

Social Trends 32 feature

Changing times for children

There have been considerable changes in the family environment in which children live. The majority of children grow up in a family with two parents. Children are living in an increasing variety of different family structures, and these are not static.

- Children's diets are not meeting guidelines to protect them against disease and an increasing proportion of children are obese.
- The levels of exercise in children are lower than recommended, but there have been falls in the smoking levels and improvements in dental health.
- There have been improvements in achievement at both GCSE and GCE A levels for both sexes since the mid-1990s.
- A greater proportion of disadvantaged children have mental disorders and try to harm themselves, are more likely to live in rented accommodation in families with the lowest income, and are more likely to be victims of burglary.

Due to changes in cohabitation, marriage and divorce patterns, children may experience a range of different family structures during their life. It has been estimated that 28 per cent of children living in married couple families will experience divorce in their family before reaching age 16.

Around a quarter of families with dependent children were headed by a lone parent in 2000-01, three times higher than in 1971. A large part of the rise up to the mid-1980s was due to divorce, compared with the increase in more recent years which has been due to a rise in single lone mothers.

Socio-economic characteristics

Housing tenure has traditionally reflected the economic status, social class and age of occupiers, and therefore tenure varies considerably for different types of family. Eighty per cent of couples with children owned their own home, either outright or with a mortgage, while two-thirds of lone parents were renting, the majority from social sector housing. Around a tenth of lone parent families were living in overcrowded accommodation.

Families with children tend to be disproportionately concentrated in the lower part of the income distribution. One-third of all children lived in a household with an income below half the mean for Great Britain, after adjustments for housing costs. Over 2 million children were living in families that received housing benefit in Spring 2001, and just over half of these also received income support.

Education

The proportion of three and four year olds enrolled in schools in the United Kingdom has trebled since 1970/71, from 21 per cent to 63 per cent in 2000/01. As a result of this increase, there has been a fall in the number of playgroups and pre-schools. In England, there was a fall of 300 on the previous year, to reach 14 thousand in 2001.

There have been improvements in achievement at both GCSE and GCE A levels. Between 1995/96 and 1999/00, there was a rise of 19 per cent in the proportion of young women who achieved two or more A levels, to reach 39 per cent. For young men, there was a rise of 14 per cent over the same period, so that 31 per cent achieved two or more A levels in 1999/00.

Attainment at GCSE varies according to the family background of the young people. Large differences exist between the socio-economic groups. Two-thirds of young people with parents in non-manual occupations achieved five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C in 2000, compared with two-fifths of those with parents in manual occupations.

Improvements in achievement at GCSE have occurred in all ethnic groups, however, differences still remain. In 2000, the Youth Cohort Study showed that 50 per cent of White young people in England and Wales gained 5 or more GCSEs at grades A* to C, compared with 60 per cent of Indian young people, 39 per cent of Black young people, and 29 per cent for both Pakistani and Bangladeshi young people.

The total number of children permanently excluded from school decreased from 12,700 in 1996/97 to 8,300 in 1999/00 in England. The majority were boys – 84 per cent in 1999/00. Black Caribbean boys are almost four times more likely to be excluded than White boys, compared with lower proportions of Indian, Pakistani, and Chinese boys.

Over the last decade young people have become more likely to continue their education. Between 1990/91 and 2000/01 the numbers of women in higher education almost doubled to 922 thousand undergraduates; for men there was a rise of one-third to 739 thousand.

Health

Around one in ten children and adolescents had a mental disorder in 1999. There were marked differences by social class, with children in Social Class V (14 per cent) being almost three times more likely to have a mental disorder than those in Social Class I (5 per cent). In 1999, the prevalence of self-harm among children aged 5-15 was greater for children living in rented accommodation than children in owner-occupier accommodation.

Mothers in Social Classes I and II had the highest breastfeeding rates, however, the greatest increase in breastfeeding between 1995 and 2000 was Social Class V from 50 per cent to 62 per cent (Chart A.3). The prevalence of obesity increases with age throughout childhood. From 1989 to 1998 there was a highly significant increasing trend in the proportion of overweight and obese young children. Research into the eating habits of 11 to 16 year olds in 2001 in England and Wales found that 6 per cent had either eaten no fruit or no vegetables in the previous week. On average, children had consumed less than 13 portions of fruit or vegetables compared with the recommended 35 portions to protect against heart disease, cancer and obesity.

