

JANUARY 2020

Society Watch Briefing 1: Social Trends

Progress and Popularity

Facing the Disillusioned in a New Decade

NatCen
Social Research that works for society

Introduction

What is life like for people in Britain as we move into the 2020s?

This Society Watch briefing considers some of the key social trends in the United Kingdom, ten years on from the 40th and last printed version of the compendium Social Trends¹.

It provides a picture of people's lives and life opportunities presented from the cradle to the grave. It also shows how lives are developing for the more disadvantaged in our society.

The report is being produced exceptionally as part of the National Centre for Social Research's 50th anniversary year and is being sponsored by the Economic and Social Research Council.

Background

The United Kingdom (UK) is one of the richest countries in the world², although there is ongoing debate about economic inequalities, including in the distribution of household wealth and income, and the need for more "inclusive growth". Social mobility in the UK has been described as "stagnant"³.

As in many developed countries, the UK is also witnessing a period of social change and transition, for example with:

- the **population changing** in size, distribution (ageing & diversity) and family formations;
- more people becoming relatively **better educated**;
- **greater equality** for minorities and transformative change in women's lives;
- **new technologies** enabling global outlooks and changing the way people communicate and live their lives.

Change is uneven across population groupings and geographies.

The British are currently divided in some areas and united⁴ in others in terms of public attitudes. Despite there being different levels of agreement on key issues by age, income and education, public attitudes have tended to move in the same direction across groups but from different bases and at different rates.

The UK's political system has evolved over several centuries. In recent times, there has been greater devolution of power (in particular, to three of the four constituent countries) and changes in the relationship with the European Union (EU), its constitution and system. There were referenda on Scottish independence in 2014 (resulting in a "no" vote) and whether to leave the EU in 2016 (a "yes" vote).

From the Cradle to the Grave

What is life like for people in Britain as we move into the 2020s?

At Birth...

Population

There are fewer births: The Office for National Statistics (ONS) reported there were 657 thousand births in England and Wales in 2018⁵, the lowest number since 2005, with a Total Fertility Rate of 1.70 (below replacement level).

The most popular names for boys and girls in England and Wales in 2018 were **Oliver** and **Olivia**⁶.

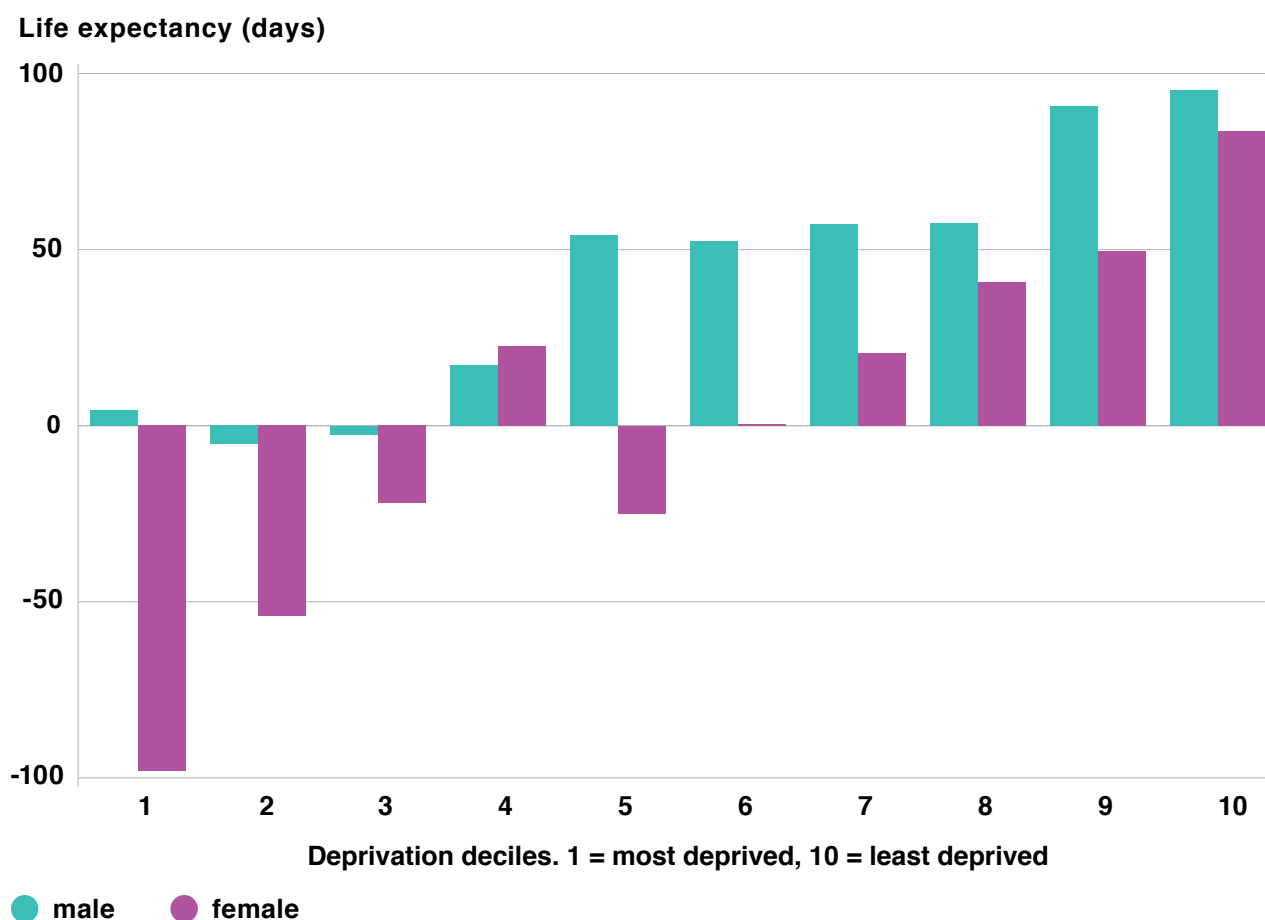
The **infant mortality rate**⁷ has decreased from 12.0 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1980 to a record low of 3.6 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2014; since then it has increased to 3.9 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2017 and is **highest in the most deprived areas of England at 5.2 deaths per 1,000 live births**.

Life expectancy at birth in the UK was 79 years for men and 83 years for women in 2016-18, which represents a small increase since 2013 to 2015 (0.2% and 0.1% respectively)⁸. The size of these increases was substantially smaller than those observed during the first decade of the 21st Century.

Improvements in life expectancy in the UK have been slowing⁹. Of 20 countries ONS compared, the UK had the greatest slowing in life expectancy at birth for females between 2005-10 and 2010-15 (with the US second) and the second greatest slowing for males (with the US first).

Life expectancy is improving in the more advantaged areas of England and reducing in the most disadvantaged (especially for women). This can be seen by mapping life expectancy by sex and area deprivation (based on the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2015 (IMD15)). Decile 1 represents the most deprived and Decile 10 the least deprived areas¹⁰.

Chart 1. Change in life expectancy at birth between 2012 to 2014 and 2015 to 2017: by sex and IMD decile, England



Source: ONS¹⁰

Health

The number of years we spend in good health is measured through Healthy Life Expectancy (HLE)⁸. **Healthy Life Expectancy was 63.1 and 63.6 years at birth for males and females respectively in the UK in 2016-18.**

HLE has been rising at a slower rate than Life Expectancy and is falling for females. This means that people can expect to live a higher proportion of their lives in poorer health. The increase in HLE for males has been 5 months since 2009-11 and has fallen by 3 months for females.

In England, Richmond-upon-Thames had the highest male HLE at birth of 71.9 years, 18.6 years more than males in Blackpool where it was 53.3 years⁸. The highest HLE for females was in Wokingham (72.2 years), compared with the lowest (54.2 years) in Nottingham (a gap of 18 years). In some local authority areas, HLE has fallen by a small number of years since 2009-11.

Into Childhood...

