

Having a birth outside marriage: the proportions of lone mothers and cohabiting mothers who subsequently marry

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This article describes a study in which a sample of just over 211 thousand women giving birth to a child outside marriage during 1988 in England and Wales were traced in the marriage registers to see whether they subsequently married. Since they were not married at the time of the birth, they would have been either lone mothers or cohabiting mothers. For those who did marry during the 8 year period of tracing, information was extracted from copies of the appropriate marriage entries to give a first-time picture of the proportions and characteristics of mothers who subsequently married.

INTRODUCTION – BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

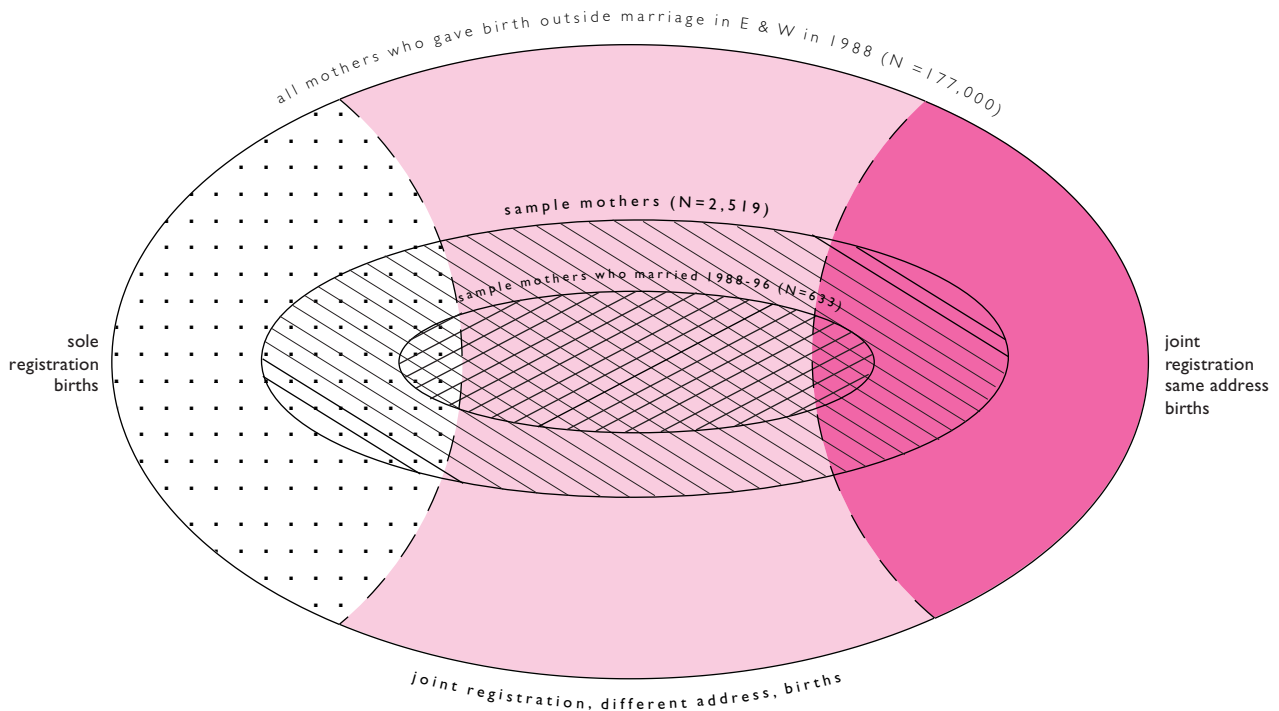
It has been well documented^{1,2,3} that single (never-married) and divorced lone mothers have grown in numbers for at least two decades: particularly divorced lone mothers up to the mid-1980s, and single lone mothers thereafter. With the increase in the divorce rate since the 1960s and the accelerated rise during the last decade in the proportion of all births which have occurred outside marriage, it has been easy to assume that it was to be expected, indeed inevitable, that the numbers of divorced and single lone mothers would increase relentlessly. Whilst it was reasonable to expect the numbers to rise, it was far from inevitable, since another factor enters the equation, and one easily overlooked – the different ways⁴ existing lone mothers can cease to be lone mothers. Because of gaps or inadequacies in our regular data sources, or sample sizes which are too small, it has proved impossible to quantify these *outflows* from the stock of lone mothers. One important such outflow is by marriage – since if a lone mother marries, the family ceases to be a one-parent family and instead becomes a married couple family, and possibly a stepfamily,⁵ too. (Another important outflow is by the lone mother starting to cohabit, a subject not studied in the present article.) Public attention has concentrated on the growth in the number (stock) of lone mothers, and lone parents generally, and also on the inflows, whilst at the same time ignoring, or at least overlooking, the outflows. One of the purposes of this study was to rectify the balance, and to indicate that, for many mothers, lone motherhood is a not a long-term situation.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH INTO THE DYNAMICS OF LONE PARENTHOOD AND COHABITING MOTHERHOOD

There have been a number of important studies on changes in lone parenthood status – both entry into, and exit from, that state. Bradshaw and Millar analysed a representative sample of lone parents in the

Figure 1

Diagrammatic representation of the sample mothers in the study



Note: diagrammatic only - not to scale

United Kingdom in 1989 through the registers of families claiming One Parent Benefit and those claiming Income Support; one part of the study, using sample data on flows, was designed to investigate the duration of lone motherhood and the circumstances of women ceasing to be lone parents.⁶ Ermisch and Francesconi, using retrospective and panel survey data, from the British Household Panel Study, analysed women's life histories by means of lifetable methods to estimate the lifetime incidence of single lone motherhood, and stepfamily formation, as well as the duration of lone motherhood.⁷

A definitive longitudinal study of a representative sample of lone parents in Great Britain in 1991 was carried out by Ford, Marsh, and Finlayson, who interviewed the cohort five times between 1991 and 1998. One of the two main aims of their most recent report⁸ was to answer questions on who leaves lone parenthood, how long it has lasted, and who repartners through marriage or cohabitation. In addition, in a paper presented to a policy seminar held at the University of Bath on lone parenthood and future policy in the United Kingdom, McKay and Rowlingson drew on quantitative data from the Social Change and Economic Life Initiative (SCLEI), to consider exits from lone motherhood.⁹ In another paper at the same seminar, Haskey presented fresh retrospective survey data on the marital and cohabitational histories of lone, cohabiting and married mothers with dependent children.¹ With regard to cohabiting mothers, a detailed research study¹⁰ – whose findings are particularly relevant to this present analysis – was undertaken by McRae who analysed a sample of cohabiting mothers who had given birth to a child in 1988. The study investigated the attitudes of the cohabiting mothers towards marriage, and reported the results of follow-up interviews in 1992 on the number of them who had married during the four-year period. In addition, a

recent extensive volume¹¹ by Kiernan, Land, and Lewis has studied the demographic and policy aspects of lone motherhood in this century, including the changing demography of lone motherhood.

