

Singlehood, Marriage, Cohabitation, and Fertility

An overview of the changing nature of relationships in the United Kingdom, Sweden, France, Singapore, and Japan.

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United Kingdom

Status

The 2011 Census found that the number of people who were reported to be “not married”—meaning that they had never been married, or were either divorced or widowed— had increased from 47% to 51% (19.4m to 23m) since 2001.¹

Simultaneously, there has been a major increase in cohabitation. In 1996, the ONS estimated that there were around 2.9m people in cohabiting relationships in the UK, that is to say that they were classified as unmarried in censuses, but live as if they were with another person. In 2012, the ONS put this figure at 5.9m.² The number of married couple families has reduced slightly from 12.64m in 1996, to 12.19m in 2012.³ Additionally, Appendix 3, depicts a shift from marriage towards cohabitation is clearly pronounced in the 20 to 34-age bracket—although it is not known if this age band is the greatest contributor.⁴

Other statistics worth considering are those related to parenting. In 1996 the number of single-parent families with dependent children stood at 1.63m, which has since risen to 1.99m in 2012.⁵ In addition, the UK’s fertility rate stands at 1.9—close what is required to maintain a consistent population.⁶

Causes

The ONS suggests that, as in many Western countries, this can be attributed to numerous factors, chief among them the increasing acceptance of living as a single with a partner.

Divorce and widowhood have contributed to the number of singles, however of those who are single and have never been married the median age has increased from 26.9 to 27.5. This suggests that younger people are putting off marriage instead choosing to live as singles, or to cohabit with

¹ (Office for National Statistics, 2014)

²(Office for National Statistics, 2012)

³ (Office for National Statistics, 2012)

⁴ (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development , 2013)

⁵ (Office for National Statistics, 2012)

⁶ (World Bank, 2015)

another before marrying them.⁷ This median increase additionally does not account for the growing number of people who simply avoid marriage.

As previously mentioned, this trend is partially driven by younger people—although the full extent is not calculable from the data. Of people aged over 20 in the UK, only 8.7% cohabit, however, 22.2% of people aged 20 to 34 cohabit.

As with many countries, the most likely potential cause of this is the changing approach towards marriage the degree to which it is requisite for having children. In 1970, only 8.7% of children were born to unmarried mothers, whereas in 2007 this figure stood at 43.7%.⁸ This trend can additionally be linked with the on-going emancipation of women—the landscape of gender roles in the UK has changed dramatically since 1970. Women now have a greater opportunity to choose to work, marry, and have children—simultaneously; the data fittingly corresponds to this trend.

It is worth noting that talk female emancipation and changing attitudes towards extramarital children as discrete causes is merely functional. The causes are secondary effects that arise from the conditions of growing social and economic liberalism.

Impact and Policy

There are several issues that arise from increasing singlehood in the UK. Increases in cohabitation and divorces have left 45% of children aged 15 living with one parent—with 4 million children in total.⁹ The Institute of Fiscal Studies reports that cohabiting parents are three times more likely to separate than married parents by the time the child is five years old.¹⁰

The extent to which the separation of parents can be defined as a “problem” is disputed. Groups such as the think-tank Marriage Foundation, claim that a child with unmarried parents will receive insufficient parenting which will have an effect on child happiness—which in a British context can be linked to the supposed issue of social decay in the country.¹¹

The Millennium Cohort Study initially corroborated these claims. Conducted by the Centre for Longitudinal Studies at the University of London, the study as followed 19,000 babies born between 2000-01. It studies a wide range of matters but one particularly pertinent initial finding in 2010 was that children living in single parent homes were supposedly more likely to have

⁷ (Office for National Statistics, 2014)

⁸ (National Healthy Marriage Resource Center, 2010)

⁹ (Department for Work and Pensions, 2012)

¹⁰ (Goodman & Greaves, 2010)

¹¹ (Mooney, 2009)

behavioural problems and hyperactivity issues. However, the researchers insisted that more intricate study would be required.¹²

More detailed 2014 research by Dr. Susan Harkness suggested that once economic factors are taken into account, the behaviour and performance of a child from a single-parent household is no different to that of a child from a household with cohabiting or married parents.¹³ Harkness suggests that policy should be shifted away from encouraging marriage or cohabitation in order to help children to succeed, but should instead look to reduce the disadvantages that poorer children endure.¹⁴

In 2011, the then Work and Pensions Secretary, Iain Duncan Smith advocated a policy of tax breaks for married couples in order to encourage people.¹⁵ In 2013, Prime Minister David Cameron unveiled a £200 incentive tax break.¹⁶ However, the policy is generally viewed to have been poor with its critics suggesting that people are unlikely to get married for what amounts to £3.85 per week. The policy has so far proved to be unsuccessful in increasing marriage rates. In February 2016, a year after it was brought in, it was found that just 8% of potential claimants applied for the tax break.¹⁷