Health

Physical Health

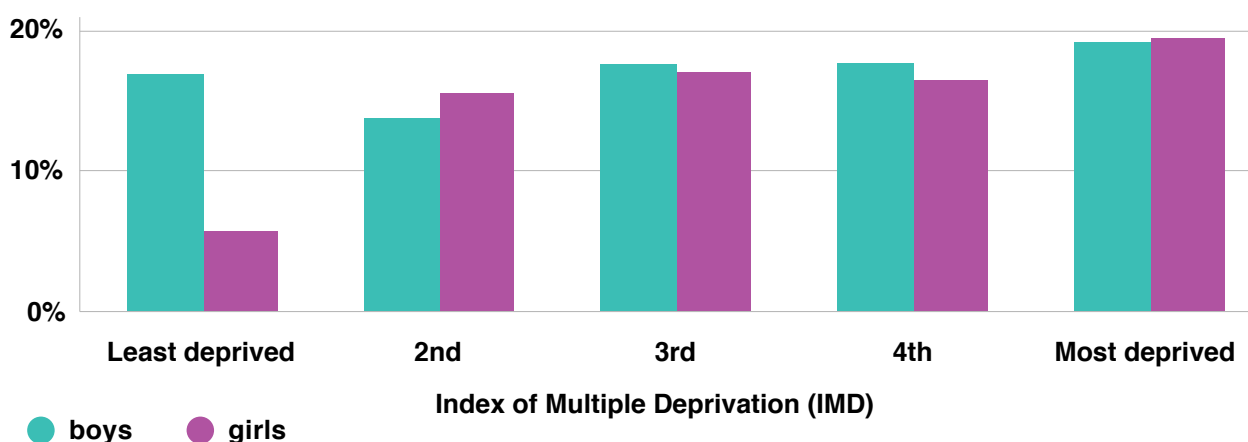
In 2018, **28% of children aged 2 to 15 in England were overweight or obese, including 15% who were obese**. The Health Survey for England, conducted by NatCen for NHS Digital¹¹, showed the prevalence of childhood obesity increased from 1995 to 2005 and since then has levelled out, varying between 14% and 17% from 2006 to 2018 within normal sampling error.

Children's overweight and obesity can be shown to associate with that of their parents¹¹. **26% of children of obese mothers were also obese in 2018 as were 22% of children of obese fathers.**

It has previously been shown that **parents of overweight and obese children often think that their child is about the right weight**. The majority of children who were overweight but not obese were described as being about the right weight by their mothers (90%) and fathers (87%). **Around half of parents of obese children (47% of mothers and 52% of fathers) also said their child was about the right weight.**

The proportion of children who are obese is higher in the most deprived areas of England. In 2018, 19% of children living in the most deprived quintile were obese, compared with 11% in the least deprived quintile¹¹. While the proportion of boys did not vary significantly by the level of area deprivation, girls were more likely to be obese in the most deprived quintile (19%) compared with the least (6%).

Chart 2. Child Obesity by Index of Multiple Deprivation and sex (2017 and 2018), ages 2 to 15, England

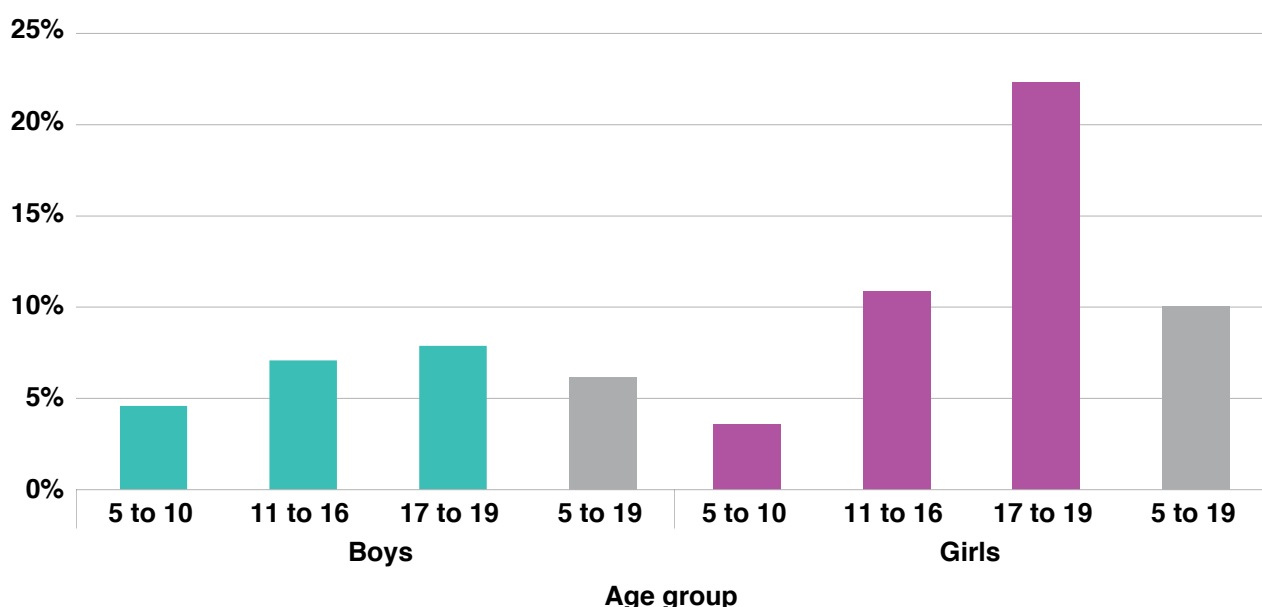


Source: NHS Digital

Mental Health

NHS Digital reports that **one in eight (12.8%) of those aged 5 to 19 years in England had at least one mental disorder** when assessed in 2017¹³. Specific mental disorders are grouped into four broad categories: emotional, behavioural, hyperactivity and other less common disorders. **Emotional disorders were the most prevalent type of disorder experienced in 2017 (8.1% of children).**

Chart 3. Emotional Disorders in Children & Young People by Age and Sex, England 2017



Base: 5 to 19 year olds

Source: NHS Digital¹³

The survey series, conducted by ONS and NatCen for NHS Digital, reveal **a slight increase over time in the prevalence of mental disorders in children aged 5 to 15**, rising from 9.7% in 1999 to 10.1% in 2004 to 11.2% in 2017¹³. **Emotional disorders have become more common** while behavioral, hyperactivity and less common disorders have remained similar in prevalence for this age group since 1999.

Alongside variation by age and sex:

- **White British children (5 to 19) were about three times more likely** (14.9%) than Black/Black British (5.6%) or Asian/Asian British (5.2%) children to have a disorder;
- **Living in a low-income household or with a parent in receipt of income-related benefits was associated with higher rates.** There was no association with neighbourhood deprivation area;
- Children with **poor general health, special educational needs, or children with a parent with poor mental health or in receipt of a disability-related benefit** were more likely to have a mental disorder than other children.

Impact of Childhood Health

Longitudinal analyses have demonstrated a relationship generally between childhood health and our adult life chances¹⁴. Chart 4, a representation of a complex statistical analysis, shows **psychological and some physical problems, as well as low birth weight, can all have negative effects on future family income**. A negative score in the chart demonstrates a negative impact at different levels of significance.

Chart 4. Effects of childhood psychological and physical health problems by age 16 on log family income

	Age			
	23	33	42	50
Psychological problems (6.8%)	−0.185*	−0.220*	−0.259*	−0.278*
Eye, ear, or skin condition (19.2%)	−0.040*	−0.014	0.010	−0.048†
Respiratory problems including asthma (16.2%)	−0.015	−0.005	−0.028	0.004
Headaches or migraines (8.6%)	−0.013	0.023	−0.016	0.017
Speech defect (7.7%)	−0.049†	−0.082*	−0.082*	−0.120*
Physical abnormality (6.1%)	−0.055†	−0.066*	0.021	−0.069†
Low birth weight (6.0%)	−0.072*	−0.024	−0.055‡	−0.119*
Alimentary, urogenital, or blood problem (3.7%)	−0.015	0.031	0.016	−0.018
Abnormality of heart (1.0%)	−0.092	−0.126‡	0.046	−0.135
Epilepsy, other CNS condition (0.8%)	−0.151*	−0.272*	−0.209†	−0.519*
Any other condition (0.6%)	−0.190†	−0.308†	−0.158‡	−0.365‡

* Significant at 0.01 level

† Significant at 0.05 level

‡ Significant at 0.10 level

Source: Centre for Longitudinal Studies¹⁴

A more recent analysis by NatCen suggests **poorer mental health between the ages of 11 and 14 is related to lower educational success later on at Key Stage 4 (GCSE)**¹⁵.