SOURCE OF THE SAMPLE DATA FOR THE PRESENT STUDY

The main source of information on the growth in numbers of births outside marriage has been derived from copies of birth entries.¹² Births outside marriage may either be registered by the mother alone – sole registrations – or else by both parents – joint registrations. Amongst jointly registered births, those in which the two parents were living at the same address have been distinguished from those living at different addresses. Statistics on these three main groups of births outside marriage have been published since 1986.¹² In the absence of more definitive information, some tentative assumptions are often made that births outside marriage registered solely by the mother – or jointly registered with the parents giving different addresses – indicate that the mother is probably living as a lone mother, whereas jointly registered, same parental address births indicate that the mother is likely to be living with the father as a cohabiting couple. Whilst these assumptions may be valid for many mothers at the time of the birth of their child, the situation is undoubtedly less sure several months, and still less a few years, later. As a consequence the other main purpose of this study is to provide some firmer evidence of the family status of these mothers and their children some time after their birth.

SELECTING THE SAMPLE

A systematic sample of just over 2½ thousand births outside marriage, from the total of 177 thousand such births, was selected from the 1988

births file for England and Wales, representing a 1.4 per cent sample. The sample was confined not only to the subset of births outside marriage, but also to the 10 per cent of births where the mother's occupation and social class were coded. These characteristics of mothers *in their own right* have been coded since 1986, and, of course, occupation and social class were available in the sample for both the mother *and*, amongst jointly registered births, the father, as well. Of course, amongst births outside marriage, a proportion take place to mothers who register their children's birth as sole registrations, so amongst this group, occupation and social class of the mother are particularly important, since the corresponding information on the child's father is not available.

The mothers were traced in the marriage registers from the date of birth of the child up to the end of 1996. If it was thought that a mother had married, a copy of the relevant marriage entry was extracted to confirm that a correct link had been made. From the copy of the marriage entry

it was noted whether the sample mother had married the father, or someone else. Other items of information were also extracted from the copy of the marriage entry. Further details on extracting the sample of births, tracing whether the child's mother had subsequently married, and deciding whether she had married the father, are given in Box 1. Also, Figure 1 gives a diagrammatic representation the different groups of mothers studied in this article.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

At birth registration, the number of previous live births the mother has had is only collected from *married* mothers – and, even then, is confined to the number of children born *within* marriage, either current or previous. Unfortunately, therefore, it was not possible to find out whether, for each mother in the sample, the birth in 1988 was her first. If it *was*, and she was not cohabiting, the birth would mark the start of her becoming a lone mother; if it was *not*, and she was not cohabiting,

Box one

EXTRACTING THE SAMPLE OF BIRTHS AND TRACING WHETHER THE MOTHER SUBSEQUENTLY MARRIED

THE SAMPLE OF BIRTHS

The sample was taken in two separate stages: first the computer file of the *statistical* details of births during 1988 was accessed and the records selected as described above; then the registration details of those sampled records were linked to the corresponding records in the 1988 computer file of 1988 births registrations, so that the references could be found to extract copies of the appropriate birth entries. (The birth computer file of *statistical* details gave only the link to the corresponding record in the computer file of birth registration details – which in turn gave only the name of the *child* born outside marriage. Only by extracting a copy of the birth entry could the name of the child's *mother* be obtained – and also, if appropriate, the name of the child's *father*.) Of course, there is no absolute guarantee that the men who jointly registered the births outside marriage with the mothers were the *biological* fathers, although the vast majority undoubtedly were. In this article, for simplicity, they are referred to as the fathers.

TRACING MARRIAGES

Once the mothers' names had been obtained, they were looked up in the lists of women married in 1988 and successive years up to and including 1996 to see whether the mothers had married. (Occasionally, the mother had been using an *alternative* surname, which was additionally recorded in the birth entry. In such instances, a search was carried out in the marriage registers under both names.) In cases where a father's name was registered in the birth entry, it was noted whether or not the mother had married the father. For the years up to and including 1993, microfiche indexes of marriages were used, whereas for 1994 to 1996,

inclusive, the computerised marriage index database was searched. Copies of the marriage entries of women who might be the sample mother were obtained and various checks made to decide whether one definitely was the sample mother.

In most instances, it was reasonably clear-cut when a link had correctly been made – especially when both the mother's and father's name appeared on the marriage entry. Even where only the mother's name was available, if she had an unusual name, or several forenames it was still fairly straightforward to establish it was the same woman; also it was sometimes possible to compare the signatures on the birth and marriage entries. Where only the mother's name was known – because the birth was registered solely by the mother – it was very occasionally more difficult to be completely sure whether a woman with the same name who had married was in fact the same person as the mother in the sample. Such cases only arose when the mother possessed a common name, but certain additional checks were made, such as whether the age at maternity was consistent with the age at marriage; whether the place of birth and of marriage were in the same locality; whether the occupations of the mother and of the woman marrying were similar; and so on. Another important clue was the surname given to the child at birth. If it was different from the mother's surname, and the mother subsequently married a man with that surname, it was concluded that he was the father. Checking all such criteria for the different types of birth resulted in only a very few possible links remaining uncertain.

Once it was decided that the sample mother had indeed married, various items of information were extracted from the copy of the marriage entry and coded – see Box 2. These items were then added to the file of statistical data on the sample births outside marriage – extending the records for those births where the mother had subsequently married.

she would most likely already have been a lone mother. In addition, at birth registration, it is only recorded whether the birth occurred inside or outside marriage; if the latter, the mother's precise legal marital status – single, divorced, or widowed – is not collected. However, previous marital status is recorded at marriage registration, so that, for sample mothers who married, their marital status could be obtained. The items of information extracted from the marriage entries of mothers who subsequently married are given in Box 2.

REPRESENTATIVENESS OF THE SAMPLE

The sample of 2,519 births outside marriage closely resembles the entire set of births outside marriage during 1988, as measured by the profile of the mothers' age at birth and by the type of birth registration (Table 1). Hence, 3 in every ten mothers had registered the birth by themselves without the father's details being recorded; 5 in every ten mothers had jointly registered the birth with the father, with both parents giving the same address, and the remaining two in every ten mothers had jointly registered the birth with the father, the parents living at different addresses. In addition, one in four sample mothers was a teenager, and two in five were in their early twenties, so that about two thirds of all the sample mothers were aged under 25. Given that the peak age group for women to marry in recent years has been the late twenties, it was expected, solely on the basis of age, that many of the lone and cohabiting mothers would marry in the subsequent 5 or so years.