Another issue surrounding singlehood in the UK involves its relationship with fertility. The ONS recently reported that one in four children born in the UK has a mother born outside of the country.¹⁸ However, as fertility rates remain reasonably constant, it is deducible that British women are having fewer children. This can be linked to increasing cohabitation as the ONS reports that the majority of cohabiting couples who have children, choose only to have one, whereas the majority of married couples that have children have two. However, the mean age of cohabiting couples that have never been married is lower and there is a greater likelihood that they have further children. Currently, this analysis is problematic, as it does not account for the unmarried cohabiting couples that may go on to marry — with more data it may be possible in the future.¹⁹

¹² (Paton, 2010)

¹³ (Harkness, 2014)

¹⁴ (Harkness, 2014)

¹⁵ (Mulholland, 2011)

¹⁶ (BBC, 2013)

¹⁷ (Fisher, 2016)

¹⁸ (Office for National Statistics, 2013)

¹⁹ (Office for National Statistics, 2012)

The impact this has on the country is potentially vast. If this continues, the proportion of population who are not of British heritage will decrease, arguably changing the UK's cultural landscape. Traditionalists have argued that it will damage patriotism and the fabric of society whilst also leading to schools and teachers suffering due to language issues. Progressives say that immigration and internationalism are what have made Britain's society what it is today. In addition, they claim that the children of immigrants, especially those who speak English as a second language (EALs), perform better at school. In fact, ONS data shows that schools with higher proportions of children from migrant families perform better than schools with fewer immigrant children—even when these children are more likely to be economically disadvantaged.²⁰

Class and Marriage in the UK

Recent studies by Marriage Foundation report that marriage is on the decline amongst all classes, however, it is particularly concentrated in lower income circles. 24% of low-income earners who are recent mothers are married, whereas 87% of high earning recent mothers are married.²¹ In the 1970s, 90% of recent mothers, regardless of their housing type were married; nowadays 25% of women in social housing were married, which is considerably lower than the 72% of married mothers with mortgages.²² In terms of education, 52% of mothers without a degree are married, as opposed to 83% who do possess one.²³ Similar trends exist in relation to smoking, employment, and age.

Marriage Foundation, as discussed, believes this to be the prime cause of social decay in the United Kingdom. They claim that the waning importance of marriage, exacerbated by the class lines that it runs on, is responsible for psychological issues in children, crime, and lack of productivity. As already mentioned, when economic condition is factored in—as per Dr. Harkness's report—²⁴ the real issue stems from socio-economic disadvantage. This is not to say that marriage, and its relative paucity amongst lower classes does not play a role in this “decay”, however, Marriage Foundation's argument may be overly simplistic.

Singapore

Status

Singlehood levels in Singapore are high and continuously growing—an issue that has emerged in the past 30 years. Among adults aged 30 to 34 it was found that in 2014, 39.2% of men and 26.6%

²⁰ (Portes, 2012)

²¹ (McKay & Benson, 2015)

²² (McKay & Benson, 2015)

²³ (McKay & Benson, 2015)

²⁴ (Harkness, 2014)

of women were registered as single.²⁵ In 1970 those respective proportions were 21.5% and 9.6% showing a marked increase in singleness amongst young people.²⁶

It is difficult to explore the nuance of the situation as the country has very conservative approaches towards cohabitation and even pre-marital relations. Data on matters such as cohabitation simply does not exist as currently, the thought of living together as an unmarried couple is abhorred. With this in mind, we must take the singlehood data on face value and ignore any potential cases of cohabitation. Jones, Yanxia, and Zhi suggest that this is slowly changing but this liberalisation is still far reaching the point where the government accounts for this in the census.²⁷

In terms of fertility, there has been a significant drop in recent years. The rate stands at 1.25 at the moment, considerably lower than the healthy 2.11 in 1976.²⁸

Causes

Jones, Yanxia, and Zhi suggest that the root of the issue is the cult of individualism. In a series of interviews with Singaporeans of Chinese-descent, thirty subjects also cited “freedom”, “independence”, and “self-actualization” as their prime motivations behind their singlehood.²⁹

They also report that rising living costs and long working hours make the idea of a family life less appealing. In addition, they discovered that Singaporeans are deterred by the examples of failed marriages that they seen in their social circles.³⁰

In essence, singleness can be attributed to the pull factors of individualism—and an aversion to the struggles of a collective family life—and the push factors of Singapore’s traditional familial attitudes.³¹

The stigma surrounding premarital sex and cohabitation is starting to decline however it has not on the issue of procreation—it is a major taboo to have a child outside of marriage. Hence, the country’s conflicting personal economic and social conservatism have led to a tension that has had a serious impact on fertility.