One-third of boys aged 2 to 7 and 38 per cent of girls of the same age were not meeting the Government's recommended activity guidelines. One area where children's health has improved in recent years is dental health. Five year olds in Great Britain in 1999/00 had an average of 1.57 teeth that were decayed, missing or filled. The average in 1989 was 1.80 teeth.

The percentage of children aged 11-15 who were regular smokers has fallen from 13 per cent in 1996, the baseline year in the target for reducing teenage smoking in England. The aim was to reach 9 per cent by 2010, which was achieved in 1999, although in 2000 it was 10 per cent. Girls aged 11-15 were more likely to smoke than boys of the same age, with 12 per cent of girls and 9 per cent of boys having at least one cigarette a week. Children were more likely to smoke if their parents or siblings smoked. There was also a rise between 1999 and 2000 in England in the proportion of children aged 11-15 who had had an alcoholic drink in the previous week, from 21 per cent to 24 per cent. Boys were slightly more likely than girls to drink alcohol.

Crime

In 1999 there were 120 thousand known offenders aged 10 to 17 in England and Wales who were found guilty or had been cautioned for indictable offences. This was lower than in 1991, when the equivalent figure was 137.5 thousand, and to 212 thousand in 1981. Boys were three times more likely to offend than girls, but this was a reduction from a ratio of almost five to one in 1981. One-third of 10-17 year olds found guilty or cautioned in 1999 were for theft and handling stolen goods offences. Just over 9.5 thousand children were found guilty or cautioned for drug offences – over four times the number in 1992.

Children are also victims of crime. In 2000, lone parent households were the most at risk of burglary and these are the family types most likely to be living in council estates and low-income areas.

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Environmental concerns increase

Concerns about the environment have increased for many types of issues in the last 15 years.

- Just over half of men and women recycle paper, while just over two-fifths recycle glass, and just under a quarter recycle plastics. One-tenth of all household waste was recycled or composted in 1999-00 in England and Wales.
- The introduction of cleaner fuels and catalytic converters led to reductions in total road traffic emissions of air pollutants between 1989 and 1999, despite growth of over 15 per cent in road traffic over the same period.
- In the period 1990 to 1998, the United Kingdom was one of three EU countries that succeeded in reducing total greenhouse gas emissions, by 9 per cent.
- Electricity generation within the United Kingdom by the renewable fuels, hydro and wind, is very small compared with other European countries.

Attitudes and individual action

People are most worried about pollution issues, such as the disposal of hazardous waste (66 per cent of respondents), pollution in rivers (55 per cent) and bathing waters (52 per cent). More recently, concerns over the effects of livestock management methods (including BSE) have increased significantly from 33 per cent of respondents in 1996-97 in England and Wales to 59 per cent (in England) in 2001. However, traffic (congestion, noise and fumes), climate change (and its effects) and air pollution were the three top issues that most people thought would cause most concern in 20 years time.

There are a variety of domestic actions that individuals can take which may have a positive impact on the environment. Just over half of men and women recycle paper, while just over two-fifths recycle glass, and just under a quarter recycle plastics (Table 11.2). Around 40 per cent cut down the amount of electricity or gas used in their household and/or deliberately used public transport, walked or cycled instead of using their car.

Environmental pressures

The disposal of waste puts great pressures on land, as landfill is the most common form of waste disposal. As more and more waste is produced, more landfill sites are required raising concerns about the impact on the surrounding soil and waters. At present, the amount of municipal (mostly household) waste going to landfill is still increasing. However, compared with other methods of

waste disposal, the proportion has fallen from 85 per cent in 1997-98 to 81 per cent in 1999-00. Recycling is a better environmental alternative for the disposal of some waste. One-tenth of all household waste was recycled or composted in 1999-00 in England and Wales. Over half of all waste paper used in newsprint was recycled in 1998 compared with around a quarter in 1990 (Chart 11.13). The proportion of aluminium cans and container glass recycled also increased substantially, to 36 per cent and 22 per cent respectively. Around 43 per cent of households in England and Wales are now served by some form of kerbside recycling scheme.

