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## The rise of living alone in Inner London: trends among the population of working age

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**Abstract.** The 1980s was a significant decade in the demography of Inner London. Population increase replaced decades of decline, and household numbers grew even faster. One-person households accounted for most of the growth in household numbers, and the greatest increase was among younger and middle-aged adults. The authors examine the characteristics and changing geography of one-person households in Inner London, particularly between 1981 and 1991, within the context of broader demographic and socioeconomic changes during the decade. In particular, the characteristics of those people who migrated to live alone in Inner London are examined, and questions raised about the relationship between household changes, residential mobility, occupational structures, and housing markets. Reference is also made to the London Borough of Tower Hamlets to explain some of the processes underlying household change. One-person households are an integral part of wider economic and social processes underway in large urban areas and form a leading edge of new ways of urban living.

### Introduction

There has been considerable discussion of population and housing changes in London during the 1980s and 1990s, but the centrality of household change, particularly as part of wider demographic changes, has been given much less attention. It was not until the second half of the 1990s, with the publication of *Projections of Households in England to 2016* (DoE, 1995) and the White Paper, *Household Growth: Where Shall We Live?* (DoE, 1996) that households became the focus of considerable policy interest. This paper demonstrates the significance of the 1980s in particular for the emergence of what is now a widely recognized phenomenon: living alone among younger and middle-aged people—here defined as under 60 years of age. We focus very specifically on one-person households, their characteristics, geography, and relationship with migration, in Inner London between 1981 and 1991.<sup>(1)</sup> In so doing, we set the background against which trends in the 1990s may be considered when full results of the 2001 Census become available.

The focus on Inner London is deliberate, as it is here that national household changes, particularly relating to one-person households, can be seen at their most acute; and the 1980s were a particularly important decade for the emergence of one-person living. The growth in the number of one-person households is an integral, but somewhat neglected, aspect of metropolitan change and one which is having important consequences both for the economic and for the social life of urban areas, as well as having significant planning implications. London in the 1980s (along with other major European cities, notably Paris) was at the forefront of these changes which have rapidly become a feature of other smaller British (and, indeed, other European) cities (Ogden and Hall, 2000). Inner London, at the heart of the London metropolis, with a population of about 2.3 million in 1991, and with more than a third of all households made up

<sup>(1)</sup>This research was part of an ESRC-funded project (grant L31553011) under the Population and Household Change Research Programme. Results of the programme are found in McRae (1999).

of only one person, provides a particularly suitable geographical area in which to begin to disentangle the complex interrelationship of demographic and other socioeconomic factors which have contributed to the growth of one-person living.

This paper builds on earlier work on the changing national geography of one-person households (Hall et al, 1997; 1999) and complements an already important literature on demographic and social change within London. For example, Fielding (1989; 1992; 1993) has examined migration and social mobility in the South East region for the period 1971–81 and, with Halford (Fielding and Halford, 1993), the gender dimension of such social mobility. An analysis of who moves into, out of, and within London has been carried out by Ford and Champion (2000) with the aid of one-year migration data, and Congdon and Champion (1989) examined links between migration and housing. The process of gentrification has a wide literature, and pertinent to this paper is the work of, for example, Lyons (1996) and Bruegel (1996) who have examined gentrification and feminization of the workforce in London; Hamnett (1991a; 1991b; 1994a; 1994b) and Lyons (1999) who have examined the processes of tenurial change, gentrification, and socioeconomic change in London; and Lyons and Simister (2000) who have examined intergenerational tenure mobility. The process of displacement through gentrification has been examined by Atkinson (2000). Although these works inevitably refer to households, their main emphasis is elsewhere.

The emphasis throughout the paper is to describe the complex changes taking place in the 1980s, a crucial decade in the changing demography of London. We use large data sets, particularly the Census of Population and the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Longitudinal Study; although such large aggregate data can indicate changing trends, their analysis can provide only the most tentative explanations for the processes that are taking place. Fuller explanation of the processes leading to living alone—whether it is a permanent or short-term arrangement, the factors influencing location and accommodation choice, and family and friendship networks—is outside the scope of this paper. The potential value of more qualitative data has been indicated elsewhere (Hall et al, 1999).

There are four main sections in the paper. After this introduction, in which we discuss one-person households, we examine the wider context of socioeconomic and demographic change in London between 1981 and 1991. We then turn to an examination of the demographic characteristics of younger and middle-aged one-person households in Inner London, their age, social status, and geography before, third, examining the characteristics of younger and middle-aged people who have migrated into and live alone in Inner London. Fourth, we briefly use the example of Tower Hamlets to disentangle some of the processes underlying household change at work in Inner London in the 1980s, most of which reached fruition in the 1990s.

The broad period considered, 1981 to 1991, is characterized by a particularly rapid growth of one-person households, but we also use some data for 1971 to set the 1981 data in context. The 1981 and 1991 Censuses provide basic information about population change, but they cannot provide a detailed picture of younger and middle-aged one-person households. For that we have to use, first, the 2% individual data of the Sample of Anonymised Records, provided for the first time from the 1991 Census of Population<sup>(2)</sup> and, more importantly, the ONS Longitudinal Study (LS), a 1% sample

<sup>(2)</sup>The 1991 British Census was the first to include the Samples of Anonymised Records (SARs). These differ from traditional aggregated census tables in that they are individual census records. This allows the user to manipulate the data to produce tables that relate more precisely to their needs than the preset census tabulations. There are two sets of SARs: a 2% sample of individuals in households, and a 1% sample of households and individuals in those households. The individual sample has been used in this case. See Marsh (1993).

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of the population of England and Wales<sup>(3)</sup> which began in 1971 and which enables a cross-sectional comparison to be made of younger one-person households in 1971, 1981, and 1991. Variables selected for examination are age, social class characteristics, and the tenure arrangements of working-age people (aged 20–59 years) living alone. These data are not available in this form from census tabulations, so it is only by using the LS that we are able to chart exactly how one-person living has emerged over a twenty-year period.