Poverty

Under the Social Metrics Commission's measure, **there were 4.6 million children (34% of children) living in families judged to be in poverty¹⁶**. Poverty rates for children were reducing until 2014-15 but have risen in the most recent years.

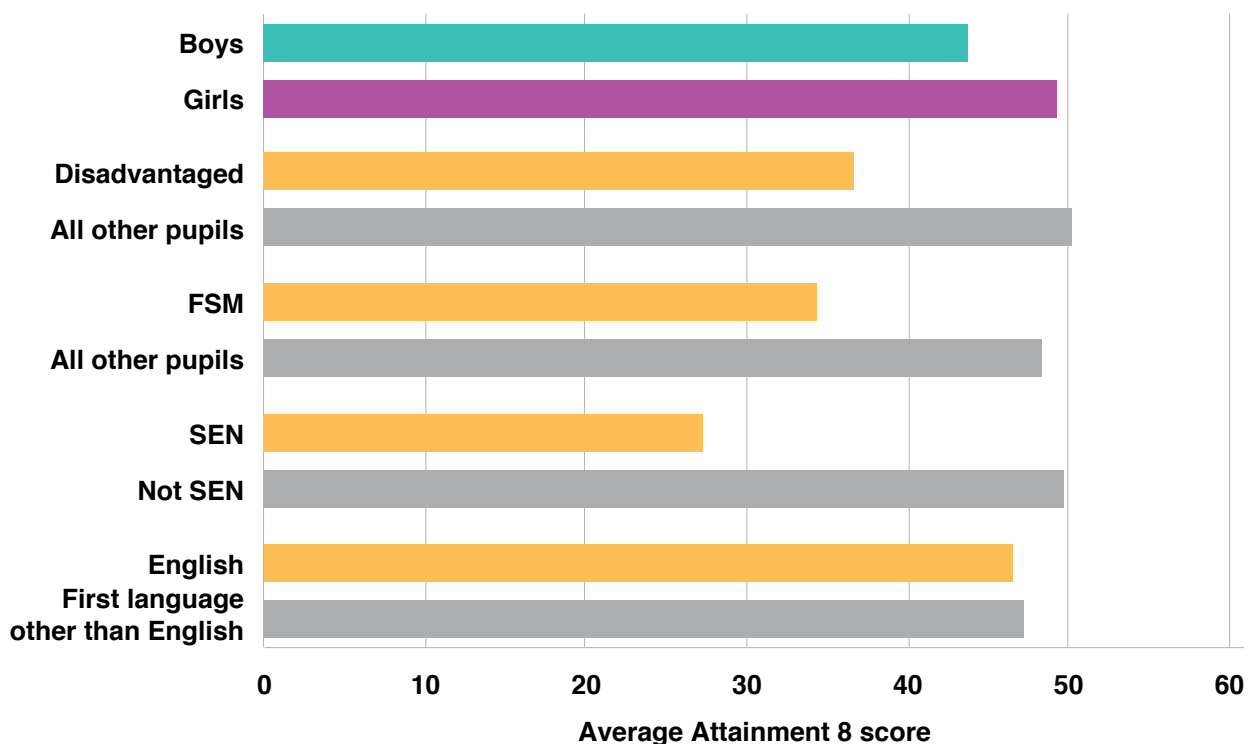
Learning and Education

The Department for Education reports¹⁷ when teachers assessed children in state-funded schools in England in 2019, **75%, 69% and 76% were at the expected standard or better in reading, writing and mathematics respectively by the end of Key Stage 1 (typically aged 7)**. These figures are higher than in 2016.

By the end of KS1, an attainment gap¹⁷ is evident with 62%, 55% and 62% of children from "disadvantaged" backgrounds being at the expected standard or better - the gap between them and all other pupils being 17, 18 and 17 percentage points respectively in reading, writing and mathematics. These gaps have remained "relatively stable" since 2016.

At the end of KS4 (ages 15 to 16)¹⁸, when compared with 2017, the average Attainment 8 score per pupil for all schools decreased by 0.1 points to 44.5. Scores in the English and maths elements of Attainment 8 remained relatively stable between 2017 and 2018.

Chart 5. Average Attainment 8 score by pupil characteristics, England, state-funded schools, 2018



Source: Department for Education¹⁴

There remained a significant gap between disadvantaged and other pupils (see Chart 5). **The disadvantaged index at KS4 remained broadly stable between 2017 and 2018** but shows there has been some narrowing of the gap (by 9.5%) since 2011¹⁸.

There are increasing numbers in Higher Education, including from disadvantaged backgrounds¹⁹. An estimated **25.6% of pupils who were in receipt of Free School Meals (FSM) aged 15 in 2012/13 entered Higher Education by age 19 by 2016/17** (the equivalent figure was 14.2% in 2005-06). This compares to 43.3% of non-FSM pupils. **The gap in progression rates between FSM and non-FSM pupils has remained at 17.7 percentage points over the past three years**, varying between 16.8 and 19.2 percentage points since 2005/06.

Community Life

Young people, as they transition to adulthood, have been referred to as “Generation Sensible”²⁰ seemingly having less sex (ONS reports the under-18 conception rate in 2017 decreased for the 12th year running), taking less drugs, drinking less alcohol and smoking fewer cigarettes, being less likely to be arrested and embracing a more on-line existence.

As Adults ...

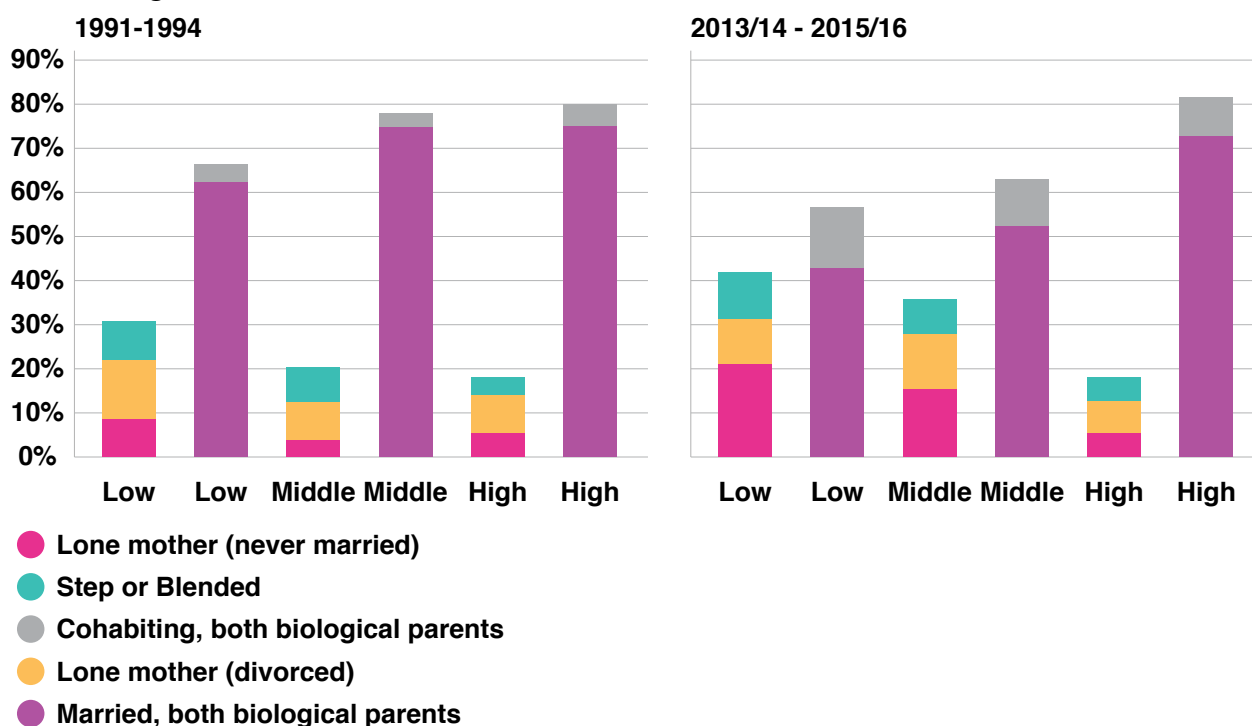
Population

In 2019, ONS reports there were 19.2 million families, a 6.8% increase over the decade from 2009 to 2019²¹. **Married or civil partner couples remain the most common family type** in 2019, representing two-thirds of families in the UK. There were 2.9 million lone parent families.