²⁵ (Department of Statistics Singapore, 2015)

²⁶ (Department of Statistics Singapore, 2015)

²⁷ (Jones, Yanxia, & Zhi)

²⁸ (World Bank, 2015)

²⁹ (Jones, Yanxia, & Zhi)

³⁰ (Jones, Yanxia, & Zhi, 2012)

³¹ (Jones, Yanxia, & Zhi)

Impact and Policy

The most obvious impact of high rates of singlehood is that, as mentioned, fertility rates are very low. This has the effect of creating an aging population and a reliance on the influx of foreign workers.

Having an aging population is a growing problem in the country. In 2000, the number of people aged 65 or over was 220,000; in 2015 it had doubled to 440,000. It is expected to grow to 900,000 by 2030. Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong best sums up this problem “Who will pay the taxes, to spend on whom? How do we keep (the economy) prosperous, vibrant and forward-looking? Who will man the Singapore Armed Forces and defend us? We can’t be the Dad’s Army.”³²

There is hope that Jones, Yanxia, and Zhi’s data—and reports by others—can be used to inform social policy with an emphasis on promoting the improvement of matchmaking institutions and attitudes towards marriage.³³

A discussion at the 6th Family Research Network Forum at The Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy in 2011 cited low fertility as the prime issue resulting from singlehood.³⁴ Since then, the government has made efforts to solve the problem—making sure that there are funds such as the Central Provident Fund and Silver Support Schemes to support the elderly.

However, more concrete solutions are also being pushed with the Prime Minister legislating to promote more flexible work arrangements, improved healthcare, and childcare, whilst also creating schemes to help young people buy homes.

2014 data showed that there were 24,000 marriages in 2014—³⁵ the highest in a decade. Furthermore, the birth statistics were pleasing in the same year at 33,200³⁶ increasing the fertility rate.³⁷

The government, however, has said that their policies are not enough to solve all of the problems. They want the people to also take the responsibility of changing social and cultural norms so that the country can become more “family friendly”.³⁸ Whether that means a shift towards more cohabitation, or instead back to tradition, is not clear.

³² (Ng, 2015)

³³ (Jones, Yanxia, & Zhi)

³⁴ (Soon Hock, 2011)

³⁵ (Ng, 2015)

³⁶ (Ng, 2015)

³⁷ (Yuen-C, 2015)

³⁸ (Ng, 2015)

The government as also sought to deal with its aging workforce by lowering immigration barriers — this has led to 20% of the country’s 5.2 million population being comprised of non-residents and immigrants. According to Paulin Tay Straughan, a sociology professor at the National University of Singapore, this influx has led to a degree of social tension between locals and immigrants. To cope with this, the government has implemented integration programs whilst also hoping that pro-fertility and marriage policies lead to a decreased reliance on immigrants.³⁹

Japan

Status

Since the Second World War, there have been significant demographic shifts in Japan. Singlehood, divorce, and marriage delay have been on the rise, whilst marriage and fertility have been on the decline. However, whilst this is the case, marriage and childbearing is seen as an important social marker in Japanese society.⁴⁰

Data shows that in 1970 only 7.2% of women in Japan between the aged 30 to 34 had never been married, whereas in 2005 this figure stood at 32%— the impact that this will make on fertility is, and will continue to be substantial. Further projections show that by 2030, 29.5% of men, and 22.6% of women over the age of 50 will have never been married.⁴¹

Similarly to Singapore, exploring cohabitation as an alternative to marriage is very difficult to explore. Miho Iwasawa of the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research in Tokyo, has led several reports and surveys on the matter in Japan alongside James M. Raymo and Larry Bumpass of the University of Wisconsin, however the majority of the research is qualitative and all of the data relies on surveys rather than government data making it hard to be conclusive about the matter. Iwasawa reports that only 7% of unmarried women in Japan have ever cohabited.⁴² Despite this, the lack of a broad database suggests that Japan must be considered in the similarly dichotomous manner of “married” or “single” that was used in Singapore.