However, the great value of the LS is that it enables individuals to be tracked from one census to the next, and so shows not only how the socioeconomic characteristics of individuals changed over the decade but also any changes in their location ten years on. Here we use longitudinal data between 1981 and 1991 and examine the characteristics of those in the LS sample (and therefore living in England and Wales) aged under 50 in 1981 who migrated (that is changed residence) between the census of 1981 and that of 1991 and were living in Inner London in 1991 (although we have no information on the date or frequency of moves). These data are in contrast to those in the 1991 Census which give only one-year migration data. We also use LS data for Inner London and a selection of London boroughs,<sup>(4)</sup> most specifically Tower Hamlets, to track the working-age population living alone back to 1981 to examine their migration patterns. At the borough level, LS data have to be used with caution because the sample size is small. They do, however, give some indication of the extent to which patterns observed for Inner London as a whole were reflected at the more local level.

The 1980s are a crucial decade for understanding subsequent household and wider demographic change, but the extent of these changes will be apparent only with the full release of data from the 2001 Census. These continuing changes are now engaging policymakers as they attempt to deal with their consequences and, indeed, one of the key themes in the draft London Plan (Greater London Authority, 2002) is accommodating continuing population and household growth.

### **One-person households**

One-person households have generally been an exceptional household form historically—the majority of people living within the setting of a family household both for economic and for social security. The rise in one-person living is a feature of the last fifty years, and in particular the last thirty years. Explanations for the rise in the proportions of the population living alone can be broadly divided into two groups. First are compositional or demographic factors, which include changing age structures, reflecting both past fertility and particularly the increase in numbers of older people as a result of improving life expectancy (and it was among older people that living alone increased first). More unmarried and divorced people result from declining marriage and increasing divorce rates; and more childless people are a result of declining fertility.

<sup>(3)</sup> The ONS Longitudinal Study (LS) is a 1% sample drawn from the census. Membership of the LS is based on four birth dates in the year, and these people are tracked from census to census. Vital events are recorded, along with the details of other people in their household. As well as showing the changing circumstances of individuals from one census to the next, including residence, social class, and tenure, the LS provides an invaluable source of cross-sectional information at each of the three census dates—1971, 1981, and 1991. See Dale (1993).

<sup>(4)</sup> LS data for seven geographically varied boroughs were obtained: two northern London boroughs, Camden and Islington; two western boroughs, Kensington and Chelsea and Hammersmith and Fulham; the more central Westminster; and Southwark and Tower Hamlets in the south and east. Choice was also determined by numbers living alone, which had to be sufficiently large to ensure reasonable sample size, although even so, results have to be viewed with caution.

Second, there are behavioural factors, particularly the increasing propensity to live alone as a chosen lifestyle by younger people who may be delaying or eschewing marriage or who have experienced divorce (Haskey, 1990; Kiernan, 1986; Pampel, 1983; Roussel, 1983; Santi, 1988). At the same time, peripatetic residential patterns at two or more addresses are becoming common, although such arrangements are not necessarily recorded in the census or other data sources, and may result in people living alone for part, or indeed most, of the time (Kaufmann, 1994; Warnes, 1992). Cultural changes also produce different ideas and expectations about gender roles and the nature of households, and indeed are likely to be an important contributor to living alone in cities (Bondi, 1991; Duncan, 1991a; 1991b; Lyons, 1996; 1999; Warde, 1991). Beauregard (1986), for example, in examining potential gentrifiers, has linked economic changes—particularly the increasing number of professional–managerial individuals—to changing attitudes and behaviour towards biological reproduction. The postponement of marriage and childbearing creates more one-person and two-person households made up of individuals who “desire to live in the city close to their jobs” (Beauregard, 1986, page 37) and who have a distinctive consumption style “facilitated by the postponement of familial responsibilities and the accumulation of savings” (page 43), and, one might add, easier access to credit. It is these groups of working-age people—aged under 60—rather than postretirement age groups, who are the particular focus of this paper.

In Britain and elsewhere in Europe, household numbers increased rapidly as their size declined between 1971 and 1991, trends which continued in the following decade (Hall, 1988; Kuijsten, 1996; Ogden and Hall, 2000). Much of this change is explained by increasing numbers of one-person households, particularly in urban areas and especially in large metropolitan areas. London has been at the forefront of these changes and was the only UK metropolitan area to experience population increase in the 1980s: London’s population grew by over 3% between 1981 and 1991, compared with a decline of 18% in the previous decade. At the same time, household numbers increased by over 14% and one-person households by over 36%. The increasing number of such households is closely related to wider economic, social, and cultural trends and associated changes in the geography of Inner London, including both urban regeneration schemes and shifts in the housing market associated with gentrification (Knox and Taylor, 1995; LeGates and Hartman, 1986; Ogden and Hall, 1998). Such changes are encouraging the shift of population back to the centre. For example, new knowledge-based service activities employ a young, highly skilled and highly paid workforce who want to live near their work but are also attracted by the entertainments and lifestyle afforded by such locations (Deben et al, 1992; Ley, 1996). The 1980s were a turning point in Inner London’s demography: a period when, it can be argued, repopulation began to replace decentralization, albeit relatively slowly and selectively by age and socioeconomic status, through a combination of natural increase and lower rates of net out-migration. By using the LS, we are able to show both how the characteristics of one-person households changed during the 1980s and how many of the younger migrants into London were living alone by 1991.