The number of people living alone has increased by a fifth over the last twenty years (6.8 million in 1999 to 8.2 million in 2019), driven mainly by increases in men aged 45 to 64 years living alone.

Although family structures have changed over time, **different patterns are evident by educational level**. Understanding Society²² shows that there has been virtually no shift in the living arrangements for highly educated mothers with about 80% continuing to be married to or cohabiting with the biological father of their children. In contrast, **the percentage of mothers with the lowest levels of education who were married to or cohabiting with the biological father of their children fell below 60% (from under 70%) and the percentage married from over 60% to 42% during the same period**.

Chart 6. Growing inequality in family structures in the UK by Low/middle/high education level



Source: Understanding Society

One particular feature of the past two decades has been the **growth in the number of young people in the UK (“non-dependent children”) aged 20-34, living with their parents**²¹ - increasing from 2.4 million in 1999 to 3.5 million by 2019.

National Wellbeing

ONS’s wellbeing dashboard²³ shows that 26 of 43 key measures of wellbeing have improved over the longer term (mainly 5 years) across the theme domains, such as **the crime rate reducing sharply**. There was **no change in our feelings of loneliness and our satisfaction with our accommodation** while our **trust in Government and engaging in cultural activities were measures that deteriorated**²³.

Areas of life that improved included our personal wellbeing (life satisfaction, things we do are worthwhile and happiness). Being single, separated, widowed or divorced; having no or a basic education; being a renter; being middle aged; economically inactive; having a long-term illness or disability; and having self-reported very bad or bad health were all key characteristics among people with the **poorest personal wellbeing**.²⁴

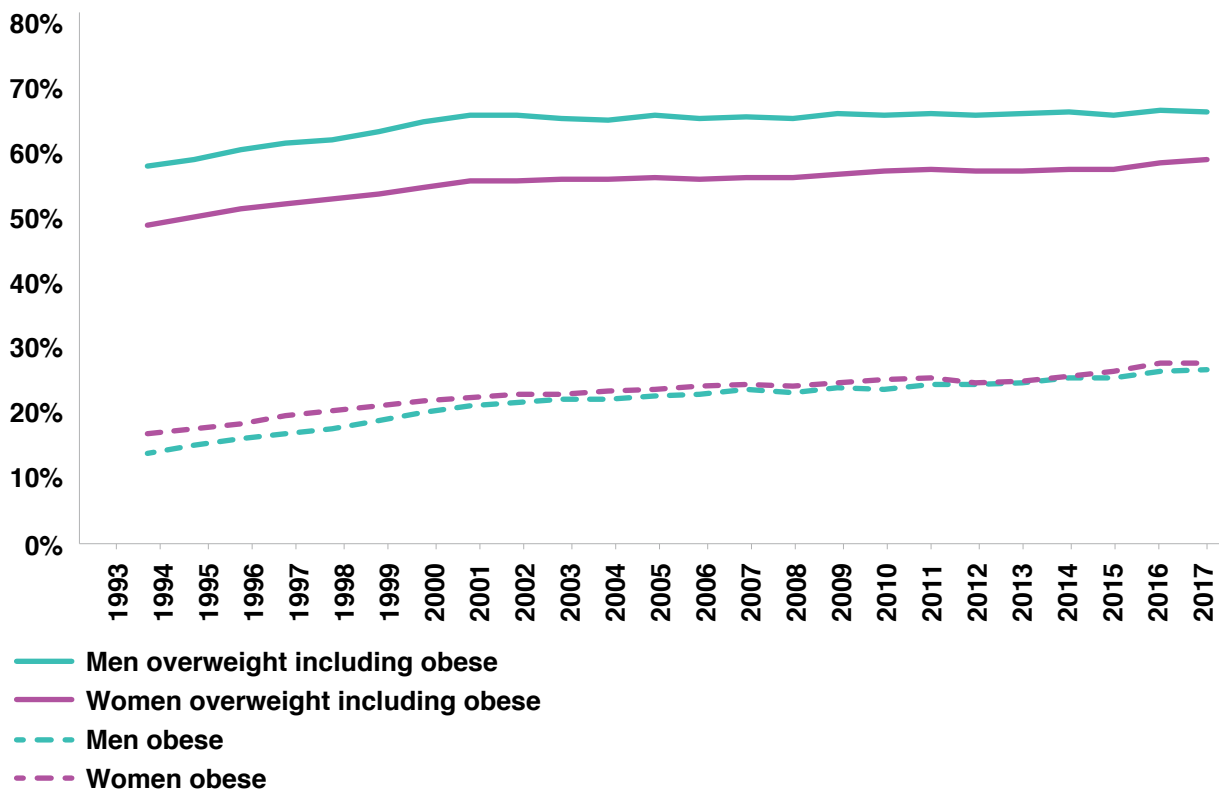
The geographic spread of personal wellbeing measures²⁵ shows the **areas of lowest personal wellbeing tend to be in London, the North and parts of the Midlands, compared with Scotland, Northern Ireland and the South**.

Health

Physical Health

The majority of adults in England in 2018 were classified as obese or overweight (67% of men and 60% of women)¹¹. Chart 7 shows trends in Obesity and Overweight (including obesity) for adults from 1993 to 2018 using three year moving averages from the Health Survey for England, conducted by NatCen for NHS Digital. **Obesity prevalence increased sharply from 1993 to about 2000 with a slower rate after that;** the prevalence has fluctuated between 23 and 27% since but rose to 29% in 2017. Figures published in December showed it at 28% in 2018 (confidence interval between 26-29%).

Chart 7. Adult overweight and obesity prevalence by sex in England, 1993 to 2018 (three year moving averages)



Base: Aged 16 and over

Source: NHS Digital

A very high waist circumference is observed in about 34% of men and 48% of women. Diabetes prevalence is associated with obesity as measured by waist circumference with **14% and 10% of men and women with very high waist circumferences respectively reported in 2018 as having diagnosed or undiagnosed diabetes**¹¹. The equivalent figures for those having a “desirable” waist circumference were 5% and 4%.