Low marriage and conservative approaches towards extramarital children, like Singapore, have led to a low fertility rate of 1.41.⁴³ Between 1-2% of children born in the country are born to unmarried mothers.⁴⁴

³⁹ (Tay-Straughan, 2012)

⁴⁰ (Dales, 2014)

⁴¹ (Toyota, 2011)

⁴² (Iwasawa, Raymo, & Bumpass, 2005)

⁴³ (The Japan Times, 2015)

⁴⁴ (Toyota, 2011)

Causes

Several factors that have led to the current issue have been identified.⁴⁵ A 2011 survey carried out by Dr. Mike Toyota reported that when asked if marriage was necessary, 43.9% of Japanese working women said that marriage “may not be so crucial”. Toyota also reports that men interviewed are hesitant to get married due to the unreliability of careers in the country.⁴⁶

Toyota and the BBC suggest that the entrance of women into the workforce has increased job competition markedly in what was already a very competitive country.⁴⁷ This has led to a greater degree of precariousness, which has seen a rise in avoidance of marriage. In addition, the considerable cost of raising a child has acted as a deterrent.

Like Singapore, the cult of individualism is a major factor in increased singlehood with people preferring the freedom of cohabitation or living as a single over the commitment of marriage.⁴⁸

Impact and Policy

Like most other wealthy Asian countries, having children outside of marriage is frowned upon in Japan.⁴⁹ These values combined with soaring singlehood pose serious problems to the future of the country. A fertility rate of 2.00⁵⁰ is required to maintain the population— a figure not met or exceeded since 1973 when it was 2.07, and as it stands the fertility rate is 1.41.⁵¹

The population of Japan stands at close to 130 million with a greater number of people aged over-65 than under-15. This means that high rates of singlehood, and consequently low fertility will exacerbate an already vast deficit of young people to populate the workforce and care for the elderly. Toyota predicts that by 2050 the number of under-15s will be less than the over-80s.⁵²

⁴⁵ (BBC, 2015)

⁴⁶ (Toyota, 2011)

⁴⁷ (BBC, 2015)

⁴⁸ (Toyota, 2011)

⁴⁹ (Siegel, 2013)

⁵⁰ (The Japan Times, 2015)

⁵¹ (The Japan Times, 2015)

⁵² (Toyota, 2011)

Another important facet of the institution of marriage in Japan is prospective elder care. Simply put, having children is a way of securing care in one's old.⁵³ However, with people not marrying, it is clear that the Japanese are caught in a complex dilemma.⁵⁴

There are also political and economic consequences. If trends continue the GDP of what is currently the world's third-largest economy is likely to shrink in the future and the pension scheme is likely to be burdened.⁵⁵

The Health, Labour, and Welfare Ministry estimates that Japan's population will continue to decline. It aims to maintain a population of 100m down from 126.88m of today through several policy schemes such as improving job opportunities for younger people—which should enhance their economic power and in turn give them greater stability thereby increasing marriage and fertility. Another policy is to roll out programs to aid mothers with child-care so that they can continue their careers whilst having children. As of yet, the success of these policies is unknown. Birth rates are still consistently low and it will take some time to see if the policies are effective.⁵⁶

Another potential line of enquiry could be Japan's mission to create a robot economy—this could very well give people more economic stability and time— it may well solve many issues surrounding singlehood and elder care.⁵⁷

Sweden

Status

Singlehood in Sweden is amongst the highest in the world with 56.1% of population unmarried.⁵⁸ Euromonitor predicts that by 2020, half of the households in Sweden will be populated by singles.⁵⁹ However, marriage rates are actually high relatively to other EU countries, but so too are divorce rates.⁶⁰ A study of single women in Sweden found that singlehood came as a result of divorces and lack of remarriage rather than altogether avoidance of marriage.⁶¹ However, the ONS' data suggests

⁵³ (Hayashi, 2011)

⁵⁴ (BBC, 2015)

⁵⁵ (BBC, 2015)

⁵⁶ (The Japan Times, 2015)

⁵⁷ (Nohara, 2015)

⁵⁸ (Statistics Sweden, Unit for Population Statistics , 2015)

⁵⁹ (The Economist, 2012)

⁶⁰ (Statistics Sweden, Unit for Population Statistics , 2015)

⁶¹ (Evertsson & Nyman, 2013)

that increasingly Swedes simply choose not to get married.⁶² The extent to which each driving force is responsible is disputed, but the result is the same: fewer people are living as legally married couples.

One of the most interesting aspects of family status in Sweden currently, is the high incidence of cohabitation— 1.3m Swedes live as de facto married couples without any legal contract.⁶³

With regards to fertility, Statistic Sweden reports that in 2014, 22.8% of children were born to cohabiting partners that were not married. ⁶⁴ In addition, 13.5% of children were born to single mothers.⁶⁵ Interestingly, the mean age of a mother at the birth of their first child is 28.9,⁶⁶ whereas the mean age at which married women were married is 33.⁶⁷ In a country that ranks highest in the EU in terms of the percentage of children born to unmarried parents—54.4%—it seems that the attitudes towards marriage and children are very much separate—to all intents and purposes, the two are mutually exclusive. All of these changes have had little effect on the country's fertility rate, which in 2012 stood at 1.91—exactly the same as it was in 1972.⁶⁸

Causes

The data and corresponding studies suggest three growing demographics.