### **Socioeconomic and demographic change in Inner London in the 1980s**

In order to understand the demographic and, in particular, household changes that have been taking place in London, it is essential to understand London’s role as a global city and the labour-market changes consequent upon this, particularly from the early 1980s. London is, in Friedman’s (1995) words, one of “the command and control centres of the global economy” (page 23) and as such is uniquely placed within the United Kingdom to be at the forefront of metropolitan change. It is recognised as a global city, a centre of “financial and commercial activity; communication and

administration; and culture and knowledge” (London Planning Advisory Committee, 1991, page 6). London’s economy is complex, with a range of sectors which have responded differentially to global and more local processes. The 1980s were a period of significant and distinctive socioeconomic change in London, after only modest changes in the 1970s (Buck et al, 1992; Gordon and Sassen, 1992). In terms of industrial structure, manufacturing employment in London declined by around 40% during the decade, as did the construction and transport-and-communications sectors; by contrast, service employment increased (Graham and Spence, 1995). In particular, the banking, insurance, and finance sector expanded rapidly: numbers employed grew by over 30% between 1981 and 1991. The public administration, health, and education sectors also grew in terms of numbers employed (Pratt, 1994). Although these changes reflect the general pattern of occupational changes in England and Wales as a whole, they are much more pronounced in Inner London.

The changes in employment are reflected in Inner London’s changing socio-economic structure: in particular, there was an increase in the numbers in professional and intermediate (managerial and technical) groups (52% and 38% increase, respectively, between 1981 and 1991). Proportions of the total economically active population in professional and intermediate occupations increased from 25% in 1981 to 40% in 1991. Meanwhile, numbers in other socioeconomic groups fell. Skilled manual and partly skilled jobs declined most rapidly (table 1, see over), so that by 1991 Inner London was significantly more middle-class in its socioeconomic makeup. Hamnett (1994b) described this as a process of professionalization with little evidence of socio-economic polarization. The socioeconomic structure is “growing at the top end both absolutely and relatively and the less-skilled sector is steadily shrinking” (page 202). Not all agree with this interpretation: both Bruegel (1996) and Lyons (1999) argue that professionalization in London has been accompanied by sociospatial polarization.

Gender differences in the changes in occupational structure were very marked in the 1980s. There was an increase of over 100% in the number of females in professional occupations in England and Wales. By contrast, changes in the size of the male professional group were much smaller, showing only a 16% increase between 1981 and 1991. The changes in Inner London were even greater, in spite of a decline of around 8% in the absolute size of the female active workforce (although their share of the workforce increased from 42.5% in 1981 to 45% in 1991). The number of professional females increased by 117%, and females in intermediate occupations by 51%—albeit from a relatively low base. All other female occupational groups experienced a decline both in absolute and in relative size (table 1). Thus, the professionalization of the female workforce was particularly pronounced in Inner London and new gender divisions of labour were developing (Duncan, 1991a; 1991b). There has been considerable debate about the nature of the professionalization of the female labour force, with Lyons (1999) pointing out that the changing status of middle-class occupations affected women and men differently. Women were more likely to have impermanent professional jobs and to have smaller numbers of subordinates than men. Nonetheless, the growth of the tertiary and quaternary sectors has enabled women to broaden their entry to managerial and professional jobs and, at the same time, bring their incomes more in line with those of men (Ley, 1996)—a phenomenon that is particularly important when looking for explanations of the increasing numbers of younger women living alone.

Closely associated with the economic changes of the 1980s, and in contrast to the previous three decades, Inner London’s population began to grow during the 1980s as a result both of natural increase and of lower levels of net out-migration: there were continuing high levels of in-migration from the rest of Britain—and also

**Table 1.** Social class of the economically active population in 1981 and 1991 in Inner London by sex (10% sample) (source: 1981 and 1991 Census of Population, England and Wales; Small Area Statistics, 10% sample).

Social class <sup>a</sup>	Total <sup>b</sup>			Males			Females		
	1981	1991	%	1981	1991	%	1981	1991	%
Total	122 976	107 044	-13.0	70 709	58 802	-16.8	52 267	48 242	-7.7
SCI	5 052	7 655	51.5	4 012	5 398	34.5	1 040	2 257	117.0
SCII	25 237	34 917	38.4	14 195	18 234	28.4	11 042	16 683	51.1
SCIII (N)	30 046	23 551	-21.6	9 480	7 174	-24.3	20 566	16 377	-20.4
SCIII (M)	23 711	16 413	-30.8	20 300	13 706	-32.5	3 411	2 707	-20.6
SCIV	21 604	13 920	-35.6	11 902	8 293	-30.3	9 702	5 627	-42.0
SCV	9 327	6 564	-29.6	5 889	3 576	-39.3	3 438	2 988	-13.1
Other	7 999	4 024	-49.7	4 931	2 421	-50.9	3 068	1 603	-47.7

<sup>a</sup> Social classes: SCI—professional; SCII—managerial and technical; SCIII(N)—skilled occupations nonmanual; SCIII (M)—skilled occupations manual; SCIV—partly skilled; SCV—unskilled; ‘other’ includes those in the armed forces, on a government scheme, or with their occupation inadequately described or not stated. Students and those economically inactive are not included.

<sup>b</sup> % indicates percentage change 1981 to 1991.

**Table 2.** Population and household change in England and Wales and Inner London, 1981 and 1991 (source: Census of Population, England and Wales, 1981 and 1991, Small Area Statistics).

