

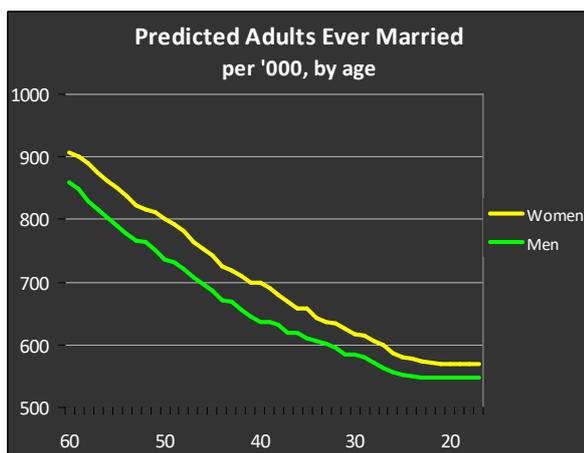


Marriage Foundation

Unfulfilled aspirations: Half of teens will never marry

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March 2019

- Our analysis of new Office for National Statistics data suggests that only a little over half of all today's teenagers will get married, in spite of multiple survey evidence showing that the vast majority of teens want to get married at some stage.
- Whereas 91 per cent of women and 86 per cent of men in their 60s have ever married, on current rates, we project that 57 per cent of today's teenage girls and 55 per cent of teenage boys will eventually marry.
- The analysis also reveals the near disappearance of marriage under 25. Whereas in 1970, 81 per cent of women and 62 per cent of men had married by age 25, today only 8 per cent of women and 4 per cent of men have done so.
- The delay in age at marriage is not enough to account for the fall in overall marriage rates. Whereas today 35 per cent of men and 29 per cent of women get married after age 30, compared to 11 per cent of men and 6 per cent of women in 1970, marriage before age 30 has fallen from 85 per cent to 21 per cent for men and 91 per cent to 30 per cent for women.
- As well as representing the failure of a dream, the trend away from marriage has serious negative consequences for family stability and teenage well-being.



Using data on marriages up until 2016 published this week by the Office for National Statistics (*ONS 2019*), and extrapolating forward on current trends, we estimate that 57 per cent of today's teenage girls and 55 per cent of today's teenage boys will ever marry.

Among women, 91 per cent of those aged 60 have ever married, compared to a projected 80

per cent of those aged 50, 70 per cent of those aged 40, and 62 per cent of those aged 30.

Among men, 86 per cent of those aged 60 have ever married, compared to a projected 74 per cent of those aged 50, 64 per cent of those aged 40, and 59 per cent of those aged 30.

In surveys of teens and young adults, most say they want and expect to marry. *Civitas (de Waal 2008)* found that 76 per cent of 20-24 year olds wanted to get married. And a survey by Seddons and Marriage Foundation showed that 77 per cent of unmarried 18-24 year olds wanted to get married (*unpublished MF analysis*).

Very few teens reject the possibility of marriage altogether. One survey found that 7 per cent of 16-21 girls ruled out marriage completely. (*Girlguiding 2012*). A more recent survey of 14-17 year olds found only 4 per cent said marriage was not part of their plans (*CSJ 2018*).

Our analysis reveals the mismatch between aspiration and achievement.

Marriage trajectories

For those now in their 60s, marriage was near universal and mostly took place during their early 20s.

The charts and tables below show the trajectory of marriage for women and men born in different eras.

For women born in the 1950s, 94 per cent got married. Not all of these worked of course. But marriage was the norm. For men 90 per cent got married.

In the ensuing decades, couples have delayed, postponed and avoided marriage as cohabitation has grown in popularity.

At today's rates, just 57 per cent of teenage girls and 55 per cent of teenage boys can expect to marry.

This is in sharp contrast to the high level of aspiration to marry found across multiple surveys.

Almost all teens aspire to marriage. Only half will now achieve this.

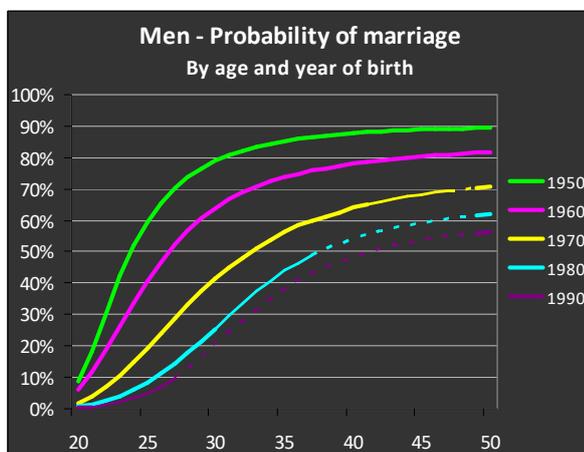
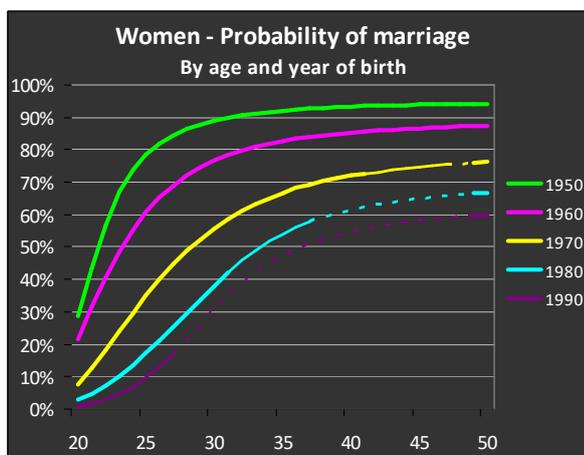