First, there is the growing incidence of solo-living singlehood. This can be explained through the lens of several of the already identified trends in other countries. Women and men are choosing not to marry so that they can maintain independence and freedom. People are no longer expected to only have children whilst married, and so some women will choose to have a child whilst unmarried, and not live with the father—12.5% of children are born to single, solo-living women.⁶⁹

Secondly, the demographic of cohabiting, but unmarried partners is large. As discussed, this demographic may be termed as de facto marriages, as they live like married couples, without the legal status. This has similarly likely been caused by waning conservative attitudes towards marriage: people are choosing to live together whilst unmarried, and have children too.

⁶² (Office for National Statistics, 2015)

⁶³ (Statistics Sweden, Unit for Population Statistics , 2015)

⁶⁴ (Statistics Sweden, 2014)

⁶⁵ (Statistics Sweden, 2014)

⁶⁶ (CIA, 2010)

⁶⁷ (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe , 2013)

⁶⁸ (World Bank, 2015)

⁶⁹ (Statistics Sweden, 2014)

Everston and Nyman's study suggests that there is a growing third demographic: living apart together relationships (LATs).⁷⁰ These self-explanatory relationships have been caused by a desire amongst women for independence, as well as some of the benefits of a long-term relationship. Here, many people live their lives with a significant other as if they were married, but will choose to have separate homes.

Impact and Policy

It seems that despite issues with divorce, Sweden is moving towards a society where marriage is not particularly important. The fertility rate is not an issue at 1.91, which although is a little under 2.0 the shortfall is made up by immigration.⁷¹ In addition, there is seemingly no major demand-based malaises or housing crisis in the country as a result of high singlehood. In essence, neither the country nor the individual is disadvantaged by high singlehood, and consequently, no policy needs to be implemented.

However, Everston and Nyman's study does suggest to the government that LATs have many benefits and should be encouraged. Additionally, in a broader sense, they emphasise the importance of having government taxation and benefit schemes that are impartial to singles and couples.⁷² The government is no stranger to this type of legislation having introduced the Cohabitees Act in 2003. This gave permanently cohabiting couples similar rights to those of a married couple in the case of a breakup.⁷³

France

Status

As of 2012, France is among the highest in the EU in terms of percentage of never-married singles standing at 50.2%.⁷⁴ In 2001, Martin and Théry reported that a "soft revolution" had occurred in the prior thirty years in approaches to marriage and cohabitation.⁷⁵ With 2.5m cohabiting couples and a sizeable 40% of births occurring outside of marriage, there was a need for a review of policy regarding the legal status of unmarried people.⁷⁶ From 2005 to 2015, the number of marriages registered in the year dropped from 278,000 to 231,000.

⁷⁰ (Evertsson & Nyman, 2013)

⁷¹ (World Bank, 2015)

⁷² (Evertsson & Nyman, 2013)

⁷³ (Couples in Europe, 2012)

⁷⁴ (Office for National Statistics, 2015)

⁷⁵ (Martin & They, 2001)

⁷⁶ (Martin & They, 2001)

In terms of growing singlehood's the effect on the population, it is reported that among the EU Member States, France had the highest fertility rate in 2014, with 2.01 live births per woman.⁷⁷ However, in January 2016 statistics for 2015 showed that the country's population was at its lowest since 1976.⁷⁸ Additionally, there has been a major decrease in the number of women 20 and 40—what are seen as the primary childbearing years. This figure has dropped from 9.3m in 2006, to 8.5m in 2016.⁷⁹ This is an issue as— all other factors remaining as they are— the fertility rate will necessarily decrease in the future. Furthermore, the number of children born each year has slowly been contracting over the past decade— 829,400 in 2006 and 800,000 in 2015.

The role of immigration must also be considered. Although ethnic and religious profiling is taboo in France, existent data suggests that fertility rates amongst immigrants from the Maghreb (generally Muslims) are higher than amongst French or European-born parents.⁸⁰ For example, Pew reports that in France the Muslim fertility rate stands at 2.8, whereas the non-Muslim fertility rate is 1.9.⁸¹ Pew project that the Muslim fertility rate will reduce to 2.5 by 2030.⁸² This is likely to do with economic factors, rather than religious ones. Immigrants tend to be more economically disadvantaged, and this can lead to higher fertility. In fact, the decrease in fertility amongst Muslim immigrants is projected to reduce across Europe.

