reaching 55,990 children in 2017 (Narey & Owers, 2018; Ofsted, 2021). Most children in foster care have suffered abuse or neglect. For a smaller proportion, parental illness or disability had led to chronically inadequate parenting (Narey & Owers, 2018).

Families created by medically assisted reproduction (MAR)

The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act of 1990 created the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA), which regulates assisted conception

treatments in the UK. Surrogacy is legal in the UK. In order to become the legal parents of a child after surrogacy, the mother and father have to apply to the court for a parental order (PO) (Bindmans, 2019). The eligibility criteria for a PO include that the intended parents were married, aged 18 or over, domiciled in the UK, that one parent was genetically related to the child, the surrogate mother gave consent, and only “reasonable expenses had been paid” (Crawshaw et al., 2012, p. 268). The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act of 2008 extended the right to legal parentage following assisted conception to unmarried couples living in an enduring family relationship, including same-sex relationships. More recently, the Act was amended to make it possible for single people to apply for a PO instead of having to adopt the child to become a legal parent. Parents who are eligible for a PO are entitled to adoption leave and pay.

The legal rights and obligations of sperm donors depend on whether sperm donation happened through a HFEA-licensed clinic or not. The donor has no legal rights or obligations toward the child if a licensed clinic was used. Otherwise, the donor will be the legal father.

About 2.7% of children born in the UK in 2019 were conceived with the use of IVF, up from 1.3% in 2000 (own calculation using ONS (2021) and HFEA (2021)). In both years, about 0.1% of all births were conceived through donor insemination (own calculation). Most IVF treatments use patient eggs and partner sperm—86% of IVF cycles in 2019—, followed by the use of patient eggs and donor sperm (HFEA, 2021). Since 2004, IVF treatment has been possible through the National Health Service under certain conditions.

Cases of surrogacy are also rising in the UK. In 2008, there were only 67 PO applications (Brilliant Beginnings, 2022), rising to 280 applications in 2018. Thirty-eight single parents applied for a PO when it became available in 2019. A major obstacle to surrogacy in Britain can be the prohibition of paying the surrogate mother more than her expenses. Many gay couples turn to the USA, where surrogacy is available and easier to navigate in legal terms, but also comes at high financial costs (Dermott, 2008). High costs can be a reason to have a surrogate in a country other than the USA, but such couples often experienced some difficulties in obtaining legal parenthood on their return to the UK (Jadva et al., 2021). People who travel abroad for fertility treatment use a number of strategies for accommodating the foreign donor within their family life (Hudson, 2017). Their practices included concealing and minimizing the donation with the aim of “normalizing” their family relationships. Surrogate parents formed networks to help them deal with the stresses of assisted fertility and manage their own ambivalences.

Multicultural and migrant families

Until June 2021, EU citizens faced no obstacle in joining their partners or family members in the UK. For non-EU nationals, family migration was more restricted. British citizens or non-British settled residents can apply for family

unification, which permits entry and legal residence in the UK of spouses or civil partners; fiancé(e)s or proposed civil partners; unmarried partners (including same-sex partners); or children of the British citizens or settled residents (Walsh, 2021).

The UK had abolished the “primary purpose rule” in 1997, which required foreign nationals to prove that immigration to the UK was not the primary purpose of their marriage. After a few years, the rules for family unification of spouses were tightened again by extending the probationary period, introducing a language requirement and increasing the minimum income requirement of the sponsor to at least £18,600 (Charsley et al., 2012). Before obtaining permanent settlement in the UK, the migrant partners have no recourse to public funds.

The policy changes form part of a move from justifying restrictive conditions for marriage migrants on cultural grounds to economic grounds, which has led to increasing class differences in the access to family/marriage migration (Kofman, 2018) as well as differences by gender and ethnic background (Sumption & Vargas-Silva, 2019). Qualitative research suggests that the measures have forced couples to marry earlier than they otherwise would have and have led to the involuntary separation of couples (Nehring & Sealey, 2020).