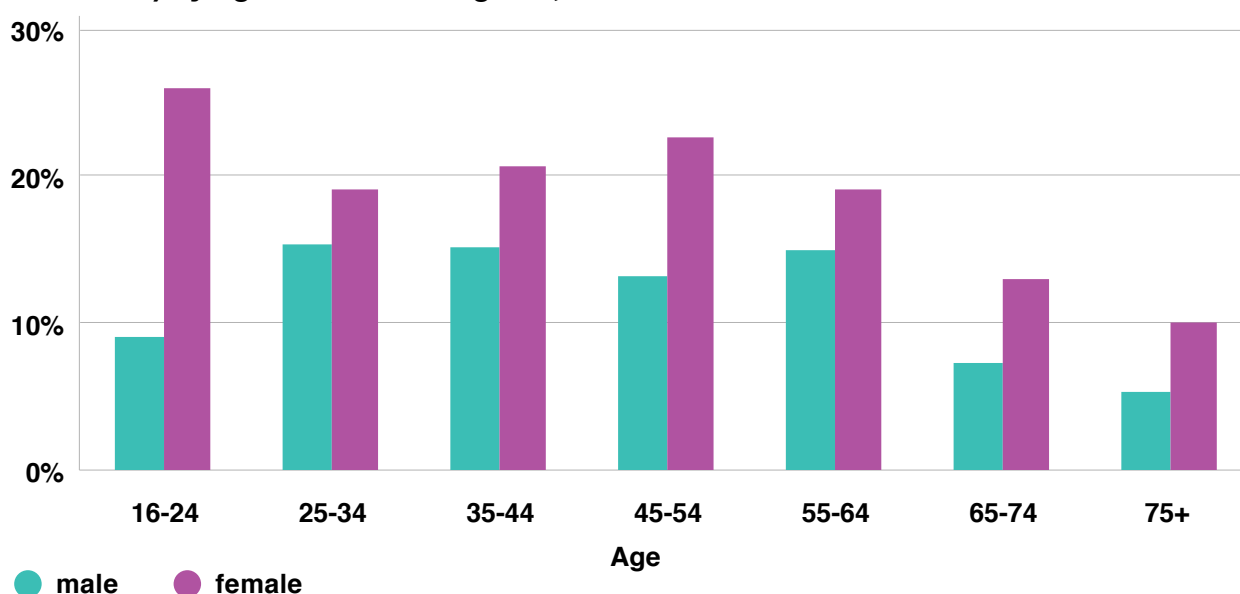
Mental Health

One in six adults (17%) in England surveyed by NatCen for NHS Digital in 2014 met the criteria for a common mental disorder (CMD).

Overall rates of CMD have increased for women since 2000 but stayed much the same for men. One in five women (19%) had reported CMD symptoms, compared with one in eight men (12%)²⁶. **Reported rates of self-harming increased in men and women and across age groups since 2007.** However, much of this increase in reporting may have been due to greater awareness.

Young women have emerged as a high-risk group in relation to mental health, with high rates of CMD (see Chart 8), self-harm, and positive screens for post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and bipolar disorder²⁶. The gap between young women and young men has increased.

Chart 8. Percentage with CMD symptoms in the past week (CIS-R score 12+) by age and sex in England, 2014



Base: all adults

Source: NHS Digital

Most mental disorders were more common in people living alone, in poor physical health and/or not employed²⁷. Claimants of Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), a benefit aimed at those unable to work due to poor health or disability, experienced particularly high rates of all the disorders assessed.

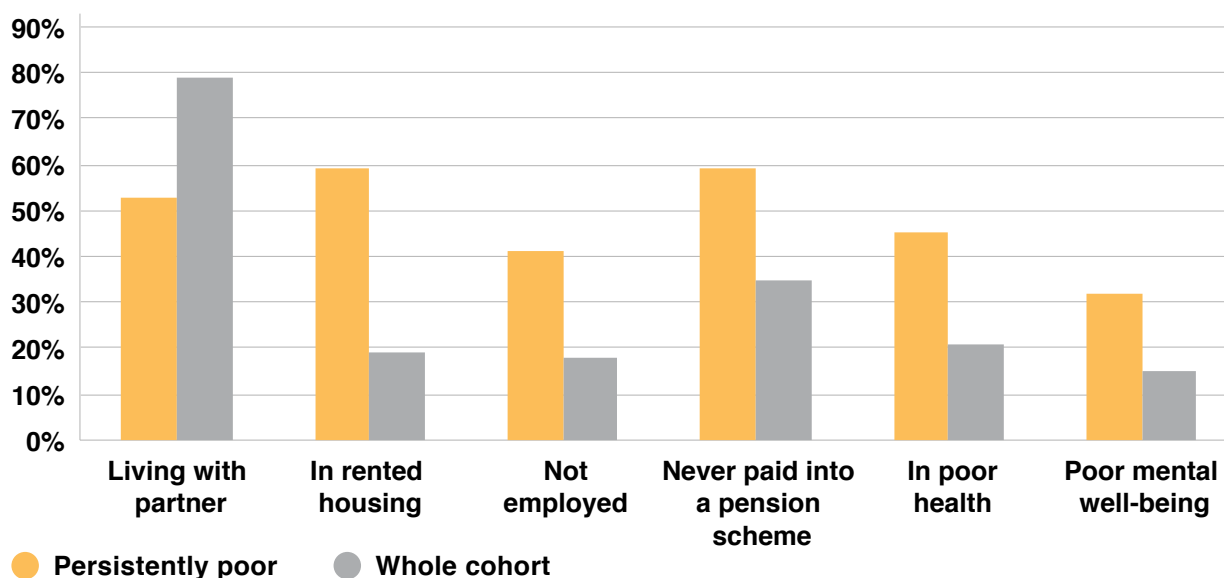
Poverty

Under the Social Metrics Commission's measure of poverty²⁸, **14.3 million people in the UK were living in families judged to be in poverty (22% of the UK population)** in 2017/18. There were 8.3 million working-age adults (21% of working-age adults) and 1.3 million pension-age adults (11% of pension-age adults). **The overall poverty rate isn't so different to the start of the 2000s.**

Just under a half (49%) of those in poverty were in so-called persistent poverty, where they were in poverty for at least two of the previous three years. **Almost a third (31%) of those in poverty are also more than 50% below the poverty line**, unchanged since the millennium²⁸.

Impact of Adult Poverty: Analysis from the Centre for Longitudinal Studies (CLS) shows **experiences across our working lives impact significantly on the starting position and life chances in later years**²⁹. For example, **those that have been in persistent poverty are multiply disadvantaged at age 55**: they are more likely to be in rented housing; not employed; in poor physical and mental health; not to be living with a partner and never having paid into a pension scheme (Chart 9).

Chart 9. Persistent poverty across working life and multiple disadvantage at age 55 in Britain, 2013



Source: Centre for Longitudinal Studies²⁹

Work

The employment rate - the percentage of those aged between 16-64 years old in the UK who are in paid work - **has risen since 2012 and for July-Sept 2019 stood at 76% (80% for men and 72% for women)**³⁰. The equivalent rate in Jan-March 1971 was 72% (92% for men and 53% for women). Unemployment and inactivity rates have been falling and vacancies rising since 2012 (although vacancies have reduced since early 2019).

ONS reports **a growth in self-employment in the UK** in recent years³¹ with **the numbers increasing from 3.3 million people (12% of the labour force) in 2001 to 4.8 million by 2017 (15% of the labour force)**.

The number of people on so-called zero hours contracts in their main job was just over 900,000 in October-December 2017 with a disproportionate number of young people, women, part-time workers or those in full-time education having these contracts³².

In 2018, an analysis by NatCen for the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS)³³ found **4.4% of the British population had worked within the gig economy in the past 12 months**. Providing courier services was the most common type of gig economy activity with Uber the most commonly-mentioned platform. **More than half of people were satisfied with their experience, citing independence and flexibility as the two aspects of gig economy work that they found most beneficial**. Income varied widely but the level of annual earnings from gig economy work was relatively low.