	Total population <sup>a</sup>			Households			One-person households		
	1981	1991	%	1981	1991	%	1981	1991	%
England and Wales	47 806 003	49 134 452	2.8	17 754 628	19 997 655	12.6	3 849 056	5 291 349	37.5
Inner London	2 359 319	2 450 918	3.9	971 948	1 109 535	14.2	306 906	417 530	36.0

<sup>a</sup> % indicates percentage change 1981 to 1991.

overseas—and a reduced level of net out-migration from London to the rest of South East England (Atkins, 1996; Champion and Congdon, 1987; 1988). Inner London's population increased by 3.9% while that of England and Wales increased by 2.8% (table 2).<sup>(5)</sup>

In the same period, numbers of households increased: in England and Wales by 13% and in Inner London by 14%, reaching about 1.1 million households in 1991.<sup>(6)</sup> With a slowly growing population and a more rapidly increasing number of households, the average size of the household declined: in England and Wales from an average of 2.97 in 1971 to 2.5 in 1991, and in Inner London from 2.7 in 1971 to 2.1 in 1991. The declining mean household size is an indicator of changing household structures, with one-person households becoming increasingly important. In England and Wales, one-person households increased in number by 38% between 1981 and 1991, a growth equivalent to 68% of all the extra households created since 1981. By 1991, 27% of all households nationally were one-person, compared with 38% of all households in Inner London (table 3). Between 1981 and 1991, total household numbers in Inner London increased by 137 587, but one-person households increased by 110 624 (a 36% increase in the decade—slightly below the national increase but from a higher base), equivalent to 80% of the increase in total household numbers.

Other household types also became more important, particularly one-parent households which accounted for 6.4% of all households in Inner London in 1991. By contrast, the 'traditional' household of two adults and their dependent children aged under 16 made up only 12% of households in Inner London (table 3), compared with over 18% nationally. This is a result of Inner London's particular attractiveness for

**Table 3.** Household composition (percentages), England and Wales and Inner London, 1981 and 1991 (source: 1981 and 1991 Census of Population, England and Wales, Small Area Statistics).

	England and Wales		Inner London	
	1981	1991	1981	1991
1 adult	21.7	26.6	31.8	38.1
1 adult + person(s) under 16	2.1	3.7	3.6	6.4
2 adults	31.2	32.1	29.1	27.1
2 adults + person(s) under 16	22.6	18.3	14.7	12.1
3+ adults +/- person(s) under 16	22.4	19.3	20.8	16.3
All households	100	100	100	100

<sup>(5)</sup> When making comparisons between censuses, changing population bases need to be taken into consideration. The population base in 1991 includes imputed residents of wholly absent households, whereas the 1981 Census does not include any imputation of missing households. In the process of imputation, records from nearby households, who returned a late form voluntarily, are used to estimate the characteristics of those missing households. A limited number of tables is available in which the 1981 base is used with the 1991 statistics. In Great Britain as a whole, 50% of the imputed households were one-person households. This high percentage is because, with only one person living in the house, these residences were much more likely to be empty on census night. Imputed households are included only in those figures and tables which use the 1991 Census Small Area Statistics. They are not included in those constructed from the LS and the 1991 SARs. Despite the inevitable problems with extrapolating absent-household characteristics from households who were absent on census night but returned a form, this procedure provides a more complete base for population output than counting only those people present.

<sup>(6)</sup> In England and Wales, 0.6% of all those living alone were students, although in Inner London this rose to 2%.

young professional adults with good prospects, whereas couples with children or those nearing retirement have different priorities and are more likely to move out of London (Fielding, 1989, 1993). Indeed, Fielding (1993), using LS data for 1971 and 1981, has argued that the South East as a whole is an 'escalator' region, with "upwardly mobile young adults living in single-person households" attracted to the region, which in turn encourages "their out-migration in nuclear family or empty-nest households... in later middle-age or at, or close to, retirement' (page 158).

Whether or not the increasing tendency among younger adults to live alone will upset the assumptions of the model, especially if increasing numbers remain living alone in the inner city, is still unclear. Present evidence for the degree of permanence of one-person households is limited: almost half (48.3%) of those people living alone (aged under 50 and in the LS sample) in Inner London in 1981 were still alone in 1991. A further 8% were living in a nonfamily household, and rather more women than men remained living alone—perhaps a reflection of the distinctive gender dimension of the London labour market (Bruegel, 1996; Duncan, 1991a; Lyons, 1996). These are slightly higher proportions than the national figures of 44% of those living alone in 1981 (aged under 50 in the LS sample) being still alone in 1991.

The composition of a household affects choice of housing, but household composition is itself also influenced by the supply and nature of housing. If there is a demand for a particular sort of housing which is created by more people wanting to live on their own, then the housing market, particularly in large cities with their large stock and variety of existing and convertible properties, is likely to respond to such demand. The changing housing market in Inner London is reflected in changing tenure structures during the 1980s.

Inner London is significantly different from the rest of England and Wales in that a higher proportion of 20–59-year olds are in privately rented accommodation and, conversely, a lower proportion in owner-occupied accommodation than in the rest of England and Wales (table 4). There are, though, considerable variations in tenure patterns within Inner London. Traditionally, the northern and western boroughs with private renting and owner-occupation contrasted with the southern and eastern boroughs with local authority renting. Tenure in Inner London changed dramatically between 1971 and 1981, from a dominance of private renting to a dominance of local

**Table 4.** Tenure of those living alone and the total population aged 20–59 years, England and Wales and Inner London, 1981 and 1991 (source: Office for National Statistics Longitudinal Study).

Tenure	England and Wales				Inner London			
	1981		1991		1981		1991	
	total (%)	living alone (%)	total (%)	living alone (%)	total (%)	living alone (%)	total (%)	living alone (%)
Owner-occupied	63.0	44.0	74.7	57.5	33.6	22.5	45.1	39.1
Local authority <sup>a</sup>	27.4	29.6	14.7	18.8	45.5	34.5	29.4	26.7
Renting unfurnished (private)	6.6	10.6	6.9	12.0	9.9	13.2	13.9	18.2
Renting furnished (private)	3.0	15.8	3.7	11.7	11.0	29.8	11.6	16.0

<sup>a</sup> Includes Housing Association rented.



authority renting with owner-occupation also becoming more important. These trends continued to 1991 when owner-occupation had increased further in importance to become the largest single tenure type (Hall et al, 1997; Hamnett, 1991b; Hamnett and Randolph, 1983; 1986).