The social class profile of the sample of births – as measured by the *father's* social class – is also very similar to the corresponding profile for all births outside marriage during 1988 in England and Wales, as Table 2 shows (last two columns). Of course, in order to consider the *father's* social class, attention has to be restricted to *jointly* registered births – but these formed the majority, two thirds, of all births outside marriage in 1988. Table 2 also gives the social class profile of the mothers – based on their own occupation and employment status. Overall, a large proportion – over 6 in every ten – were not economically active. Furthermore, the social class profiles of the mothers are very similar for the different types of births registrations. In contrast, the social class profiles of the fathers differ somewhat – for example, in the proportions of fathers in Social Class IIIM – skilled manual occupations.

PROPORTIONS OF THE MOTHERS WHO MARRIED

Overall, one quarter of the sample mothers married between giving birth in 1988, and 1996; 633 of the sample of 2,519. This proportion varies considerably according to age of the mother at

Box two

INFORMATION CODED FROM THE MARRIAGE ENTRIES OF MOTHERS WHO SUBSEQUENTLY MARRIED

1. Identity of husbands:
 - father
 - someone else
 - uncertain whether the father or not
2. Full date of marriage
3. Mother's age at marriage
4. Husband's age at marriage
5. Previous marital status of mother
6. Previous marital status of husband
7. Registration district of marriage
8. Manner of solemnisation: Civil (Register Office), Religious
9. Denomination
10. Whether mother's occupation in marriage entry was of similar type to that of husband:
 - Yes
 - No
 - No occupation of mother given in birth or marriage entry
11. Whether mother's occupation in marriage entry was similar to that in birth entry:
 - Yes
 - No
 - No occupation of mother given in marriage entry
12. Whether residential addresses before marriage of mother and husband were identical

maternity and also by the type of birth registration (Table 3). Perhaps not surprisingly, mothers who jointly registered the birth with the father, both living at the same address, married in proportionately largest numbers; 3 in every ten. The group of mothers to marry in the next largest numbers were those who jointly registered the birth with the father but lived at different addresses; about one in 4 such mothers subsequently married.

Table 1 Births outside marriage, 1988, England and Wales

Type birth registration	Addresses of mother and father	Age of mother at birth					
		Under 20	20-24	25-29	30-34	35 & over	All ages
All births outside marriage in 1988							
Sole	-	10	11	6	2	1	30
Joint	same	9	19	12	6	3	49
Joint	different	7	8	3	1	1	20
Total	all	25	38	22	10	5	100*
Sample births outside marriage in 1988							
Sole	-	10	12	5	3	1	31
Joint	same	9	19	12	6	3	49
Joint	different	7	7	3	1	1	20
Total	all	26	39	21	10	4	100**

* equivalent to 177,352 births outside marriage.

** equivalent to 2,519 births outside marriage.

Table 2**Profile by social class of sample mothers and fathers of children born outside marriage, by type of birth registration, 1988, England and Wales**

Percentages

Social class	Mother's social class				Father's social class				100% 1988 births
	Sole	Joint registrations			Joint registrations				
		Same address	Different addresses	Total	Same address	Different addresses	Total		
I Professional occs	0.4	0.6	0.2	0.5	2	2	2	} 15	
II Intermediate occs	5	8	5	7	15	9	13		
IIIN Skilled non-manual	11	16	16	16	7	8	8	7	
IIIM Skilled manual	5	5	4	5	43	36	41	} 42	
IV Partly skilled occs	10	9	10	9	18	19	19		
V Unskilled occs	0.9	0.9	0.8	0.9	12	18	14		
Inadequately described Housewives, students no occupation etc	0.3	0.7	1	0.9	1.2	0.8	1.1	} 4	
	68	60	63	61	2	4	3		
Total - percentage	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	
Total - sample no	787	1,230	502	1,732	1,230	502	1,732	123,400	

Note: all columns, apart from the last refer to sample mothers and fathers.

Table 3**Percentage of mothers who married, 1988-96, by age of mother at birth, England and Wales**

Percentages

Age of mother at birth	Type of birth registration			Total	
	Sole	Joint		%	Sample number*
		Same address	Different addresses		
Under 20	18	31	26	25	659
20-24	19	36	24	29	972
25-29	15	27	24	23	526
30-34	9	28	(38)	21	251
35 and over	4	19		13	111
All ages - percentage	17	31	24	25	2,519
All ages - sample no*	787	1,230	502	2,519	

* base for 100 per cent in preceding column/row.

Mothers who registered the births by themselves – most often thought to be lone mothers – were least likely overall to marry subsequently; only one in 6 did so.

One in 4 teenage mothers subsequently married, and three in every ten mothers who were in their early twenties. The proportion of mothers who married declined with successively older ages at maternity, so that only about one in 8 mothers who gave birth at age 35 or over subsequently married. Mothers who had jointly registered their births with the fathers with whom they were residing were the most likely to marry, particularly those mothers who were in their early twenties; over one in 3 did so.

Table 4 considers the men whom the mothers married – and allows the proportions of mothers who subsequently married the fathers to be compared with the proportions marrying someone other than the father. Overall, one in 5 mothers married the father, with only 3 per cent definitely marrying someone other than the father. Mothers who jointly registered the births with the fathers, both living at the same address, were proportionately more likely to marry the fathers than the corresponding mothers whose residential addresses were different from those of the fathers; the ratio of marrying the father to marrying someone else was roughly 9 to 1 for the

former group, but only 4 to 1 for the latter group. Overall, amongst the 25 per cent of mothers who married, 19 per cent married the fathers, that is, around three quarters of all mothers who did marry, married the fathers.

Inevitably, amongst mothers who had registered the birth of their child as a sole registration, there was a relatively high proportion of cases where it was uncertain whether or not the mother married the father of her child – 11 out of the total of 17 per cent. Interestingly, even amongst births which were solely registered by the mother, it was reasonably certain that at least one in 20 of the mothers married the child's father. Roughly half the number of such cases could be decided because the child's surname was different from the mother's, but the same as that of the man the mother married, and in the other half of cases the initial sole registration was replaced by a later joint registration, from which the father's name could be obtained. (It is worth noting that such re-registrations of births which were originally registered solely by the mother are not taken into account in the published birth statistics – for the very practical reason that they can take place at any time after the birth.) Further information on re-registrations of sole registration births, and on the sole registration mothers in the study who married the fathers, are given in Box 3.