The main sources of air pollution are road transport, the production of electricity and domestic users. Electricity production accounted for 65 per cent of all sulphur dioxides released into the atmosphere in 1999 (Table 11.3). In contrast, road transport accounted for 69 per cent of carbon monoxide, 44 per cent of nitrogen oxide and 20 per cent of particle releases. Air quality has improved over the past 20 years. Between 1971 and 1999 sulphur dioxide emissions, particles and carbon monoxide emissions fell (most rapidly from the late 1980s/early 1990s) and emissions of nitrogen dioxide began to fall from the early 1990s (Chart 11.4). These reductions were a result of a decrease in emissions from large combustion plants, the decline of heavy industries, the replacement of coal by natural gas in power stations and houses, as well as technological improvements to motor vehicles. In urban areas, vehicle emissions were the greatest cause of human exposure to nitrogen oxides and carbon monoxide in 1999. The introduction of cleaner fuels and catalytic converters led to reductions in total road traffic emissions for some pollutants (such as particles, nitrogen oxides and volatile organic compounds) between 1989 and 1999, despite growth of over 15 per cent in road traffic over the same period. However, in the future (beyond 2015), increases in traffic volumes could result in a reversal of these trends unless further technological advances are made.

Greenhouse gas emissions

Under the Kyoto Protocol, EU countries are committed to reducing emissions of six greenhouse gases by 8 per cent below the 1990 level over the period 2008 to 2012. The Protocol will come into force when it has been ratified by at least 50 parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The United Kingdom has a legal-binding target to reduce emissions by 12.5 per cent relative to the 1990 level over the period 2008 to 2012. In the period 1990 to 1998, the United Kingdom was one of three EU countries that succeeded in reducing total greenhouse gas emissions, by 9 per cent (Table 11.6). In 1998 the United Kingdom emitted 9 tonnes per capita of carbon dioxide, which is the main gas that contributes to climate change, and had the ninth highest emission out of the 15 EU countries.

Electricity generation has been one of the major causes of greenhouse gas emissions, but alternative methods are able to reduce this source of pollution. There have been substantial rises over the past decade in the amount generated by landfill gases, municipal solid waste combustion, and onshore wind. However, compared with other countries in Europe, electricity generation within the United Kingdom by hydro and wind, is very small – only 2 per cent of total electricity generated, compared with 46 per cent in Sweden and 15 per cent in France (Table 11.21).

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One nation, many facets

One in fourteen people in Great Britain in 2000-01 are from a minority ethnic group. In general, ethnic groups have a younger age structure than the White population, reflecting past immigration and fertility patterns. Progressive ageing of the ethnic population is expected in the future, but will depend upon the fertility levels, mortality rates and future net migration.

- Around half of households headed by a Bangladeshi or Black Caribbean person in England were living in the social rented sector in 1998-01. Households headed by a White person or someone of Indian descent were more likely than other groups to either own their home outright or be buying it with a mortgage.
- A greater proportion of Indian boys and girls achieved five or more GCSEs graded A*-C than those in any other group. Children from Pakistani/Bangladeshi or Black groups, particularly boys, tended to be less successful than other groups.
- Unemployment rates for the Black and Pakistani/Bangladeshi people were three times greater than that for White people in 2000-01. Nearly one-third of young Black people (aged 16 to 24) were unemployed, as were only a slightly lower proportion of Pakistani/Bangladeshi young people.
- Black and Asian adults in England and Wales in 2000 were roughly twice as likely to be worried about suffering some form of personal attack than White adults. However, minority ethnic groups were more confident than White people that the Criminal Justice System was effective in bringing people who commit crimes to justice, dealing with cases promptly and efficiently and meeting the needs of victims of crime.

Different demographic structures, cultural traditions and economic characteristics of the various ethnic groups in Great Britain underlie distinctive patterns of family and household size and composition. In Autumn 2000, nearly half of families with dependent children headed by a Black person were lone parent families compared with one in thirteen Indian families (Chart 2.18). Indian and Pakistani/Bangladeshi households tend to be larger than those from other ethnic groups (at 3.6 and 4.5 persons per household, respectively). Such households may contain three generations with grandparents living with a married couple and their children.

Housing tenure patterns vary markedly with ethnic group. Around half of households headed by someone of Bangladeshi or Black Caribbean ethnic origin in 1998-01 in England were living in the social rented sector and around a third were buying their home with a mortgage (Table 10.9). Households headed by a White person or someone of Indian descent were more likely to either

own their home outright (28 and 24 per cent, respectively) or be buying it with a mortgage (43 and 57 per cent, respectively).