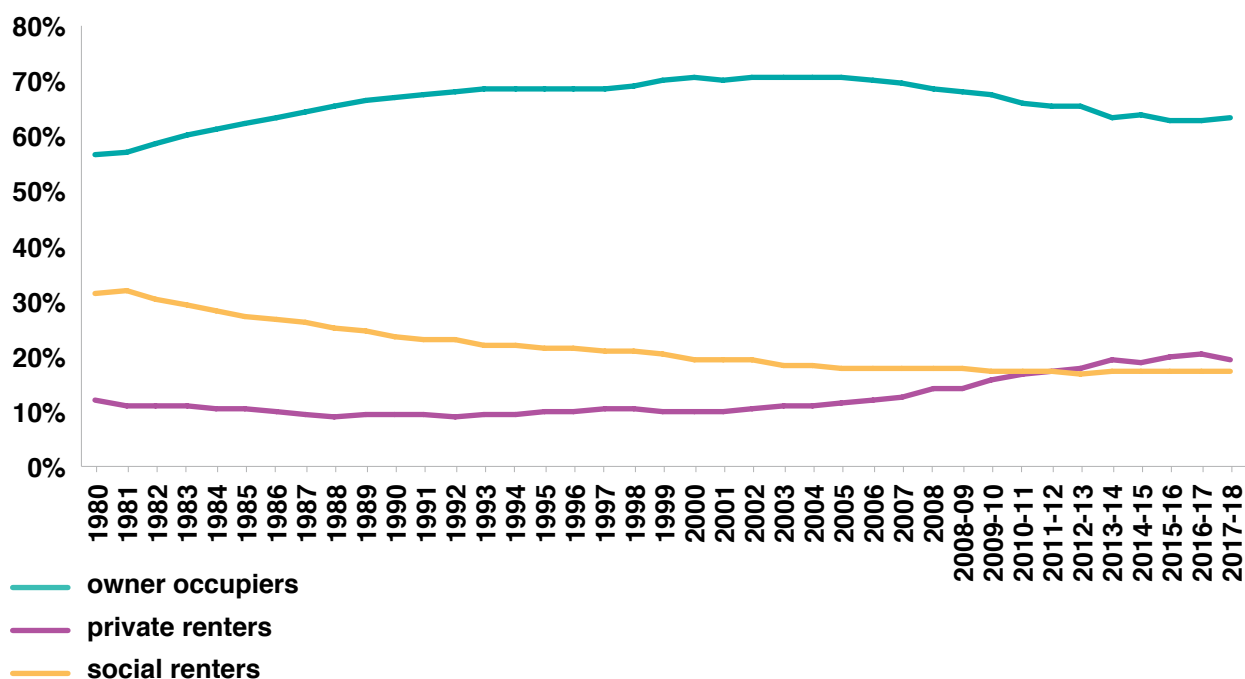
Housing

Owner occupation rates remained unchanged for the fifth year in a row, based on the English Housing Survey conducted for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government by NatCen³⁴.

Of the estimated 23.2 million households in England, 14.8 million or 64% were owner occupiers. The proportion of households in owner occupation increased steadily from the 1980s to 2003 when it reached its peak of 71% before declining to its current level (2017/18). After more than a decade of decline, the proportion of 35 to 44-year olds in owner occupation has started to increase again.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the proportion of **private rented households** was steady at around 10%. While the sector has doubled in size since 2002, the rate has hovered around 19 to 20% since 2013-14. The social rented sector, at 4.0 million households (17%), remained the smallest tenure, following a long downward trend which has stabilised over the last decade³⁴.

The proportion of social renters who expect to buy has declined (no such decline is evident among private renters)³⁴. In 2017-18, 25% of social renters expected to buy a property at some point in the future, down from 30% in 2016-17. **In 2017-18, 8% of households in the social rented sector were living in overcrowded accommodation**.

Chart 10. Trends in housing tenure, England, 1980 to 2017-18

Base: all households

1980 to 1991: DOE Labour Force Survey Housing Trailer;

1992 to 2008: ONS Labour Force Survey;

2008-09 onwards: English Housing Survey, full household sample

Source: Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

Community Life

Most of **the public were satisfied with their local area as a place to live** in England in 2018-19 (76%) with 81% of us agreeing that our area was a place where people from different backgrounds got on well together. **62% felt that they belonged to their immediate neighbourhood and 84% felt they belonged to Britain** according to the Community Life Survey, conducted by Kantar Public for the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport³⁵.

Almost **three quarters of people meet up with friends or family in person once a week or more (74%)** while 6% felt lonely often or always.

Access to transport - The Department for Transport's National Travel Survey, conducted by NatCen, reports just **under 1 in 4 households (24%) didn't have a car or van in 2018³⁶**; the figure was close to 1 in 2 (46%) for households in the lowest income quintile. The figures were 26% and 49% respectively in 2002.

Leisure - According to Travel Trends³⁷, **UK residents made almost 72 million visits abroad in total in 2018**, compared with just over 50 million in 1998, spending more than £45 billion abroad. 47 million of those visits were for holidays (over 1.5 per household) with Spain being the most popular destination.

Despite this, the National Travel Survey³⁸ reports for England that **48% of the public didn't take a flight abroad in 2018** (compared with 53% in 2006); while 8% of the public flew abroad 4 or more times.

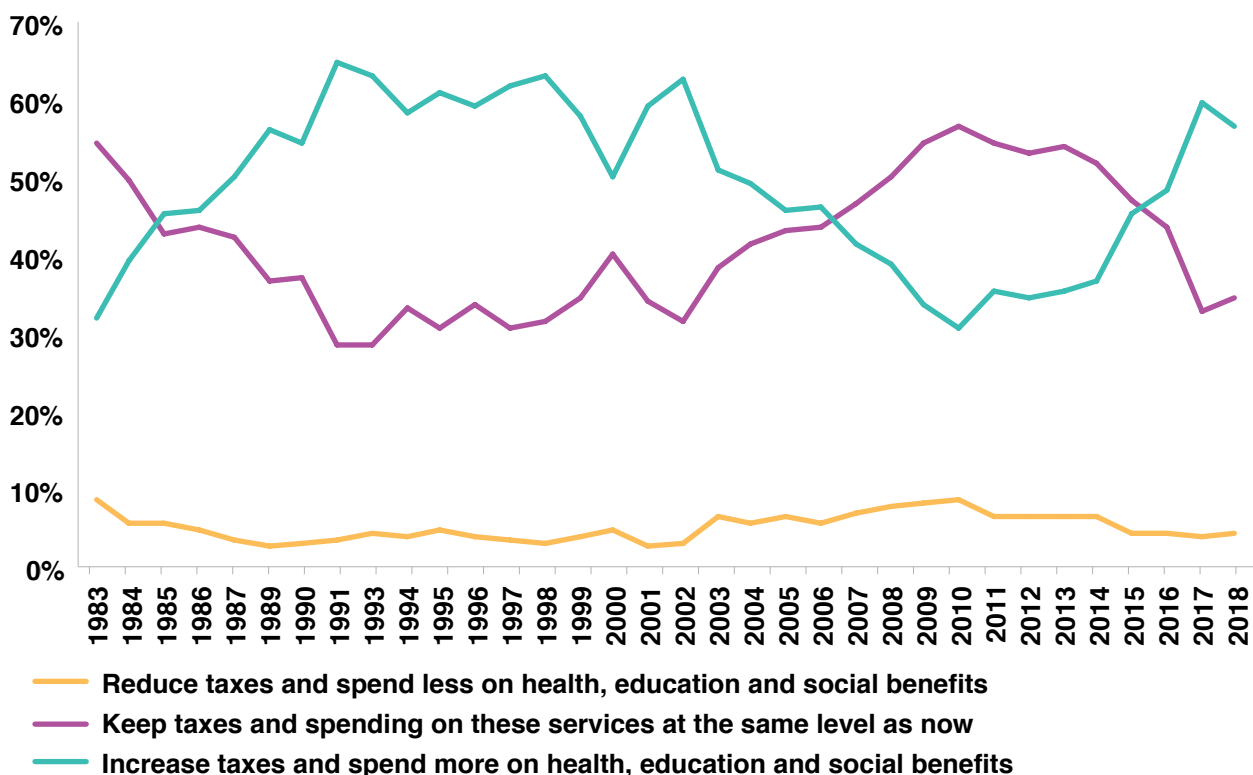
Politics and the Constitutional Settlement

NatCen's British Social Attitudes Survey (BSA)³⁹ is the primary vehicle in Britain for looking at public attitudes over time.

Taxation & Spending: The majority of the public believe politicians should **increase taxes to spend more on health, education and social benefits** (Chart 11) while approaching 9 in 10 adults believe the NHS has a major or severe funding problem.

Similarly, **the public has become more willing to see increases in benefits** for those caring for the sick or disabled, the disabled themselves or workers on very low incomes - but not for the retired.