Causes

Several explanations for the decline in marriage and births have been given. Some cite discrete factors such as increased terrorist activity, and the resulting spread of fear, as well as on-going economic unease. Others suggest that the President Francoise Hollande's socialist government has reduced incentives for couples to get married and to have children within marriage.

Decreasing marriage and the rise in singlehood and cohabitation can also be attributed to the French government's successful support for women in the workforce. Whilst in Eastern Asia, Southern Europe, and even Germany great emphasis is placed on the family and mothers for raising the next generation of citizens, France and Scandinavia have been successful in taking emphasis away from the notion of the family, and using the powers of the state to support care for children.

In addition, the declining importance of the Catholic Church has seen French sensitivity towards the concept of marriage has softened. It is suggested that the growing acceptance and eventual legalisation of same-sex marriage in France can be attributed to weakening Catholicism. By

⁷⁷ http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Fertility_statistics

⁷⁸ (Smits, 2016)

⁷⁹ (Smits, 2016)

⁸⁰ (Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2011)

⁸¹ (Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2011)

⁸² (Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2011)

extension, it is likely that approaches to matters of marriage and extramarital children have simultaneously liberalised.⁸³

Impact and Policy

It seems that although there may be worries about the future, up until now, France has been successful at maintaining its population. Demographer Ron Lesthaeghe, a professor of Brussels Free University praises France's well-informed and up-to-date policy making for their success: "for the economy Germany is the strong man of Europe, but when it comes to demography France is our fecund woman".⁸⁴

The National Institute for Demographic Studies (INED) leads French demography policy. In fact, INED has been so successful that several delegations from South Korea and Japan have visited to try to learn how to replicate France's success in their own respective countries with low fertility.⁸⁵

France employs strong government policy that revolves around modern models of family based on gender equality. Lesthaeghe suggests that the entire model of the family has been catered for very effectively, hence its success. Laurent Toulemon at INED says that in countries like Japan, and similarly in some Mediterranean countries, women are expected to give up work when they marry in order to care for children.⁸⁶ In previous decades staunch supporters of the traditional family model with a mother who raises the children claimed that decreases in marriage and the entrance of women into the workforce would lead to a decline in fertility, however, in reality countries that hold on to these ideologies have seen drops, whilst those that embrace the change—namely France and the Scandinavian nations—have been successful. Among women aged 24 to 54, the employment rate in France is 83.8% in France, 87.5% in Sweden, 85.6% in Denmark, and 84.4% in Finland. In contrast, these figures are much lower in countries with low fertility: 71.6% in Japan, 78.3% in Spain, 64.4% in Italy, and 72.2% in Greece.⁸⁷

General Trends and Issues

The social construction of marriage is continuously evolving. Although variation exists between different era, cultures, religions, and classes, there are several trends in how and why marriage has manifested itself in its traditional form. To the elite, it was a means of maintaining diplomatic

⁸³ (Ghosh, 2014)

⁸⁴ (Chemin, 2015)

⁸⁵ (Chemin, 2015)

⁸⁶ (Chemin, 2015)

⁸⁷ (Chemin, 2015)

relations between families and the maintenance of private property. To the everyman, marriage was often about the continuation of business and a means of supporting the extended family. In addition, reproduction and child rearing has been fundamental to marriage across the board.

With industrialisation and the growth of the middle class, marriage in Western culture is an altogether different affair. Similar cultural mores still exist, but with the emergence of nuclear families, as opposed to large extended ones, and growing emphasis on the happiness of the individual and self-actualisation, the institution continues to evolve. The growth of market economies, meritocracy, and the welfare state has led to greater social liberalism. This has meant that people have a greater capacity to live outside the bonds of family. The new importance of the individual—termed individualism—has meant that people in developed societies now marry for love and happiness. By continuation, people in marriages who no longer feel this are able to divorce, whilst unmarried couples may simply decide that the legal or religious binding that marriage gives them is simply not required, hence the growth of long-term cohabitation.

Issues arise out of this sort of individualism. In terms of singlehood, there are now a greater number of people who forgo both marriage and cohabitation. For many this is a positive life choice—sociologist Eric Klinenberg explores this in his 2012 publication *Going Solo: The Extraordinary Rise and Surprising Appeal of Living Alone*⁸⁸—however for some, the growing digitalisation of society and the resulting decline social interaction, combined with the cult of the individual has left some suffering from loneliness.

Arguably the more pressing matter is the decline in couples having children. This now mainstream culture of cohabitation and singlehood has led to declining fertility. In the west this issue not particularly major yet as the rates are still quite stable due to immigration and births to foreign-born mothers. However, highly developed Eastern countries where social conservatism is still significant, fertility rates are very low due to negative attitudes towards cohabitation and children born outside of marriage. This is leading to shrinking, aging populations that are going to be difficult to maintain.