Education and employment

Girls consistently outperform boys in examination achievements in all ethnic groups: in 2000, 44 per cent of boys achieved five or more GCSEs graded A*-C in England and Wales, compared with 54 per cent of girls (Table 3.16). However, examination achievement varies substantially across minority ethnic groups. A greater proportion of Indian boys and girls achieved five or more GCSEs graded A*-C than those in any other group – 54 per cent of boys and 66 per cent of girls. Children from Pakistani/Bangladeshi or Black groups, particularly boys, tended to be less successful.

Having qualifications, and the level of those qualifications, has an important influence on employment rates. In each ethnic group in 2000-01, for both men and women of working age, employment rates are much higher among those with qualifications than among those with none, and are higher according to the level of qualifications attained (Table 4.9). However, the contrast in employment rates between qualification levels is greater for minority ethnic groups than it is for the White population. For example, employment rates among men with higher qualifications were 90 per cent for the White population and 92 per cent for the Indian population, but fell to 58 per cent for White men with no qualifications and 53 per cent for Indian men. Overall, the lowest employment rates for women of working age are among the Pakistani/Bangladeshi communities, averaging only 25 per cent. However, among these women the presence of qualifications makes an even greater difference to whether or not they are in employment than it does for men: 69 per cent of those with a higher qualification were in employment, compared with only 7 per cent of those with no qualification.

People from certain ethnic groups were more likely to be self-employed than others (Chart 4.15). Around one-fifth of Pakistani/Bangladeshi people in employment were self-employed in Spring 2000 to Winter 2000-01, compared with only one in ten White people and one in 13 Black people. Chinese and Indian people were also more likely than White or Black people to be self-employed. Two-thirds of self-employed Chinese people and over half of the Indian self-employed worked in distribution, hotels and restaurants. Two-fifths of the Pakistani/Bangladeshi self-employed also worked in this industry, and only slightly fewer worked in transport and communication.

People in minority ethnic groups had higher unemployment rates than White people in Spring 2000 to Winter 2000-01 (Table 4.21). Unemployment rates for the Black and Pakistani/Bangladeshi people were three times greater than that for White people, and the rate for other minority ethnic groups was more than twice that for White people. For all ethnic groups, unemployment is much higher among young people aged 16 to 24 than for other age groups. Nearly one-third of young Black people were unemployed, and only a slightly lower proportion of Pakistani/Bangladeshi young people. However, the unemployment rates among Indians were only slightly higher than those for White people at all ages.

Crime

Individuals and households from Black and Asian groups have consistently shown higher levels of concern about crime than individuals from other ethnic groups. Black and Asian adults in England and Wales in 2000 were roughly twice as likely to be worried about suffering some form of personal attack, or some form of car theft than White adults (Table 9.10). Asian adults were also three times as likely to be worried about being insulted or pestered than White adults. Females of all ages and ethnic groups were more likely than males to be concerned about all kinds of crime. Perceptions of risk show variations across the various ethnic groups, with Asians more than three times as likely to say that they were very or fairly likely to be a victim of mugging than Whites.

Minority ethnic groups were more confident than White people that the Criminal Justice System was effective in bringing people to justice, dealing with cases promptly and efficiently and meeting the needs of victims of crime (Chart 9.14). However, they were less confident that the Criminal Justice System respects the rights of, or treated fairly, people accused of committing a crime. Just over half of Black people believed that the system respects the rights of accused people.

In 1999, the government set employment targets for the recruitment, retention and progression of minority ethnic police officers in England and Wales. The targets are intended to ensure that by 2009, forces will reflect their minority ethnic population. On 31 March 2001, in England and Wales, there were almost three thousand officers from minority ethnic backgrounds, representing 2.4 per cent of the police service. Eighty five per cent of these officers were constables (Table 9.24).

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Hases and have nots

The socio-economic circumstances of people living in different households types and social classes vary considerably.

- Lone parent families and pensioners were more likely than the population as a whole to be living in a low income household in 1999-00.
- Two-thirds of young people with parents in non-manual occupations achieved five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C in 2000, compared with two-fifths of those with parents in manual occupations.
- Over two-thirds of households in the top income quintile had a mobile phone in 2000-01, compared with under a quarter of households in the lowest income quintile. However while ownership has grown in all groups, the rate of increase has been highest in the lowest income quintile.
- Over 30 per cent of unskilled women and 19 per cent of unskilled men were obese in England in 1999, compared with 15 per cent of professional women and 12 per cent of professional men.