Table 4

Percentage of mothers who married, 1988-96, by whether married the father, England and Wales

Person whom the mother married	Type of birth registration			Total
	Sole	Joint		
		Same address	Different addresses	
the father	5	28	19	19
another man	1	3	5	3
not sure whether the father or not	11	-	0	4
Total - percentage	17	31	24	25
Total - sample no	787	1,230	502	2,519

Figure 2 shows the proportions of mothers who married the fathers, by both age of the mother at maternity, and also by type of birth registration. (Consequently, the proportions in Figure 2 correspond to those in Table 3, except that those in Figure 2 refer specifically to mothers marrying the fathers.) Similar to the pattern in Table 3, the overall proportions of mothers who married the fathers are largest for same address joint registrations (3 in every 10), followed by different

address joint registrations (2 in every 10) and smallest for sole registrations (1 in every 20). In general, the proportions marrying the fathers are largest for mothers who were aged under 25 at maternity – the same result as found in Table 3.

There is some variation, by social class of the mother, in the proportions who married (Table 5). In general, there is some evidence of a social class gradient, with slightly smaller proportions of non-manual social class mothers marrying than manual social class mothers (penultimate column). The differential in the proportions of mothers marrying by the type of birth registration is pronounced, and fairly similar for every social class of mother. Overall, mothers in Social Class IIIM – Skilled manual occupations – married in the relatively largest numbers; the proportion was over one third of those in Social Class IIIM who had jointly registered their children's birth with the father, both parents giving the same address.

Box three

SOLE REGISTRATION BIRTHS AND THEIR POSSIBLE SUBSEQUENT RE-REGISTRATION

After a mother has registered the birth of her child as a sole registration, one or two (or none) of the following 3 events can subsequently take place:

1. The birth is re-registered to include the (unmarried) father's name [for example, on the parents jointly supplying the information];
2. The mother marries the father, and they apply for the birth to be re-registered as a child of the marriage;
3. The mother marries the father, but they do not apply for the birth to be re-registered, and the original birth entry stands.

In the study, there were 36 'sole registration mothers' who subsequently married the fathers:

- 1 in which [sole registration → joint re-registration → marriage → no re-registration]
 - 1 in which [sole registration → joint re-registration → marriage → re-registration]
 - 13 in which [sole registration → marriage → no re-registration]
 - 20 in which [sole registration → marriage → re-registration]
- (plus one joint registration which had originally been miscoded as a sole registration)

Hence among the group of 35 'true sole registration mothers' who married the fathers, 22 subsequently re-registered the birth.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MOTHERS WHO MARRIED

By age at maternity

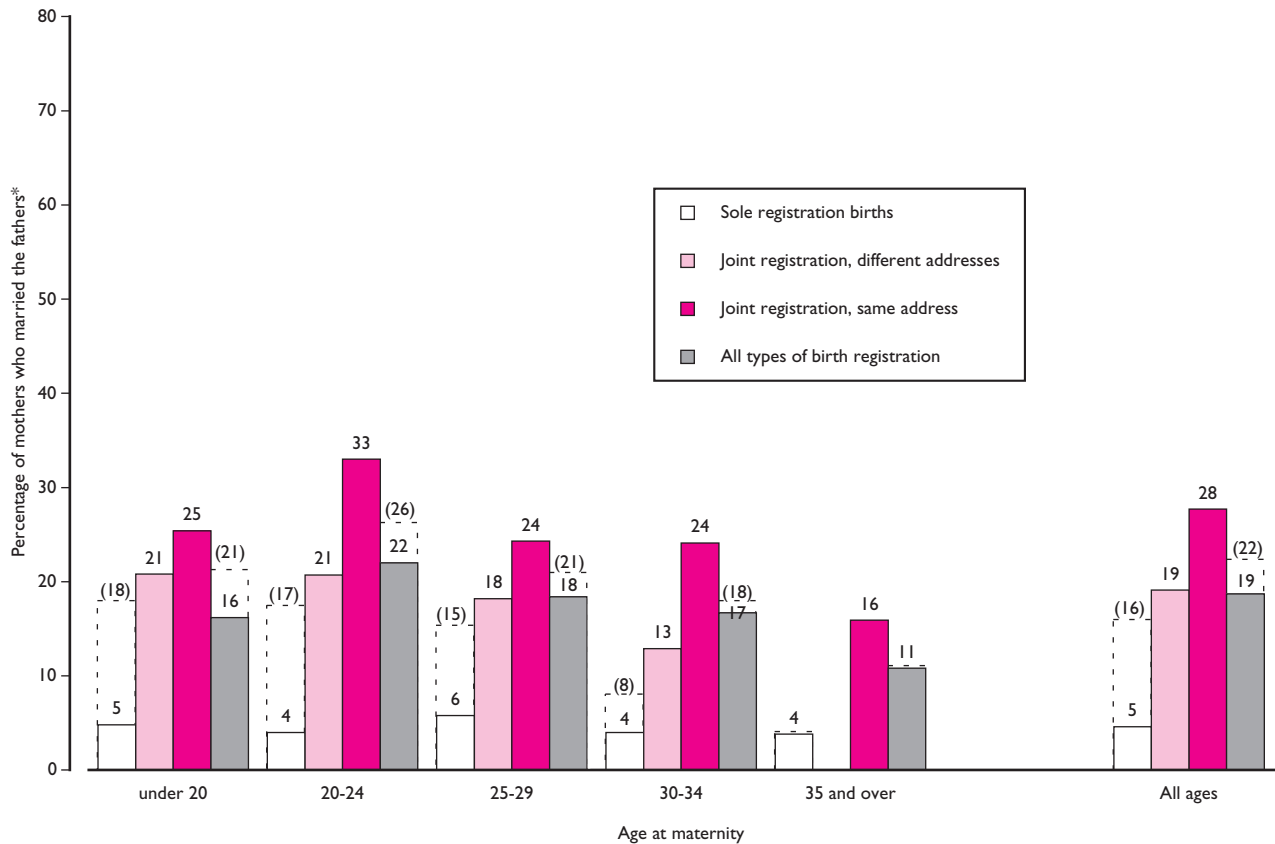
Mothers who married tended to have had their children at the youngest ages, compared with mothers who did not marry (Table 6). Seven in ten of all mothers who married were aged 25 or under when they gave birth. Amongst mothers who jointly registered the births and who married the fathers, the age profile of mothers who gave the same residential address as the father was older than for those giving different addresses. This finding suggests that having different addresses may be as indicative of age as of being a lone mother or a cohabiting mother; the fact that over one in four such mothers marrying the father were teenagers at maternity suggests that for a sizeable proportion of these mothers, the addresses were different because the mother was still living in her parental home.