In addition to economic advancement and the impact that this has had on the nature of marriage and relationships, another factor that must be considered is female emancipation.

Education and entrance into the workforce has changed the role of women. While this is of course for the better, it does bring about several problems. In order for a woman to be able to progress in the working world, they often put off, or even avoid, having children, further exacerbating potential fertility crises.

Additionally, the voluntary nature of marriage combined with our postfeminist society means that women rightly have higher standards when it comes to marriage. This means that women who

⁸⁸ (Klinenberg, 2012)

might have previously been subjected to unhappy marriages are able to leave them, increasing the rate of singleness.

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Appendix 1: Marital Status in England and Wales, 2015

	Single	Married	Civil partnered	Divorced	Widowed	Population aged 16 and over
Total number	15,789,198	23,837,253	115,389	3,802,489	3,005,928	46,550,257
Percentage of population aged 16 and over	33.9%	51.2%	0.2%	8.2%	6.5%	100%
Percentage of each age group by marital status						
16-19	99.6%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2,756,471
20-24	95.8%	4.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.0%	3,823,995
25-29	75.0%	23.9%	0.2%	0.8%	0.1%	3,910,483
30-34	48.2%	48.3%	0.3%	3.1%	0.1%	3,889,281
35-39	31.6%	62.1%	0.5%	5.5%	0.3%	3,563,751
40-44	26.1%	63.8%	0.4%	9.3%	0.5%	3,903,960
45-49	18.3%	66.4%	0.5%	13.7%	1.1%	4,136,176
50-54	15.0%	67.3%	0.4%	15.5%	1.9%	3,932,946
55-59	10.4%	70.5%	0.4%	15.7%	3.0%	3,379,275
60-64	8.0%	70.2%	0.3%	15.2%	6.3%	3,101,464
65-69	5.3%	71.8%	0.1%	12.8%	9.9%	3,168,294
70-74	4.7%	67.6%	0.1%	10.9%	16.7%	2,333,027

75-79	4.6%	62.1%	0.0%	7.3%	26.0%	1,899,567
80-84	4.0%	52.8%	0.0%	4.7%	38.6%	1,397,185
85+	4.5%	32.4%	0.0%	3.0%	60.1%	1,354,382

Appendix 2: Legal marital status in selected European countries, all ages, 2012⁸⁹

	Single	Married	In registered partnership	Widowed	Divorced	Separated	Unknown marital status
Czech Republic	40.2%	42.0%	..	7.3%	10.5%	..	..
Denmark	47.3%	38.9%	0.2%	5.5%	8.2%	..	0.0%
England and Wales	46.2%	41.3%	0.2%	5.5%	6.8%	..	..
Germany	42.3%	42.4%	..	7.1%	8.2%	..	..
France	50.2%	37.3%	..	6.1%	6.4%	..	..
Italy	41.5%	49.0%	..	7.5%	..	2.0%	0.0%
Latvia	41.5%	37.3%	..	9.0%	12.2%	..	..
Lithuania	38.8%	42.4%	..	9.6%	9.2%	..	..
Hungary	42.6%	37.7%	0.0%	9.8%	9.9%	..	0.0%
Netherlands	46.9%	40.2%	0.8%	5.2%	7.0%	..	..
Romania	38.0%	49.5%	..	7.8%	4.7%	..	0.0%
Slovenia	47.7%	39.6%	..	7.1%	5.6%	..	..
Slovakia	43.1%	41.9%	..	7.2%	7.9%	..	..

⁸⁹ (Office for National Statistics, 2015)

Finland	47.5%	37.3%	0.1%	5.4%	9.8%	0.0%	0.0%
Sweden	51.6%	33.9%	0.0%	4.9%	9.6%	0.0%	0.0%
Iceland	43.3%	33.8%	8.1%	3.5%	5.3%	3.4%	2.6%
Norway	51.0%	35.2%	0.0%	4.9%	7.6%	1.3%	0.0%
Switzerland	43.2%	43.8%	0.1%	5.1%	7.8%	0.0%	0.0%
Turkey	45.7%	47.7%	..	4.0%	2.2%	..	0.3%

Appendix 3: A Partnership and prevalence of cohabitation, recent years⁹⁰

⁹⁰ (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development , 2013)