Socio-economic

Attainment at GCSE varies according to the family background of the young people. Large differences exist between the socio-economic groups. Two-thirds of young people with parents in non-manual occupations achieved five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C in 2000, compared with two-fifths of those with parents in manual occupations.

In 1999-00, people living in lone parent families, pensioner couples and single pensioners were all more likely than the population as a whole to be living in a low income household (Table 5.18). For people in lone parent families, the likelihood was nearly twice that for all individuals. The pattern was similar in 1981, although the overall risk of low income was lower at that time (Chart 5.17). Households where the head is in a professional occupation spent the most per week, £640 in 2000-01, whilst those households where the head was in an unskilled occupation spent the least, £230 per week (Table 6.8).

Among the economically active, more than a third of both professional households (37 per cent) and employer and manager households (36 per cent) lived in detached houses, compared with 7 per cent of unskilled manual households (Table 10.10). The economically inactive under retirement age were twice as likely as the economically active to live in purpose-built flats or maisonettes.

Mobile phone ownership is related to income. In 2000-01, over two-thirds of households in the top income quintile had a mobile phone compared with under a quarter of those in the bottom quintile. The proportion of households with at least one mobile phone (either *pay as you go* or subscription) almost tripled between 1996-97 and 2000-01 (Chart 13.15). However while ownership has grown in all groups, the rate of increase has been highest in the lowest income quintile, more than seven-fold.

Health

Circulatory diseases are the biggest killers of both men and women in the United Kingdom. The prevalence of one of the major types of these diseases, coronary heart disease (CHD), shows a clear relationship with material deprivation. The prevalence rate for male patients living in the least deprived areas was 31 per 1,000 patients compared with 41 per 1,000 in the most deprived areas in 1994-1998 (Table 7.4). There was a similar pattern for females, despite the overall lower levels of CHD compared with males, with 26 per 1,000 females treated with CHD from the most deprived areas compared with 17 per 1,000 in the least deprived areas.

Household consumption of some foods was increasingly in line with dietary recommendations in 2000, although this was not true for all food types and population groups. There were differences in diet between social groups. In 1998, almost a fifth of men in the professional class and less than one in ten women in the same group had a high fat intake. By contrast, two-fifths of men and a fifth of women in the unskilled class had a high fat intake. Furthermore around a fifth of professional men and women had a high fibre intake (defined as 30 grams or more a day) compared with only a tenth of men and women classified as unskilled.

Between 1993 and 1999 the proportion of men of 'desirable weight' fell, and in 1999 63 per cent of men were classified as either overweight or obese. For women, more than half were overweight or obese in 1999. Obesity is strongly linked to social class – it is more common in the manual social classes (Chart 7.20). While 12 per cent of men in the professional group were obese, 20 per cent in the skilled manual group and 19 per cent in the unskilled class were obese. For women the link is even stronger: 15 per cent of professional women were obese in England in 1999 compared with 31 per cent of unskilled women.

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Men and Women

One of the most important changes in UK society in recent decades has been women's increased participation in the labour market.

- The number of women in the labour force rose from 10.0 million in 1971 to 13.2 million in 2001, while the number of men rose much more slowly from 16.0 million to 16.3 million (Table 4.5).
- Among women with pre-school children, most were either working part-time (36 per cent) or were economically inactive and looking after family and home (38 per cent), while around a fifth were working full-time (Table 4.10).
- About a quarter of women employees are in administrative and secretarial work, while men were most likely to be employed as managers and senior officials or in skilled trades (Table 4.14).
- While the pay of women has risen, the 'pay gap' between men and women remains. In 1986 the hourly earnings of women working full-time in Great Britain were 74 per cent of those of men, whereas in 2000 they had risen to 82 per cent.
- The employment rate was almost 90 per cent for men with a higher qualification and 58 per cent for those with no qualification, while for women the rates were 84 per cent and 46 per cent, respectively.
- Overall girls continued to outperform boys at GCSE level – 44 per cent of boys achieved five or more GCSEs graded A* to C compared with 54 per cent of girls in England and Wales in 2000 (Table 3.16).
- Women are more likely than men to suffer from some illnesses such as mental health problems while men have substantially higher prevalence rates of coronary heart disease, and higher death rates from major diseases, such as respiratory and circulatory diseases and cancers.