By marital status before marriage

Four in every five of the mothers who married were single (never-married), and one in every five was divorced. (Table 7 – column 3). Almost two thirds of the marriages involving the mothers were the first for both partners; only in one in 10 couples had both spouses been previously divorced. Also shown in Table 7 are the corresponding profiles by previous marital status, separately for the mothers who married the fathers, and for the mothers who married someone else. Overall, the profiles are fairly similar, although single mothers in the sample appeared slightly more likely – though not statistically significantly so – to marry divorced men than all single women who married in the period (final column in Table 7). Part of the explanation could lie in a high proportion of the divorced men being the fathers of their children born outside marriage, although it could also be a feature of the different age profiles of the sample mothers who married and of all women who married in 1990.

Figure 2

Percentage of mothers who married the fathers*, 1988-96, by age at maternity and type of birth registration, England and Wales



* for sole registration births, the lower solid histogram includes only those husbands where it is certain they were the fathers; the upper, dotted histogram represents the additional husbands where it is not sure whether they were the fathers or not.
 † no sample mothers married.

Table 5

Percentage of mothers who married, 1988-96, by social class of mother, England and Wales

Social class of mother	Type of birth registration			Total	
	Sole	Joint		%	Sample number*
		Same address	Different addresses		
Professional occs				(27)	11
II Intermediate occs	12	27	18	21	164
IIIN Skilled non-manual occs	14	33	25	27	355
IIIM Skilled manual occs	26	35	(26)	31	120
IV Partly skilled occs				27	236
V Unskilled occs	20	32	26	32	22
Inadequately described				(24)	17
Housewives, students, no occupation, etc	16	31	23	24	1,594
All social classes - percentage	17	31	24	25	2,519
All social classes - sample no*	787	1,230	502	2,519	

* forms base of 100 per cent for preceding column/row.
 bracketed percentages are based on a sample number of fewer than 20.

Table 6 Profile of mothers who married, 1988-96, by age of mother at birth, type of birth registration and whether married the father, England and Wales Percentages

Age of mother at birth	Joint birth registration				Sole regs	All mothers	
	Same address		Different addresses			all mothers who married	in sample*
	married father	married another man	married father	married another man			
Under 20	17	32	40	43	35		
20-24	48	32	40	26	43	39	44
25-29	21	20	17	22	16	21	19
30-34	10	12	4	9	5	10	8
35 and over	3	5	0	0	1	4	2
All ages - percentage	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
All ages - sample no	340	41	96	23	131	2,519	633

* i.e. whether or not they married.

Table 7 Characteristics of the mothers who married, 1988-96, England and Wales Percentages

Marital status before marriage mother/husband	Mothers in sample who married:			All women who married in 1990
	the father	not the father/ not sure	total	
Spinster/bachelor	64	62	64	63
Spinster/divorced man	15	21	16	10
Divorced woman/bachelor	10	9	10	9
Divorced woman/divorced man	11	9	10	13
Widow/divorced man	0.2	0	0.2	1
Total - percentage	100	100	100	100*
Total - sample no	472	160	632	331,150

* Note: includes 4 other marital status categories not identified above (for which there were no sample mothers).

Table 8 Profile of mothers who married, 1988-96, by age at marriage, and by manner of solemnisation, England and Wales Percentages

Age of mother at marriage	Cof E/C in W		Roman Catholic		Non-conformist#		Civil (Register Office)		All marriages*	
	Sample mothers	1990 brides	Sample mothers	1990 brides	Sample mothers	1990 brides	Sample mothers	1990 brides	Sample mothers	1990 brides
Under 20	17	7	8	5	4	4	8	7	9	7
20-24	59	53	47	46	29	32	36	24	40	37
25-29	18	30	28	35	43	29	33	24	30	27
30 and over	6	10	17	13	25	34	24	45	21	29
Total										
- percentages	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Total - sample no/no**	109	115,328	36	22,455	28	28,186	451	156,875	633	331,150

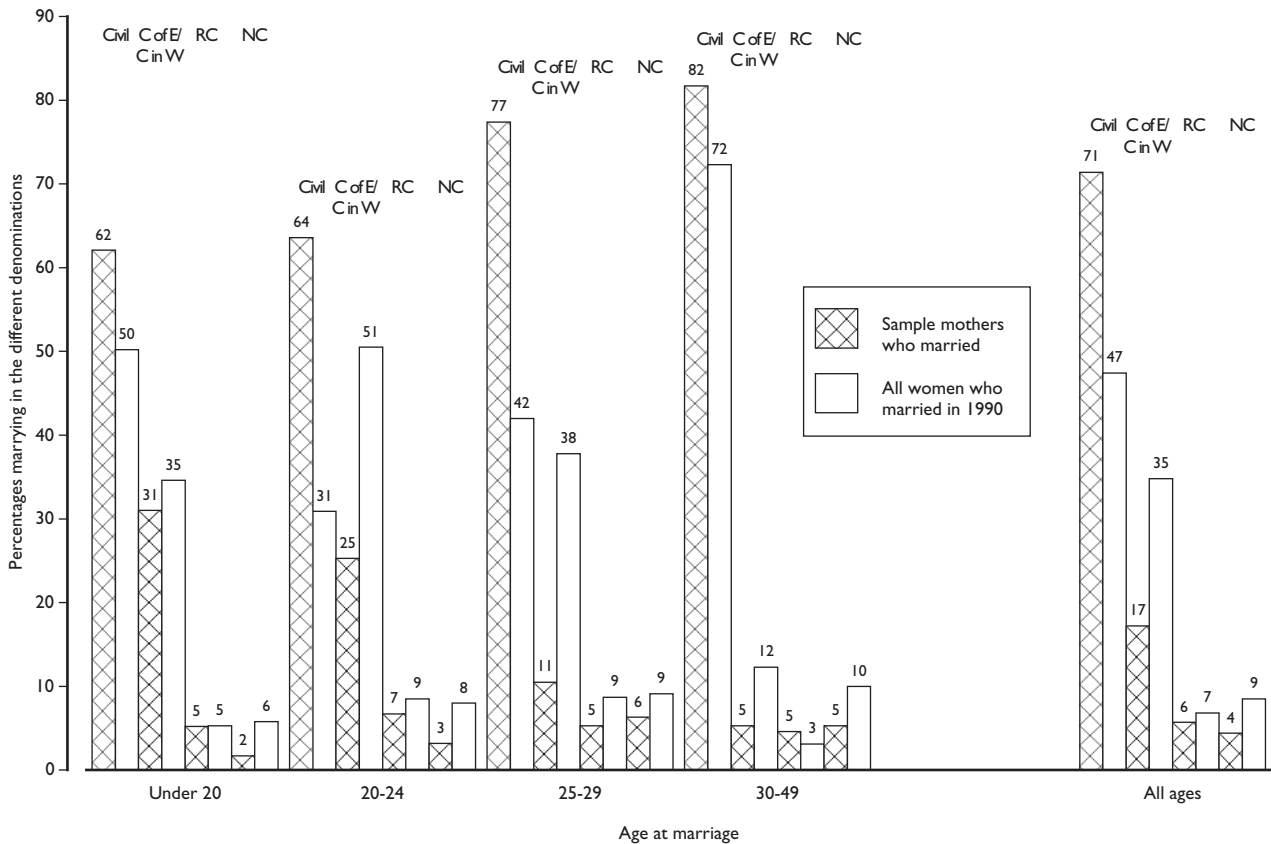
Methodist, Congregationalists, Baptists and United Reformed Church.