	All ages from 20 years old				ages 20-34 ²				
	Single, living alone	Married	Cohabiting	Other	Single, living alone	Married	Cohabiting	In parental home	Other
Australia ³	18.5	51.2	8.9	21.4	:	:	:	:	:
Austria	16.5	48.3	6.5	28.7	15.3	32.6	13.7	32.4	6.0
Belgium	19.5	48.6	6.4	25.6	18.8	22.0	5.2	54.1	
Bulgaria	14.0	42.4	4.2	39.4	6.4	18.9	2.8	71.9	
Canada	10.7	39.3	8.9	41.1	:	:	:	:	:
Cyprus ^{4,5}	6.3	61.7	0.9	41.9	4.1	47.6	2.1	33.8	12.4
Czech Republic	14.8	51.6	2.9	30.7	11.9	39.0	4.2	40.1	4.9
Denmark	24.1	40.8	11.5	23.5	33.7	25.4	28.6	7.6	4.8
Estonia	18.2	43.9	11.8	26.1	14.1	31.8	23.5	27.4	3.2
Finland	19.6	43.6	11.8	25.0	20.8	27.0	28.3	17.7	6.2
France	22.8	44.6	14.4	18.2	19.4	21.3	21.8	37.5	
Germany	16.4	47.5	5.3	30.7	20.3	33.7	13.6	23.9	8.5
Greece	8.0	56.4	1.7	33.9	6.0	36.4	3.1	45.5	8.9
Hungary	12.0	50.9	6.3	30.7	6.6	39.4	11.5	36.0	6.5
Ireland	10.6	53.4	5.9	30.0	5.5	27.6	13.4	45.2	8.3
Italy	10.8	53.9	2.0	33.2	5.8	30.5	3.0	51.1	9.5
Japan	15.4 ⁶	47.5	2.0 ⁷	:	:	34.8	:	:	:
Latvia	16.5	58.0	5.5	20.0	7.5	35.0	6.3	51.2	0.0
Lithuania	14.2	55.0	4.1	26.6	15.4	69.2	8.3	0.0	7.1
Luxembourg	19.1	58.2	14.0	8.7	18.0	23.3	11.4	47.2	
Malta	7.0	40.1	2.1	50.8	3.1	31.4	0.8	64.7	
Netherlands	15.8	48.1	9.3	26.9	19.5	29.9	21.9	19.9	8.8
New Zealand ³	17.6	48.6	9.3 ⁸	24.5	:	:	:	:	:
Norway	19.3	44.1	10.7	25.8	21.0	25.0	22.7	26.6	4.7
Poland	11.2	56.3	1.3	31.1	8.0	40.7	1.9	43.5	6.0
Portugal	7.0	56.5	4.1	32.4	4.1	40.5	5.9	39.0	10.6
Romania	7.6	56.1	4.3	32.0	3.1	48.8	7.4	31.4	9.3
Slovenia	9.6	52.7	5.4	32.3	3.8	27.5	8.8	57.0	2.8
Slovak Republic	14.6	54.5	1.4	29.4	10.8	40.5	1.7	42.9	4.1
Spain	8.6	53.6	3.3	34.5	5.4	27.3	5.5	52.1	9.7
Switzerland	17.5	49.3	5.9	27.4	20.7	35.2	12.3	21.3	10.5
Turkey	3.9	45.7	0.2	50.3	2.4	37.8	0.0	59.7	
United Kingdom	14.9	47.3	8.7	29.0	11.4	32.2	22.2	24.7	9.6
United States	13.4	52.9	5.5	28.2	:	:	:	:	:
OECD-25	15.2	49.9	6.8	27.9	14.3	31.4	12.4	36.4	7.7

Appendix 4: Families by family type and presence of children in 1996 and 2012⁹¹

	1996	2012
	Estimate	Estimate
Married couple family	12,641,000	12,185,000
No children	5,746,000	5,936,000
Dependent children	5,223,000	4,610,000
Non-dependent children only	1,673,000	1,639,000
Civil partner couple family	N/A	66,000
No children or non-dependent children only	N/A	60,000
Dependent children	N/A	6,000
Opposite sex cohabiting couple family	1,459,000	2,893,000

⁹¹ (Statistics Sweden, 2014)

No children	877,000	1,632,000
Dependent children	539,000	1,131,000
Non-dependent children only	43,000	130,000
Same sex cohabiting couple family	16,000	69,000
No children or non-dependent children only	15,000	64,000
Dependent children	..	6,000
Lone parent family	2,445,000	2,975,000
Dependent children	1,631,000	1,986,000
Non-dependent children only	814,000	989,000
Lone mother family	2,089,000	2,575,000
Dependent children	1,466,000	1,811,000
Non-dependent children only	623,000	764,000
Lone father family	356,000	400,000
Dependent children	164,000	176,000
Non-dependent children only	191,000	224,000
All families	16,560,000	18,188,000
No children	6,637,000	7,688,000
Dependent children	7,393,000	7,739,000
Non-dependent children only	2,530,000	2,761,000