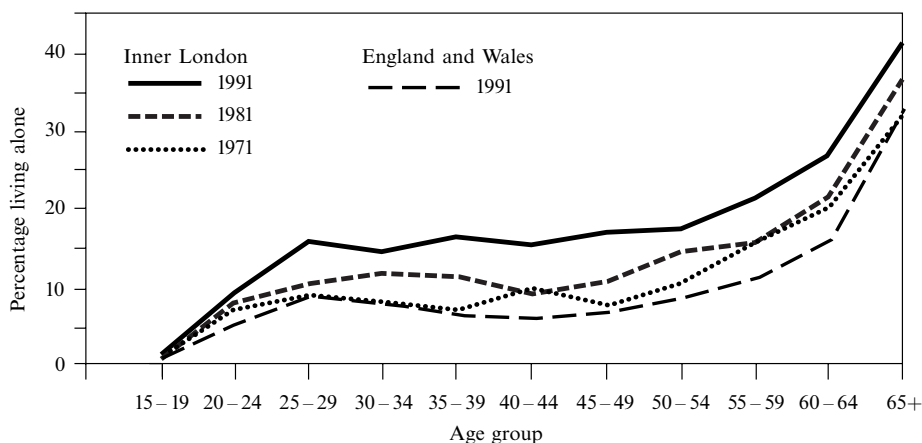
Similarly, in Inner London the tenure arrangements of people living alone have changed in line with those of the population of London as a whole. One-person households were closely associated with the more flexible private renting sector in 1971. However, in the 1980s there was an increase in owner-occupation and in the private rental of unfurnished property and a decline in the private rental of furnished property among people living alone—indicative perhaps both of the changes in their socioeconomic status (discussed below) and of their aspirations. Nonetheless, people living alone aged under 60 in Inner London in 1991 were still more likely to live in some type of rented accommodation (61%) than be owner-occupiers (39%) compared either with those living alone nationally (42.5% renting), or with the total population in Inner London (table 4). One must assume that the supply of rented accommodation available in Inner London is one important element that contributes to the numbers living alone, although this larger supply must in turn be a function of the greater demand in Inner London compared with elsewhere in England and Wales, as the buy-to-let phenomenon of the 1990s and 2000s demonstrates. It is estimated that of the 60 000 properties bought in this way in 2001, 50 000 were in London and the South East (Turner, 2002).

### Demographic characteristics and geography of one-person households

We now turn to a more detailed examination of the changing age and social class characteristics of one-person households in Inner London between 1981 and 1991, which provides a foundation for increasing our understanding of the underlying processes of change. The Sample of Anonymised Records (SARs) enables broad comparisons to be made between the characteristics of people living alone in England and Wales and Inner London in 1991 (table 5). These data show that people living alone were younger, high proportions were nonpensioners, were unmarried, and were in higher social classes in Inner London compared with England and Wales. As far as gender is concerned, women living alone in the younger age groups were overrepresented in Inner London compared with England and Wales as a whole.

**Table 5.** Characteristics of people living alone, England and Wales and Inner London, 1991 (source: Samples of Anonymised Records, 2% individual data).

	England and Wales	Inner London
Mean age	59.3	52.0
Percentage of nonpensioners living alone who are unmarried		
males	60.5	70.7
females	53.2	70.2
Nonpensioners as percentage of		
all males living alone	69.3	78.0
all females living alone	28.9	49.3
Percentage of nonpensioners living alone in social classes I and II		
males	33.9	39.6
females	23.7	42.4
Percentage of all nonpensioners living alone who are female	40.0	43.6



**Figure 1.** Percentage living alone by age in Inner London, 1971, 1981, and 1991 and England and Wales 1991 (source: Office for National Statistics Longitudinal Study).

The 1981 and 1991 Censuses also show the increasing youthfulness of the total population of Inner London. In particular, the age group 25–34 years increased by 37% (compared with 9.6% for England and Wales) and the 35–44-year age group by 20.6% (18.4% nationally). LS data allow us to look specifically at people living alone over time, which again show increasing numbers both of younger and of middle-aged people living alone by 1991 (figure 1). Numbers of those living alone aged between 25 and 34 increased by 73% in the decade, and those aged between 40 and 49 by 72%.

Although living alone among the over sixties has been increasing since the 1950s, it was only after 1971, and particularly 1981, that there were increases among the under sixties. Inner London experienced more than double the national rates of increase of the proportions of working-age population living alone: 9.3% to 11.2% between 1971 and 1981, and to 15.4% of the 20–59-year-old population by 1991. For England and Wales, comparable figures were from 3.8% to 4.9% between 1971 and 1981, and then to 7.6% in 1991. By 1991, the majority of people living alone in inner London were aged under 60 rather than over 60—the proportions increased from 49% in 1981 to 57% of the population living alone by 1991.

In Inner London in particular, people aged under 60 living alone were much more likely to be in a higher social group than those living alone nationally—and much more so than the total LS population aged under 60. By 1991, 40% of those living alone aged between 20 and 59 were in social classes I and II (table 6)—a figure confirmed by the SARs data (table 5) which show slightly more women than men in the higher social classes. Looking at the significance of living alone for the higher social classes from a slightly different angle, the proportion of people in social classes I and II who were living alone in Inner London rose from 15.6% to over 20% between 1971 and 1991, compared with a rise in the national proportion from 5.2% to 9.6%. The 1980s were, therefore, a decade in which living alone emerged as a significant household type in Inner London for people of working age, and particularly for people in higher social classes. In Inner London at least, it was no longer the retired who constituted the majority of those living alone.

The increasing importance of one-person households in Inner London is reflected in their changing geography during the 1980s. Areas with the highest proportion of one-person households (of all ages in 1991) were in west London, particularly Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster, where 48% and nearly 47%, respectively, of all households

**Table 6.** Social class structure in England and Wales and Inner London for the population living alone and the total population aged 20–59 years 1981 and 1991 (source: Office for National Statistics Longitudinal Study).