With the increasing ethnic diversity of the UK population, interethnic couple relationships have become more common. The proportion of interethnic relationships of all couple relationships has increased from 7% in 2001 to 9% in 2011 (ONS, 2014b). They are more common in non-marital cohabiting relationships than in marriages. A high proportion of married men and women with a Caribbean background are married to a partner from the native UK population, which differs from the other main minority groups from South Asia (Kulu & Hannemann, 2019; Lucassen & Laarman, 2009; Muttarak, 2010). The decline of endogamous marriage in the second generation is rather slow for South Asians (Kulu & Hannemann, 2019), which contradicts expectations of increasing exogamy in the second generation (Muttarak & Heath, 2010).

The increasing prevalence of interethnic relationships resulted in growing numbers of mixed ethnicity children in the UK. Interestingly, mixed ethnicity has been associated with a socio-economic advantage for some groups of children in the UK (Panico & Nazroo, 2011). However, children of intermarriage might experience stigmatization and social isolation (Kalmijn & Rodríguez-García, 2015). Interviews with mixed race, ethnicity, or faith families in Britain identify a variety of everyday approaches adopted by parents to negotiate difference and create a sense of belonging for their children (Caballero et al., 2008): some parents promote a sense of belonging based on a “single” aspect of their children’s heritage; others stress the “mix”; and even others see their children’s identity as “individual”, that is, not rooted in their particular racial, ethnic, or faith backgrounds. The authors report that each of the approaches worked for the families concerned. The “individual” approach was more common among middle-class parents. Analyzing English survey data, Kalmijn and Rodríguez-García (2015) found that mixed children’s social, cultural, and economic integration was in

between the outcomes for children from immigrants and natives, often being closer to the outcomes for immigrants than for natives.

Conclusion and recommendations

In today's UK, romantic relationships are even more regarded as a private matter than at the start of the century. New family forms, especially SGM families and families created by MAR, have been recognized in UK family laws and policies. A lot of the diversification of families in the second half of the 20th century was driven by marital instability. In the 21st century, marriages have become somewhat more stable, but they have also become less prominent in adults' lives. At the same time, non-marital cohabitation has become more common, especially in the younger population. More research is needed to fully understand the significance of these changes for young adults' lives and well-being.

Research into diverse families faces many challenges. Some new family forms are too rare for survey-based research and others are exceedingly complex. The latter applies to step- and patchwork families. There is little quantitative research in the UK about family relationships in complex step- or patchwork families partly because of a lack of data. New large-scale surveys are necessary that collect detailed information about family relationships across different households.

Furthermore, research into stepfamilies directs attention to the dynamic nature of modern family life. Being an only parent or being in a partnership is increasingly transient states. Instead of addressing single types of families, it is becoming increasingly important for family researchers to understand the development of family life courses and the legacies of individuals' previous families.

The discussions in this chapter have not systematically addressed differences in family forms in different socio-economic groups. Diversity is not just a matter of choice. Diversity can also be a matter of constraints, for example, when partnerships receive too little support and break down under the pressures of daily life. For developing policies that support diverse families, we need to consider more fully the intersection of their cultural and material contexts.

Most UK policies are inclusive of diverse family types. However, the conditioning of benefits on employment is a way of treating families formally equally, but it neglects the diversity of families' needs and constraints. The research reviewed in this chapter has highlighted some of the efforts involved in creating and maintaining family relationships, especially in some "new" types of families. Making sure that all families are able to build strong and caring relationships remains a task for future policy development.

This chapter has addressed trends in UK families up to 2020. Since then, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought about further changes. For example, young adults who were living independently before the pandemic, especially students, often moved back into the parental home (Zilanawala et al., 2020). One-parent families suffered particularly strong declines in earnings because of the need to

cut down working hours during the pandemic (Crossley et al., 2020). In addition, families were affected by the reduced capacity of public services. For example, the COVID-19 lockdowns made the adoption process more difficult and limited the capability of social services to identify vulnerable cases (Dafydd & Taylor, 2021).

Notes

- 1 The TFR for Scotland was lower and the TFR for Northern Ireland was higher than the TFR for England and Wales (Berrington et al., 2021).
- 2 Similar rules were introduced in Northern Ireland. Stepparents in Scotland can apply for a Residence Order.
- 3 Same-sex sexual acts were de-criminalised in Scotland in 1981 and in Northern Ireland in 1982.
- 4 Same-sex marriage became legal in Scotland in 2014 and in Northern Ireland in 2020.
- 5 Corresponding laws were passed in Scotland in 2009 and in Northern Ireland in 2013.

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