Chart 11. Attitudes towards taxation and public spending in Britain, 1983-2018



Base: All adults

Source: British Social Attitudes Survey, NatCen

Public confidence in politicians: BSA data showed in 2011 that **72% of the public agreed with the statement that “it doesn't matter which party is in power, in the end things go on much the same”** suggesting a degree of disillusionment and apathy towards the political system, and how it is operating, is not a recent development. Similarly, those people

having very little or no confidence in Parliament increased from 35% in 1991 to over a half by 2008 (55%).

In 2016, the UK public voted to leave the European Union (EU) despite leaders of the main political parties campaigning to stay in. **The majority of people in Britain have wanted to either leave the EU, or stay but see a reduction in EU powers**, since 1996 - the proportion wanting one of these two options was about two thirds in 2018. The Treaty of Lisbon, which came into force in December 2009, introduced qualified majority voting (rather than the need for unanimity) in many policy areas in the EU so could be seen as the UK ceding more power. **Views on Europe are linked to factors such as age, education, income and social class** with older members of the public and the relatively less well-educated, in particular, more likely to support leaving the EU.

On international migration, **between 4 and 6% wanted to see immigration increase a little or a lot** during the period between 1995 and 2011 when immigration rose sharply and net migration increased from the tens of thousands in the early 1990s to a peak of over 300,000 by 2015, before slight reductions since.

In 2018, 8% of the British public said that they are 'very strong' supporters of a political party, while as many as **40% said that they are either a 'very strong Remainder' or a 'very strong Leaver'** in relation to the European Union.

Despite the "no" vote in the referendum on Scottish independence in 2014, **whether the United Kingdom is working sufficiently well for the people of Scotland** has remained a live issue with the Scottish people continuing to put their trust in the Scottish National Party. The What Scotland Thinks website⁴⁰ shows the percentage of the Scottish people wanting independence currently at just below 50%.

In Later Years...

Population

The **UK population** was over 66 million in 2018 and **is ageing**. The ageing brings opportunities and challenges. **The number of people aged 65 to 84 grew by 23.0% to 10.6 million between 2008 and 2018**. ONS reports there were an additional 1.6 million people aged 85 or over (up 22.8%). This compares with a growth of 3.5% for those in the typical "working age population" (defined as aged 16 to 64)⁴¹.

The main ONS 2018-based population projection⁴² shows the population in pensionable ages growing by a further 30% over the next 25 years and **the number of those over 85 almost doubling to 3.0 million**. The ageing population partly reflects the baby booms, firstly after the second world war and then in the 1960s.

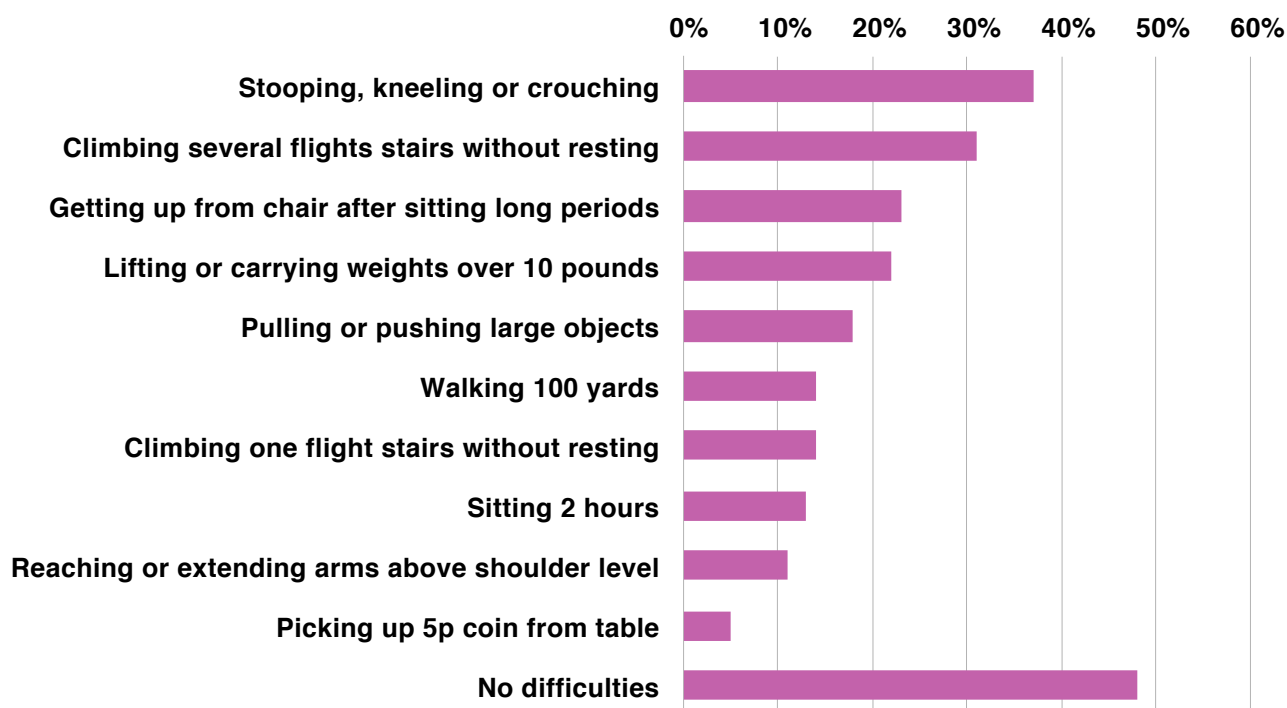
Health

The English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA), conducted by NatCen every two years for a range of partners, provides a consistent set of data for England for 2014-15 (Wave 7) and for 2016-17 (Wave 8) for people over the age of 50.

Primary care services remain the most common form of healthcare received by older people. **Over a quarter (28%) of all older people had talked to their General Practitioner in the previous four weeks about their health condition(s).**

The majority of older people aged 50 and over in England are able to conduct activities related to personal care and mobility about the home that are basic to daily living (known as Activities of Daily Living or ADLs). ELSA shows that stooping, kneeling or crouching and climbing flights of stairs are the most common problem areas for older people (see Chart 12).

Chart 12. Difficulties with activities experienced by 50+ population in England, 2016-17



Base: ELSA Wave 8 (2016-17)
 Unweighted base: 7,131
 Source: NatCen

ELSA also asks about Instrumental Activities of Daily Living (IADLs). These are activities that are not fundamental to our functioning but are important for living an independent life, such as housework or shopping. **The instrumental activity older people experience the most difficulty with is doing housework and gardening (13% of men and 18% of women).** More women than men report difficulty with each of the key instrumental activities.

Almost two thirds (64% in 2016-17) who reported difficulty with an ADL or IADL received no help in the last month. Among those who did report receiving help, around one in ten received help with dressing and one in five with shopping for groceries.

Previous research at the University of East Anglia and the University of Exeter⁴³ found that **less wealthy older people tended to have much higher levels of angina, cataracts, depression, diabetes and osteoarthritis.** They also found that **these higher levels of illness were not matched by higher levels of diagnosis and treatment.** Inequalities in income were reflected by inequalities both in people's health and in the treatment received.