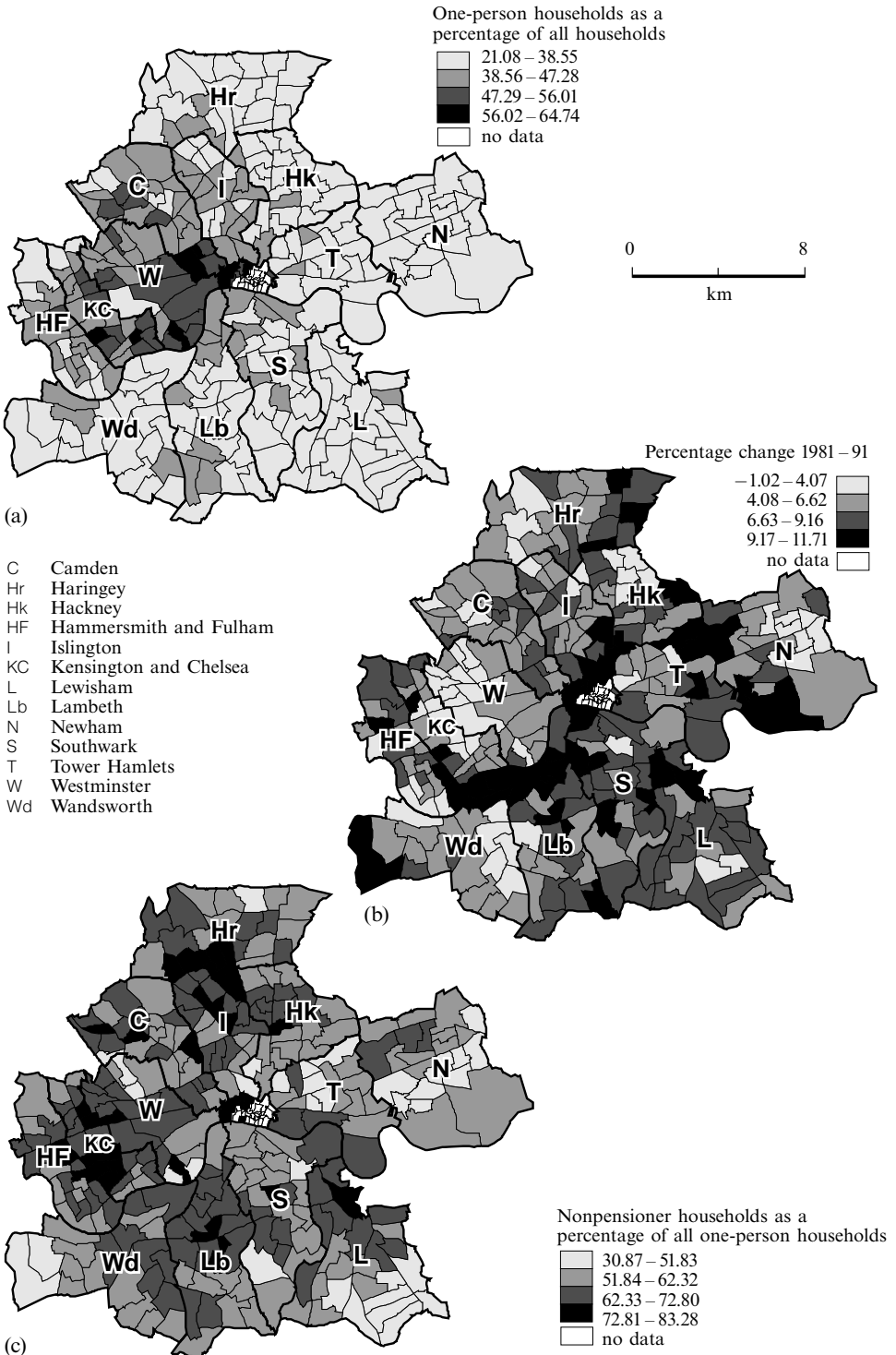
Social class <sup>a</sup>	1981				1991			
	England and Wales		Inner London		England and Wales		Inner London	
	total (%)	living alone (%)	total (%)	living alone (%)	total (%)	living alone (%)	total (%)	living alone (%)
SCI and II	20.8	29.3	21.1	32.1	28.2	35.6	30.6	40.1
SCIII (N)	17.0	20.5	18.7	24.0	20.6	18.3	19.0	19.7
SCIII (M)	19.5	17.5	15.6	12.5	18.2	16.5	12.4	10.5
SCIV and V	19.2	20.7	20.6	18.2	19.9	18.2	16.5	14.6
Other	23.5	12.0	24.0	13.2	13.1	11.4	21.5	15.1

<sup>a</sup> See table 1.

were one-person. In both these boroughs, together with neighbouring Camden, some wards had almost two thirds of households which were one-person [figure 2(a), see over]. This is the traditional area of single-person living, either in bed-sits, pieds-à-terre, or mansion blocks. By contrast, the areas where one-person living was increasing in the 1980s, although widely spread, were particularly concentrated in the northern wards of Wandsworth and Lambeth, parts of Lewisham, as well as wards in Southwark, Tower Hamlets, and Newham—particularly associated with the new housing of the Docklands redevelopment programme—and wards to the north of the City in Islington, Haringey, and Hackney [figure 2(b)]. The proportion of nonpensioner one-person households in each ward is shown in figure 2(c), which shows a similarly diverse, but by no means identical, distribution to that in figure 2(b). Boroughs with higher than average proportions of one-person households under retirement age include parts of Lambeth, Wandsworth, and Lewisham in the south, Islington, Haringey, and parts of Hackney in the north, Kensington and Chelsea and Hammersmith and Fulham to the west, and parts of Tower Hamlets, particularly the Docklands wards, in the east. The increase of one-person households in Tower Hamlets is discussed later in the paper to demonstrate some of the processes associated with these changes in demographic structures.