* includes some marriages in denominations other than those shown (for only 8 of the sample mothers).

** forms base of 100 per cent.

Figure 3

Sample mothers who married 1988-96, and all women who married in 1990 – percentages marrying in the different denominations*, separately for each age-group of women at marriage, England and Wales



* Percentages for other denominations are not shown – but included in the base of 100 per cent.

By manner of solemnisation and age at marriage

The sample mothers who married did so in proportionately larger numbers with a civil ceremony in a Register Office than all brides who married during the period – in fact, the sample mothers were 1½ times as likely to marry with a civil wedding; the proportions were approximately seven in every 10 and five in every 10, respectively (see Figure 3). In contrast, the proportions of sample mothers who married in the Church of England/Church in Wales, or in one of the Non-conformist churches were only one half those of all brides. Amongst those who did marry in the Anglican Church, the sample mothers were younger in age profile than their counterpart brides who married in the same period, whereas there was not such a contrast amongst those marrying in the Roman Catholic Church (Table 8). The sample mothers who married with a civil ceremony were appreciably younger than all brides who had a civil wedding – over three quarters of the former group were aged under 30, whereas the corresponding proportion amongst the latter group was only just over one half.

By whether the addresses before marriage were identical

It has been established¹³ that spouses giving identical residential addresses before marriage in their marriage entry is a good indicator of pre-marital cohabitation. The original reason for investigating this association was twofold – to consider whether identical addresses was a good proxy variable for this purpose, and, if so, to obtain some

evidence to substantiate that conclusion. The idea that identity of addresses might be informative was partly influenced by the distinguishing, in birth statistics, of same/different residential addresses of the parents in jointly registered births outside marriage. In the present study on mothers who married, whether the addresses were identical can be investigated in both the birth and the marriage entry. For example, the marriage entries of the sample mothers of jointly registered births with the same parental addresses where the mother married the father can be examined to see the proportion in which the pre-marital addresses were identical. In such cases, the births have usually been thought of as being to cohabiting couples; it would be understandable if the couple had continued living together until their marriage, in which case identical addresses might be expected in the marriage entry too.

This latter surmise for the particular example quoted proves to be borne out in practice; almost 9 in every 10 such mothers who married the fathers gave identical addresses in their marriage entry (Table 9). For mothers who jointly registered the births with the fathers, but who were living at *different* addresses, the proportion was smaller, at fewer than 6 in every ten. Despite this proportion being smaller, it nevertheless seems anomalous that as many as six in every 10 lived with their future husband before marriage when they had not been living at the same address at the birth of their child. Possibly family, accommodation, or work considerations prevented the couple living together at the birth of their child, but they were able to move in together shortly afterwards and before their marriage.

Table 9

Profile of mothers who married, 1988-96, by whether the addresses before marriage of the spouses were identical, England and Wales
Percentages

Type of birth registration	Man whom the mother married	Addresses before marriage		Total	
		identical	different	%	sample no
Sole	the father	72	28	100	36
Sole	someone else	(57)	(43)	100	7
Sole	not sure	58	42	100	88
Joint - same address	the father	87	13	100	340
Joint - same address	someone else	71	29	100	41
Joint - same address	not sure	(0)	(100)	100	1
Joint - different addresses	the father	58	42	100	96
Joint - different addresses	someone else	70	30	100	23
Joint - same address	all	85	15	100	382
Joint - different addresses	all	61	39	100	119