TABLE 1

Actual & Predicted probability of ever marrying

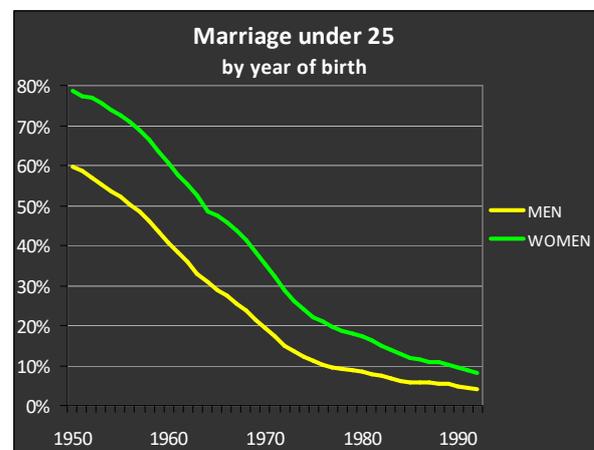
By Birth Year	Men	Women
1950	90%	94%
1960	82%	88%
1970	71%	76%
1980	62%	67%
1990	56%	60%
2000	55%	57%

By Age Now	Men	Women
60	86%	91%
50	74%	80%
40	64%	70%
30	59%	62%
20	55%	57%

Decline of marriage under 25

The following charts show the near disappearance of marriage amongst those under 25.

Whereas in 1970, when marriage rates were at their peak, 81 per cent of women and 62 per cent of men had already married by age 25, just 8 per cent of women and 4 per cent of men under 25 have married by age 25 today.



This decline in early marriage has only partially been replaced by an increase in later marriage.

The following charts show an increase in marriage across all age groups – except for men under 30.

However an approximate 20 per cent increase in marriage over age 30 does not account for a near 70 per cent fall in marriage under 30.

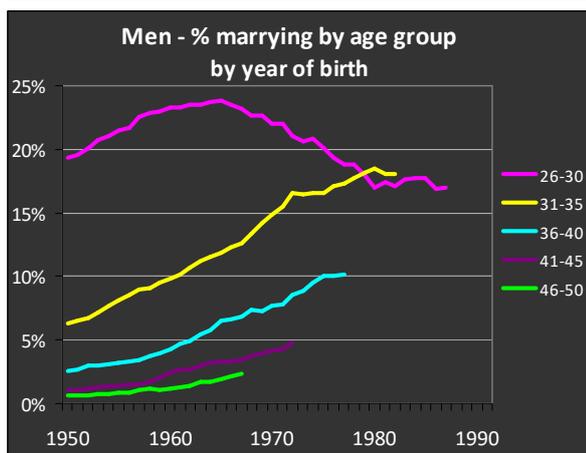
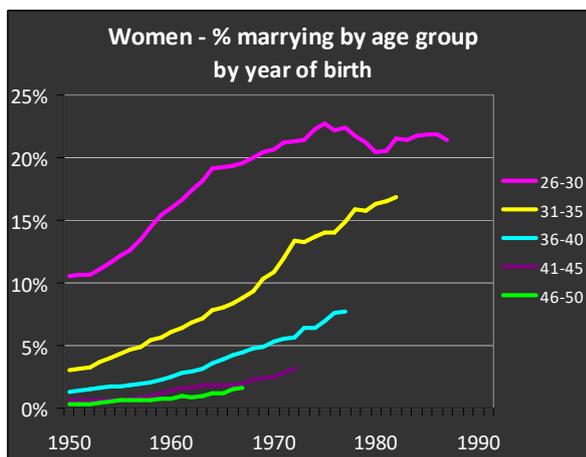


TABLE 2
New marriages by age group

	Men			Women		
	2016	2000	1970	2016	2000	1970
Under 25	4.0%	10.2%	62.3%	8.1%	20.9%	81.0%
26-30	17.0%	22.0%	22.5%	21.4%	21.2%	10.3%
31-35	18.1%	12.3%	6.2%	16.8%	8.4%	2.8%
36-40	10.1%	4.7%	2.3%	7.7%	2.8%	1.3%
41-45	4.8%	1.5%	1.3%	3.2%	0.8%	0.8%
46-50	2.3%	0.6%	0.8%	1.6%	0.3%	0.6%

Comment

Study after study shows that marriage is good for stability.

Couples who marry are significantly more likely to stay together than those who don't, even taking into account background factors such as age, education and ethnicity, and even when including relational factors such as happiness, conflict and planned birth (*Benson 2015, Benson & McKay 2016, 2018a, 2019*)

Marriage is also good for children's outcomes.

Teenage self-esteem is boosted in families with married parents. This again takes into account background factors. (*Benson & James 2016*)

Teenage mental health is protected in families with married parents.

Our analysis of thousands of teenagers in the Millennium Cohort Study has shown that family breakdown is the number one predictor of problems for girls and equal first for boys, alongside parental relationship happiness (*Benson & McKay 2017*).

Even among intact families, having married parents has a unique protective effect on the mental health of teenage boys in particular (*Benson & McKay 2018*).

For the benefit of couples and their children family policy needs to acknowledge and address the trend away from marriage, because it undermines the stability of couples, it undermines the well-being of their teenage children and it undermines the hopes and dreams of those young adults for their own future.

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