The increasing proportion of one-person households, and particularly younger one-person households, demonstrates how almost every part of Inner London was experiencing a transition to smaller households and away from family households in the 1980s. This supports the work of Duncan (1991b), who used LS data for 1971 and 1981 to show how inner west London (defined by him as a very broad swathe of boroughs from Brent in the west to Hackney in the east) was an area with high proportions of economically active women living alone, and low proportions of married couple households. (He described this area as having a lower household 'conventionality index'.) This part of London, he argued, played a significant role as a port of entry in terms of migration, in particular for women who were in full-time paid work. Our analysis suggests that the changes associated with increasing household 'unconventionality' as defined by Duncan—particularly economically active women living by themselves—continued during the 1980s as one-person households increased in importance in areas where they were previously less important.

A multiple regression was carried out on the 305 wards in Inner London to see which of a number of variables best explained the geographical variation in the proportion of one-person households in 1991. Two variables accounted for over 80% of the variation. The first, unsurprisingly, was a negative relationship with the



**Figure 2.** One-person households in wards of Inner London (sources: 1981 and 1991 Small Area Statistics): (a) proportion of one-person households 1991; (b) percentage-point change in the proportion of one-person households, 1981–1991; (c) proportion nonpensioner one-person households 1991.

average number of rooms per dwelling, demonstrating the close relationship between accommodation type and household structure. The second, a positive relationship with the proportion of households with a professional household head, highlights the points made above.

### Migration and living alone

Migration is particularly important as a conduit for metropolitan change as individuals and households adjust to national and regional economic, social, and cultural changes. Households themselves are essentially dynamic, with people entering and leaving particular households relatively frequently as they adjust to life-course changes. For example, one study found that the mean survival time for one-person households was 4.76 years (Richards et al, 1987). Younger one-person households in particular are more likely to be associated with a professional, independent, and more migratory lifestyle and, it can be argued, are linked to what Cadwallader (1992) has suggested are the highly mobile and fluid labour-market requirements of global cities. So the socio-economic changes experienced in London during the 1980s discussed earlier in the paper are closely associated with the rise in the number of people living alone, many of whom are likely to have migrated to Inner London from elsewhere in the United Kingdom or from abroad. In this section we attempt briefly to establish something of the relationship between living alone and migration, albeit restricted to a consideration of those migrating from elsewhere in England and Wales.

The 1991 Census showed that 28% of all wholly moving households (households where everyone moved) in England and Wales in the previous twelve months were people living alone aged under 60 at the time of the census. In Inner London, the figure is even higher, at 44%. Something of the relationship between mobility over the previous twelve months and household structure is shown by SARs data (table 7). People living in Inner London were more likely to have moved in the last year compared with the population of England and Wales. Not surprisingly, people aged 20–59 had higher rates of migration than the total population. The national migration rates for the working-age population were lower than those for Inner London, whereas those living alone in Inner London were slightly less migratory over the previous twelve months than the living-alone population nationally.

**Table 7.** Migration rates (percentage of movers within one year) for the total population and those living alone in 1991 for England and Wales and Inner London (source: Samples of Anonymised Records 1991, 2% individual sample).

	England and Wales	Inner London
Total population	9.1	12.3
Total population living alone	8.8	10.0
Population aged 20–59 years	11.5	16.5
Living alone aged 20–59 years	17.0	15.1

Unfortunately, the 1991 Census allows only a limited insight into the mobility of one-person households and is restricted to a one-year picture. However, by using the LS we are able to examine some of the links between migration and living alone in Inner London during the 1980s. Building on earlier work (Hall et al, 1999; 2000; Ogden and Hall, 1998), we look here specifically at the characteristics of migrants living alone in Inner London in 1991. Using the LS, we can track members aged under 50 in 1981, and so aged under 60 in 1991, between the two dates, comparing the migration characteristics of the total LS population with the LS population living

alone in 1991. Obviously, we know nothing of the intervening moves individuals might have made in this ten-year period, nor whether the change of residence was coincident with the move to living alone, but it does enable broad comparisons about migration characteristics to be made.

From the LS sample, Inner London in 1991 had a higher proportion of immigrants in its population—about a quarter—than any other region; this may be compared with the national figure of just over 12%. At the same time, more of these migrants to Inner London from elsewhere in England and Wales were likely to be living alone in 1991 than in any other region in England and Wales. A total of 22% of males and 17% of females who had migrated to Inner London between 1981 and 1991 were living alone in Inner London in 1991, compared with 10.1% and 7.5%, respectively, of those who had migrated between other regions in England and Wales. These migrants to Inner London who were living alone were more youthful than migrants nationally (as indeed were all migrants to London): 80% were aged between 20 and 39 years, compared with 62% nationally.

People who had moved to Inner London sometime between 1981 and 1991 were more likely to be in the professional or managerial and technical social classes in 1991 than were people who had moved between other regions of England and Wales: 57% and 45%, respectively, for men and women (compared with 31% and 23%, respectively, nationally). Men and women living alone who had migrated to London between 1981 and 1991 were even more likely to be in these two social classes: 62% and 53%, respectively, compared with a national figure of 39% for all migrants living alone. Fielding and Halford (1993) showed, for the period 1971–81, that women migrants were more likely to be upwardly socially mobile in the South East region. Our data from the LS show that it was women living alone in Inner London in 1991 who had migrated sometime between 1981 and 1991 who were most likely to have moved up a social class: 28% had done so (compared with only 20% of men living alone) whereas all women migrants showed similar rates of social improvement as their male counterparts (20% and 22%, respectively, moved up a social class). A total of 21% of women migrants living alone nationally improved their social class.