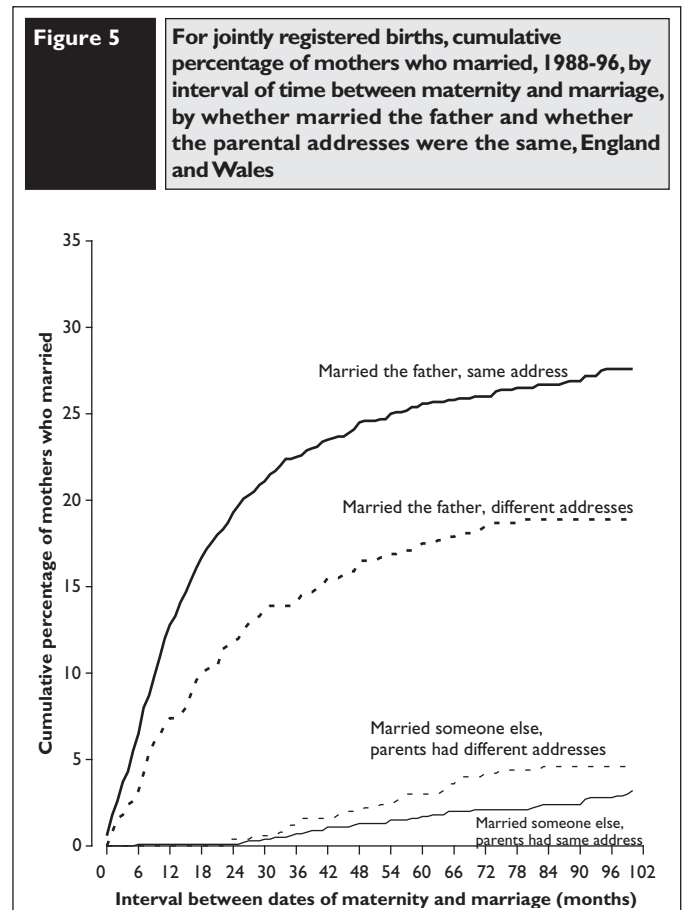
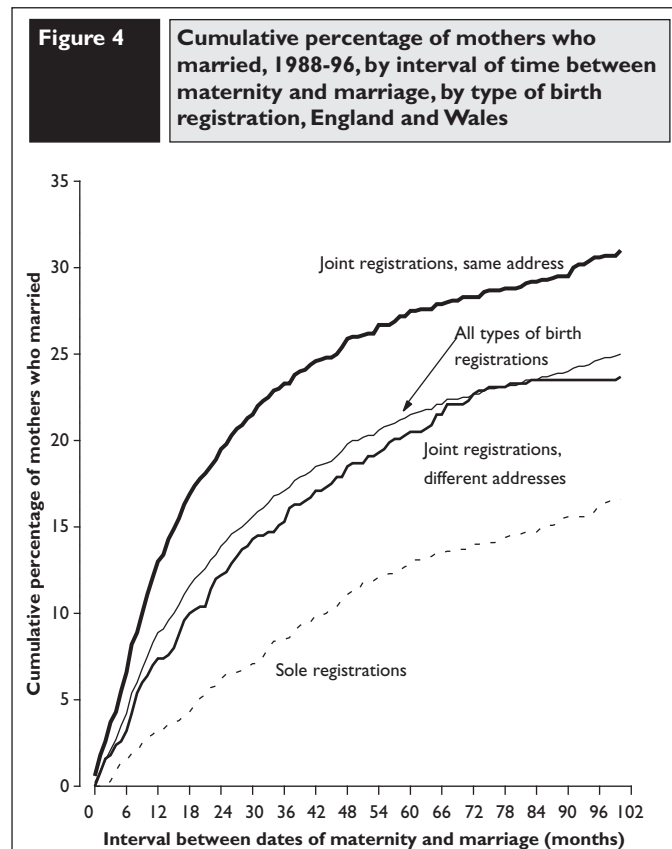
This example illustrates the fact that a proportion of mothers who jointly register the birth with the father but are not living at the same address, do subsequently move in with him, so ceasing being lone mothers. Table 9 also gives some evidence that jointly registered, same parental address births do, in fact, represent births to mothers living in cohabiting couples. Some further details on addresses for jointly registered births where the mother married the father are given in Box 4.

TIME INTERVAL BETWEEN MATERNITY AND MARRIAGE

During the first six months after having a birth outside marriage, relatively few mothers married (Figure 4), as has been confirmed elsewhere.¹⁴ Even amongst mothers who had jointly registered the birth with the fathers with the same address, only 5 per cent married, and the corresponding proportion was even smaller amongst mothers of jointly registered births with different addresses. Nevertheless, the same pace

of marriage as in the first half year was maintained throughout the two years following the birth for each of the three groups of mothers shown in Figure 4, so that about 19, 12, and 6 per cent of joint registration same address mothers, joint registration different address mothers, and sole registration mothers, respectively, had married within two years. After this period, the pace slackened somewhat, particularly for the first-mentioned group of mothers. However, it is notable that amongst each of the groups of mothers, the proportion marrying continued to rise, even after some 6 years or so. However, very few extra mothers with jointly registered births with different parental addresses married after about 7 years.

Of course, of equal interest are the corresponding patterns of marriage of the mothers to the fathers, and to others, by the length of time since



Box four

FURTHER ANALYSIS OF THE ADDRESSES IN THE BIRTH AND MARRIAGE ENTRIES

The addresses in the birth and marriage entries were analysed for the sub-sample of mothers who had jointly registered the birth with the father, and subsequently married the father. The idea was to see the pattern of moves – or of living together throughout the entire period – of the mother and father up to the time of their marriage. The sub-sample is most usefully considered in two parts:

	Birth entry address of:		Marriage entry address of:		Comment	Sample number	%
	mother	father	mother	father			
(a) Same addresses, A, in birth entry for mother and father							
(i)	A	A	A	A	All 4 addresses identical	199	58
(ii)	A	A	B	B	addresses in marriage entry identical - but different from those in birth entry	101	30
(iii)	A	A	(all combinations of 2 different addresses)		addresses in marriage entry different, possibly with one in common with the birth entry address	40	12
Total	A	A	(all combinations)			340	100
(b) Different addresses, A and B, in birth entry for mother and father							
(i)	A	B	A	A	marriage addresses identical - and same as mother's birth entry address	15	16
(ii)	A	B	B	B	marriage addresses identical - and same as father's birth entry address	4	4
(iii)	A	B	C	C	marriage addresses identical - but different from both birth entry address	33	34
(iv)	A	B	(all combinations of 2 different addresses)		marriage addresses different, possibly with one (or both) in common with those in birth entry	44	46
Total	A	B	(all combinations)			96	100

Hence, amongst couples of the jointly registered *same* address births in which the mother married the father, about two thirds of mothers and fathers had the same, identical, addresses from the time of birth to just before the marriage. Most of the remaining couples had moved to another address – which they shared – between the birth and the marriage.

Amongst the couples of the jointly registered *different* address births, almost one half had different addresses both at birth and just before marriage. One third of couples moved from their addresses in the birth entry to a different address – which they shared – just before marriage. Only in about one in 5 couples did one parent move in with the other parent before their marriage.

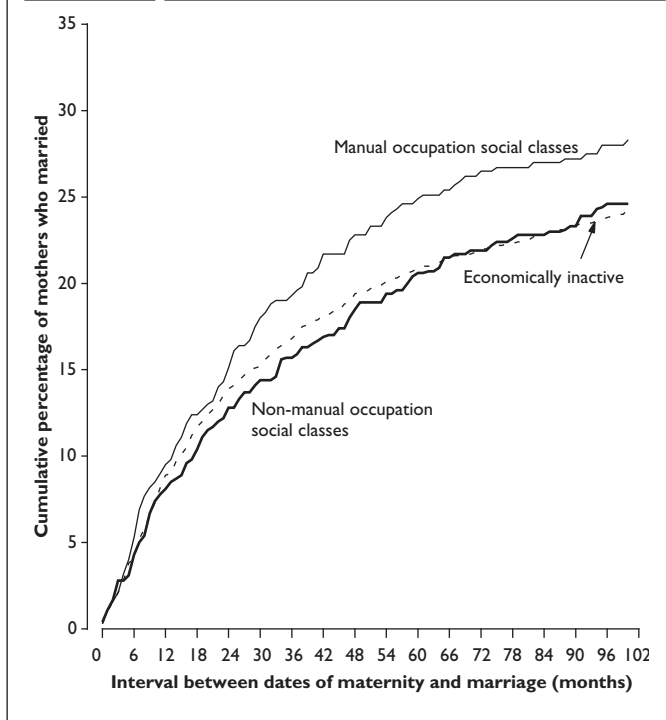
the birth. Because for every sole registration birth where it was reasonably certain that the mother had married the father, there were two where it was impossible to tell, attention is best focussed on the mothers of jointly registered births. Figure 5 shows the cumulative proportions of such mothers who married, by type of joint birth registration, that is, same or different parental addresses, and by whether or not the mother married the father.