Labour market

The number of women in the labour force rose from 10.0 million in 1971 to 13.2 million in Spring 2001, while the number of men rose much more slowly from 16.0 million to 16.3 million (Table 4.5). However, the presence of a dependent child in the family still has a major effect on the economic activity of women. About 44 per cent of women of working age had dependent children in Spring 2001 (Table 4.10). Around a fifth of women whose youngest child was under 5 worked full-time; however, this proportion rose with the age of the

youngest child to 44 per cent for women whose youngest child was aged 16-18. Among women with pre-school children, most were either working part-time (36 per cent) or were economically inactive and looking after family and home (38 per cent). For women without dependent children the economic activity rate in 2001, at 75 per cent, was the same as in 1991. Therefore the main driver behind the increase in female economic activity rates during the 1990s has been the increased economic activity of women with dependent children.

The total number of jobs done by men is virtually the same as the number done by women – 12.8 million compared with 12.7 million – whereas in 1981 there were 3.2 million more male than female employee jobs (one person may have more than one job, and jobs vary in the number of hours' work they involve). In Spring 2001 the pattern of occupations followed by men and women were quite different. About a quarter of women employees were in administrative and secretarial work, while men were most likely to be employed as managers and senior officials or in skilled trades (Table 4.14).

While the pay of women has risen, the 'pay gap' between men and women remains. In 1986 the hourly earnings of women working full-time in Great Britain were 74 per cent of those of men, whereas in 2000 they had risen to 82 per cent. The fact that women are more likely to be in non-manual occupations raises their overall average pay relative to that of men: the average hourly earnings of non-manual women is higher than that of men in manual work. However, among both manual and non-manual workers, women are concentrated in lower paid occupations which reduces their relative pay.

Having qualifications, and the level of those qualifications, has an important influence on employment rates for both men and women – employment rates are much higher among those with qualifications than among those with none, and are higher according to the qualifications attained. The employment rate was almost 90 per cent for men with a higher qualification and 58 per cent for those with no qualification, while for women the rates were 84 per cent and 46 per cent, respectively in 2000-01.

Education

In 2000-01 males in the United Kingdom were nearly twice as likely to GCE A level (or equivalent) as their highest qualification, while just over a quarter of females had GCSEs as their highest qualification (Table 3.17).

Overall girls continued to outperform boys at GCSE level – 44 per cent of boys achieved five or more GCSEs graded A* to C compared with 54 per cent of girls in England and Wales in 2000 (Table 3.16). There has been an increase in the proportion of young men and women in the United Kingdom achieving two or more A levels (or their equivalent), with a rise of around a fifth since 1995/96 for young women, to 39 per cent in 1999/00, compared with a rise of 14 per cent, to reach 31 per cent for young men (Chart 3.18).

Health

The life expectancy of women continues to exceed that for men. In 2000, the number of years men could expect to live was just over 75 years compared with 80 years for women. While there is little difference in the reporting of limited long-standing illness, women are more likely than men to suffer from some illnesses such as mental health problems. However, men

have substantially higher prevalence rates of coronary heart disease than women, and higher death rates from major diseases, such as respiratory and circulatory diseases and cancers.

More cancer deaths in the United Kingdom can be attributed to smoking tobacco than to any other single risk factor. The sharp decline in male lung cancer deaths since the 1970s (Chart 7.13) can largely be attributed to a decrease in smoking in older men. However, more recent trends in smoking prevalence indicate a levelling off, and moreover, smoking has risen over recent years among young women aged 16-19 from 27 per cent in 1994-95 to 31 per cent in 1998-99 (Table 7.17). There has been a small rise in the proportion of young people who drink alcohol. In 2000, 25 per cent of boys and 23 per cent of girls, aged between 11 and 15, reported having had an alcoholic drink in the previous week, compared with 22 per cent and 23 per cent, respectively, ten years earlier. However, the amounts of alcohol consumed by young people have doubled between 1990 and 2000, to reach an average of 11.7 units for boys and 9.1 units for girls. In 2000, one-third of young men (aged 16-24) reported using drugs in the previous year compared with a quarter of young women (Table 7.19). For both sexes, cannabis was the most commonly used drug – by 29 per cent of young men and 23 per cent of young women.

In 1999, 63 per cent of men were either overweight or obese compared with more than half of women. Obesity is strongly linked to social class – it is more common in the manual social classes (Chart 7.20). The link is particularly strong for women – 31 per cent of unskilled women were obese in England in 1998 compared with 15 per cent of professional women. For men, 19 per cent and 20 per cent of men in the skilled manual and unskilled manual classes, respectively, were obese against 12 per cent of the professional group.