All migrants to Inner London between 1981 and 1991, and especially migrants who were living alone by 1991, were both younger and of a higher social class in 1991 than migrants nationally. London was exerting its power as a magnet to young upwardly mobile people, many of whom were choosing to live alone after arrival. Moreover, there was relatively little difference either in age or in social class by gender for those who had migrated to, and were living alone in, Inner London in 1991. This suggests that Inner London was equally attractive for working-age men and women moving from other parts of England and Wales. High proportions of such migrants were able to achieve high-status jobs, and higher proportions than nationally were likely to live alone.

Changing perspective, we examine people living alone in Inner London in 1991, tracking them back to 1981, and see what proportions had changed residence sometime during the decade and over what distance. The majority of those living alone (69%) had moved sometime during those ten years (compared with 55% of the total population). Using the borough-level LS data, we find that the pattern of greater mobility among those living alone compared with the total population was repeated, but there were contrasts among the boroughs in the patterns of migration. Some, such as Hammersmith and Fulham, were particularly attractive destinations for longer distance migrants: 78% of those living alone there were migrants, and 41% had moved more than 16 kilometres. Others, such as Southwark, were less attractive for longer distance migrants—with only 19% of those living there alone having moved this distance. Tower Hamlets stands out as having one of the highest proportions of longer distance migrants among the sample boroughs—over 33%. Tower Hamlets also

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had one of the most dramatic increases in working-age one-person households of any Inner London borough—89%—and the LS data showed that the social class differences within Tower Hamlets between the population living alone and the total population were greater than in any of the other sample boroughs. It is therefore worth examining Tower Hamlets in greater detail.

### **Tower Hamlets**

Tower Hamlets has already been identified [in figure 2(b)] as an area experiencing a substantial increase in numbers of one-person households between 1981 and 1991 – from 30% to 36%. Some parts of the borough experienced even greater increase, for example, in the wards of St Katharine's and Shadwell in the west, proportions of one-person households increased from 31% to 40% and 28% to 37%, respectively. The changes in parts of Tower Hamlets can be explained partially at least as a result of the impact of the regeneration policies of the London Docklands Development Corporation (LDDC). This aimed to increase tertiary employment and to change the housing structure, with the stated aim of providing "a wide choice of housing in terms of size, price, style and tenure so as to attract back to the area the range of residents needed to create economic development, particularly young and skilled workers, professionals, managerial staff and entrepreneurs" (LDDC Corporate Plan 1986, cited in Hall and Ogden, 1992, page 153). The development of private housing in Docklands in the 1980s coincided with the rapid expansion of the workforce in the City as a result of the growth of the financial sector in London, as discussed earlier, and with the changing culture of longer working hours which made accessible housing important. For Tower Hamlets at least, it is in a combination of these regeneration policies and wider economic change that explanations of household change can be sought.

The restructuring of urban space and in-movement of new residents took place in Tower Hamlets at a pace unique in London during the 1980s, and indeed was a forerunner of developments that have become much more widespread in Inner London during the 1990s. Formerly derelict areas, particularly warehouses but also brownfield sites, were transformed into commercial and housing uses, and were some of the first examples in London of 'loft living', pioneered in New York but rapidly becoming important in London and other major urban centres in the 1980s and 1990s (Ley, 1996; Zukin, 1982; 1991). As well as warehouse conversions, particularly numerous in Wapping and Limehouse, there were over 4600 new-build housing completions in this part of Docklands from July 1981 to March 1998 (most of them private) (LDDC, 2002). The early housing developments in the western wards around Wapping and Limehouse were partly marketed on the basis of their proximity to the booming financial centre of the City of London. Here, in this part of London, we can see the synergy of the wider changes in the London labour market and the availability of housing designed to attract young, skilled, and mobile workers.

From LS data at the borough level, it is possible to track people living alone in 1991 in Tower Hamlets back to 1981. In 1991 those living alone aged under 60 in Tower Hamlets were of significantly higher social class than the total population: 44% were in professional, technical, and managerial social classes, compared with only 20% of the total population. Those living alone were also more likely to be in owner-occupied housing: 43% compared with 32% of the total population. They were also more likely to have changed residence between 1981 and 1991 than the total population, and almost one in five of those living alone had moved more than 80 kilometres. We can thus see how the availability of accommodation as well as the marketing of an area aimed at younger, affluent, and mobile people (Crilley, 1992a; 1992b) had contributed to the changes in its household structure by 1991.

## Conclusions

The 1980s were a period when, despite economic variations, demographic change was significant. Although the overall percentage increase in population numbers was relatively small, the underlying household change was much greater, marking a real shift in the nature of Inner London's population, which in turn laid the foundations for the wider cultural and lifestyle changes that emerged in the 1990s. The growth in one-person households raises a number of questions about the relationship between household structures and changing patterns of tenure, residential mobility, and occupational structure in large cities. We can see in London distinctive household structures, with one-person households becoming increasingly dominant by 1991. We have shown that one-person households of working age increased rapidly during the 1980s. Women as well as men under the age of 60 were increasingly living alone, and large numbers were in higher socioeconomic groups. Tenure changes show that one-person households were moving away from their traditional pattern of renting and that owner occupation was becoming more common.

It is evident too, through the LS data, that younger people choosing to live alone are particularly attracted to Inner London. They are, it can be argued, an integral part of the repopulation of many parts of Inner London, with work, residence, and recreation all in close proximity. Such households are at the leading edge of new ways of urban living with all the other appurtenances of urban change following the households: the restaurants, bars, gyms, and boutiques catering specifically for a young clientele. The growth in Inner London of smaller households characterized by high levels of mobility is a reflection of the specific labour-market requirements of London, which needs people able to move in and out of jobs relatively easily. Individuals attracted by the employment opportunities of London more frequently choose to live alone, salaries increasingly enable them to do so, and the housing market in turn both facilitates and responds to their particular life-style demands. Our analysis of one-person households certainly suggests that Inner London has a distinctive household demography. We must await the results of the 2001 Census to see how far this distinctiveness has developed over the past decade and is being replicated in other urban areas of the country.

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