Poverty

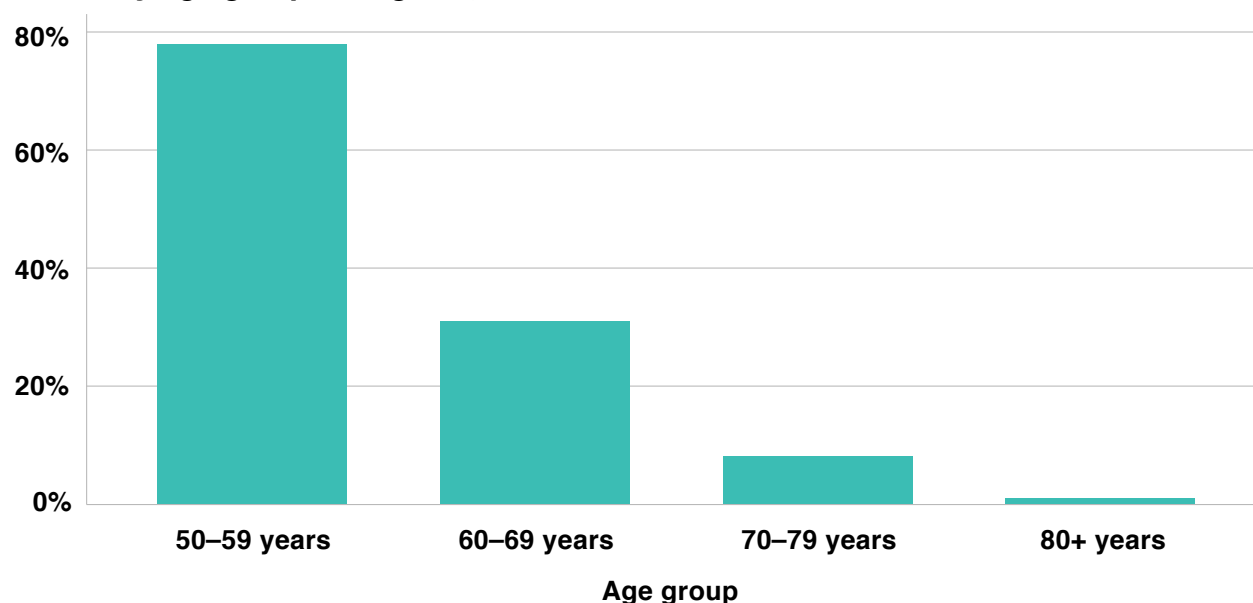
Living comfortably? There is a **high level of wealth inequality among older people.** An analysis of ELSA data showed that 10% of individuals held a net (non-pension) wealth of £780,501 or more, while the bottom 10% possessed £1,000 or less in total assets. The median individual held £234,000 in total net.

ELSA also captures subjective data: how people themselves feel about their ability to manage financially in later life. When analysed by age group, the data show **those in their 50s report lower levels of financial wellbeing compared with older age groups;** 77% of those aged 80+ reported managing very well or quite well as compared with 66% of those in their 50s.

Work

ELSA data for 2016-17 showed about 8% of those in their 70s contributed to work in the last month, compared with 7% in 2014-15 (see Chart 13).

Chart 13. Whether employed or self-employed during the last month by age group in England, 2016-17



Base: ELSA Wave 8 (2016-17)

Unweighted base: 7,131

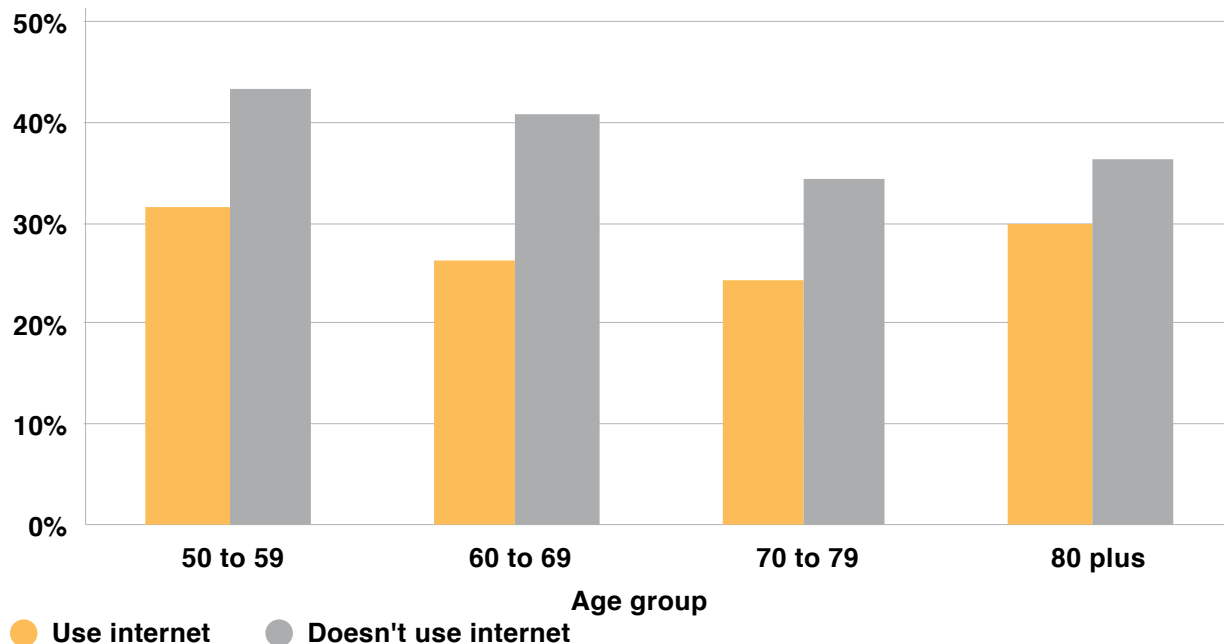
Source: NatCen

Community Life

Staying Connected: Most people over the age of 50 report hardly ever or never experience feelings of loneliness. However, those in the 80+ age group are more likely to report that they 'often' feel lonely (9% of that group in 2016-17, compared to 6% of the people aged 60-69 and 70-79).

Using the internet can help reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness. ELSA data show marked generational differences in internet and email use. **People aged 50-59 were more likely to use the internet or email daily (85%) than people aged 80 and over (21%).** The younger age groups are highly likely to continue using the internet as they age. Across all 50+ age groups, the percentage of people who feel socially isolated is significantly higher amongst those who do not use the internet (see Chart 14).

Chart 14. Proportion feeling isolated some of the time or often, by age group and internet/email usage in England, 2016-17



Unweighted base: 6,898 (Data for non-internet users, aged 50-59, feeling isolated - data should be treated with caution due to small sample size)

Base: ELSA Wave 8 (2016-17)

Source: NatCen

Caring: Older carers make a major contribution to the UK economy with the unpaid care they provide. Eighteen per cent of those aged 50 and over reported providing care for someone in the past week, such as for a spouse or partner. Many **older people also volunteer through clubs and organisations.** Around a third (37%) of older people say they have provided unpaid help to groups, clubs or organisations in the last twelve months.

Around two in five (41%) of older people say they have provided help to others who are not relatives in the last twelve months. The most common form of helping, reported by one in five (20%), is keeping in touch with someone who has difficulty getting out and about.

Mobility and transport are important for maintaining access to the shops, doctors and other services. **The use of public transport decreases with age overall**, with 29% of 60 to 69-year olds in 2016-17 and 52% of those aged 85 and over never using public transport.

At Death...

Population

There are more deaths: In 2018, there were 541,589 deaths registered in England and Wales⁴⁴, an increase of 1.6% compared with 2017 (533,253); this is the highest annual number of deaths since 1999.

Health

Deaths due to dementia and Alzheimer disease continued to increase and remained the leading cause of death, accounting for 12.8% of all deaths registered.⁴⁴

There were **7,551 deaths registered in the UK in 2018 that related to alcohol-specific causes**⁴⁵, the second highest since the time series began in 2001. **Alcohol-specific death rates were highest among men aged 55 to 59 years and women aged 60 to 64 years.** There were also **4,359 deaths related to drug poisoning** registered in England and Wales in 2018⁴⁶, the highest number and biggest increase (16%) since the time series began in 1999.

There were an **estimated 23,200 excess winter deaths**⁴⁷ in the winter of 2018 to 2019, the lowest since the winter of 2013 to 2014.

and a final word...

The most popular names for baby boys and girls in England and Wales in 1924, 1934 and 1944 were John and Margaret⁴⁸.

As children or babies during the second world war, and today in the older age group, they may reflect on the relative peace in the UK since 1945; the improvements in life expectancy, health, education and rights during their life-times; but on the many opportunities and challenges still facing those born and named Olivia and Oliver today.

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