There is a fundamental difference in the timing of marriage between the mothers who married the father, and the mothers who married someone

else. Mothers started marrying the fathers immediately after the birth of their child; indeed the cumulative proportion grew at its fastest rate during the first year. In contrast, virtually no mothers married men other than the fathers during the first two years – and the proportions were only 1 or 2 per cent by the end of the third year. Furthermore, this basic finding applies whether or not the father lived at the same address as the mother at the time of birth. Some fathers possibly wanted no further involvement after the birth of the child, and the mothers were too occupied looking after their babies during the first few years to have a full social life and meet potential husbands. Also, men other than the

Figure 6

Cumulative percentages of mothers who married, 1988-96, by interval of time between maternity and marriage, by social class of mother, England and Wales



fathers are possibly less willing to marry women with young babies than those with older children. Alternatively the mothers may have been having an unsuccessful relationship with the father at the time of the birth, even though the father might be committed to her and their child. The very occurrence of the birth might have caused the relationship to founder, and so prevent the mother from marrying the father.

It is also notable from Figure 5 that, amongst mothers where the mother's and father's addresses were the same at the time of birth, the proportion of mothers who married continued to grow even after 7 years, unlike the corresponding proportion of mothers where the parents had given different addresses. Somewhat surprisingly, this result applies equally to mothers who married the fathers and mothers who married others. Possibly, the mothers who were living at different addresses from the fathers were living in her parental home as a three-generation household; once the child was 5 or 6, the pattern of family living, perhaps with active grandmother or grandparental support, was firmly established. In such circumstances, the mother might not be inclined to marry – either the father, or another man.

The pace of marriage by social class of the mother (Figure 6) did not show as much variation as that by type of birth registration, partly because a large proportion of the mothers – 6 in every ten – were not economically active, as shown in Table 2. Overall, mothers who were in the manual occupation social classes were slightly more likely to marry than those in the non-manual occupation social classes; 28 per cent of the former and 25 per cent of the latter had married by the end of 1996 (Figure 6). The pace of marriage over the 8-year period for mothers who were economically inactive was very similar to that for mothers in the non-manual social classes. (Even though there is little variation in the pace and proportions of mothers who married between the manual and non-manual social classes of mothers shown in Figure 6, when the proportions are considered by social class of the father, the differential disappears completely.)

OTHER RESULTS

Of the sample mothers who married, about one in 13 had a similar type of occupation to that of her husband, so that it is possible that they had met at work. On excluding the sample mothers for whom an occupation was not given in the marriage entry, the proportion rose to 17 per cent, very close to the corresponding estimate amongst 18 per cent of couples with identical addresses before their marriage in 1981. For the sample mothers who gave an occupation in both the birth and the marriage entry, about four in every 5 gave similar jobs in both; the idea was to make a subjective judgement of whether the mother had changed jobs at the same level of skill. Overall, 76 per cent of the sample mothers gave identical addresses before marriage to their husbands – which may be compared with the proportion of 60 per cent of all women who married in 1994. However, as has been seen, there is a very different mix of civil and religious marriages amongst the sample mothers, compared with all brides. For civil marriages, the proportion with identical addresses was 86 per cent amongst the sample mothers and 76 per cent amongst all 1994 brides. For religious ceremony marriages, the proportions were 58 per cent and 41 per cent, respectively.

DISCUSSION

Whilst the results form a coherent whole, it is somewhat difficult to make comparisons with the results from the other studies, mentioned earlier. The main reason is that the sample mothers in the present study comprise a mix of lone mothers and cohabiting mothers, whereas most other studies consider one group or the other, or each, separately. In addition, most other studies analyse lone or cohabiting mothers with children (perhaps in different age-groups), whereas the present linkage exercise refers to mothers who had *just* had a child outside marriage.

Probably the closest study is that by Susan McRae, since her sample was of cohabiting mothers who gave birth in 1988. One third, 34 per cent, had married by 1992; the comparable proportion from the present study – which includes both cohabiting and lone mothers – is just over 20 per cent. Possibly it might be expected that cohabiting mothers marry their partners in relatively larger numbers than lone mothers marry – if so, the two results are plausibly consistent. In the study by Reuben Ford, Alan Marsh and Stephen McKay, of lone parents in 1991, about one in 20 were married with dependent children by 1993 (lower than the corresponding proportion in the present study). In the following study with Louise Finlayson, amongst the sample of lone parents with dependent children aged under 5 in 1991, about one half had ceased being lone parents by 1995 (though that proportion includes repartnering by cohabitation, of course). In a very different kind of study, use life table methods, John Ermisch has estimated that the median duration of lone motherhood is less than 2 years for mothers who began their lone motherhood with a pre-partnership birth. However, using the first four waves of the panel data – between 1991 and 1994 – he concludes that a more accurate estimate is that about 15 per cent of lone mothers leave lone motherhood each year.

CONCLUSIONS

One in four women who gave birth outside marriage in 1988 married in the subsequent 8 years, and, of those who married, at least three quarters married the child's father. Of all mothers who have a birth outside marriage in a given year, some will become lone mothers for the first time; some will already be lone mothers, and yet others will be living in cohabiting couple families – either with or without children. Whilst it is difficult to estimate the proportions of mothers in these different groups who subsequently marry (as opposed to the overall proportion for the entire group of mothers), it is clear that for a sizeable minority of mothers who give birth outside marriage, their family status changes to that of a married couple with children within several years. In addition, of course, of those lone mothers who have a birth outside marriage, an additional number will start living in an informal union – and so also cease being lone mothers.

It is notable that larger proportions of mothers giving birth outside marriage in their teens and early twenties subsequently married than those giving birth at older ages – a somewhat unexpected result. Possibly there is more pressure from family and relatives on younger mothers to marry (and there may be greater pressure on younger fathers, too). Another possibility is that younger mothers are more likely to be single (never-married) than older mothers – who in turn are more likely to be divorced. It is known that divorced women cohabit in relatively larger numbers than single women, and if also true for divorced and single women who have just had a birth outside marriage, it could be that younger such mothers tend to marry in proportionately larger numbers than older such mothers who, in contrast, tend to cohabit in relatively larger numbers.

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