

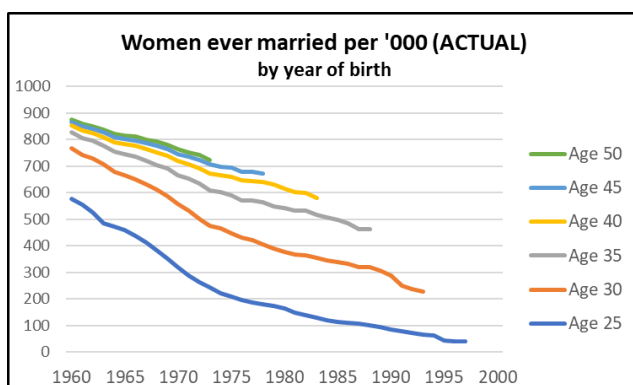


# Marriage Foundation

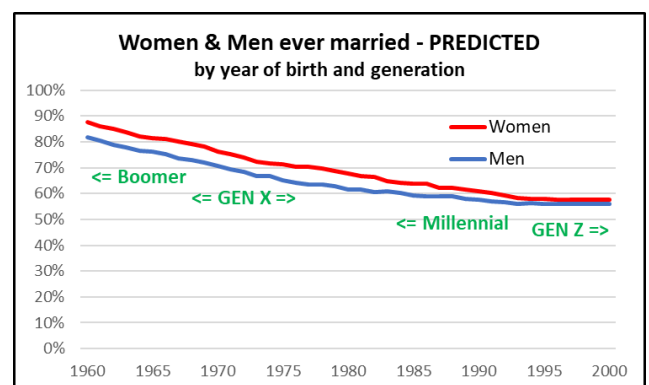
## The collapse of marriage among Gen Z

Harry Benson, Marriage Foundation

- Just over half of all Gen Z men and women will ever marry, according to our new analysis of marriage data from the Office for National Statistics.
- On present trends, 58 percent of Gen Z women and 56 percent of Gen Z men (born 1997 onwards) will ever marry, compared to 56-67 percent of millennials (born 1981-1996), 62-82 percent of Gen X (born 1965-1980), and 77-96 percent of boomers (born 1946-1964).
- Marriage rates have especially collapsed among those aged 25 and under. Whereas 60 percent of women and 41 percent of men born in 1960 married before they were 25 years old, today just 4 percent of women and 2 percent of men born in 1998 have done so.
- The effect of lockdown on marriages has yet to run its full course. We have previously identified that weddings in 2021 and 2022 have not yet made up for the cancellations and postponements forced by our draconian restrictions. Fully 115,000 weddings, equivalent to half a year, have simply disappeared.
- This drop can be seen in the recent dips in the chart below. The biggest drop has been among those aged 30, whose marriage rate is 16 percent lower than it should have been. It's possible these young adults will marry later, perhaps having decided to save the money for now.
- This is a tragedy. There is a great deal of evidence that making decisions and acting upon them – as in the act of marriage – changes the way people see one another for the better.
- Fewer marriages means more family breakdown. We already have the highest level of breakdown in UK recorded history. Nearly half of all children are not living with both natural parents. It's no coincidence that that this matches the trend away from marriage.



This shows the ACTUAL proportion of women who HAVE EVER MARRIED, by their year of birth. So, 23 percent of today's 30-year-olds have ever married, compared to 58 percent of today's 40-year-olds and 72 percent of today's 50-year-olds.



This shows the PREDICTED proportion of women and men who WILL EVER MARRY, by their year of birth. Based on existing trends, 58 percent of Gen Z women and 56 percent of Gen Z men will marry by age 50.

## Introduction

New figures from the Office for National Statistics show the proportion of men and women who have ever married, by age and year of birth (ONS, 2024).

Why does any of this matter? Put simply, the trend away from marriage has profound consequences for stability & children's outcomes.

Couples who marry before their child is born are more likely to stay together while bringing up their child compared to couples who marry later or not at all. Whereas 76% of couples stay together if they were married before their child was born, 44% stay together if they married later on and 31% if they never married (Benson, 2015).

Couples who split up are then far more likely to experience poverty and need higher levels of state support. For example, 60% of lone parents receive housing benefit compared to just 10% of couple parents (DWP, 2015; ONS, 2022).

Whether through the drop in income, loss of contact with one parent, or psychological impact of parental divorce, children living in lone parent families tend to fare worse on almost any negative social indicator (Amato, 2005; Brown, 2004; Panico et al, 2010).

Today, we already have the highest level of family breakdown in recorded UK history. Nearly half of all teenagers are not living with both natural parents (Kiernan et al 2022). The source of more than two thirds of this family breakdown is not from couples divorcing but from the break-up of couples who never married in the first place (Benson 2023).

## Actual trends in marriage

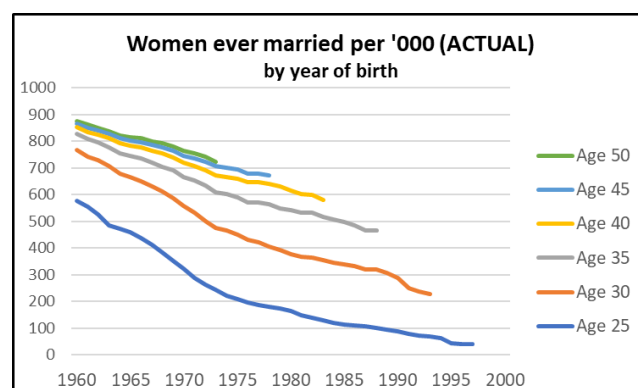
The following tables and charts use data taken directly from 'Marriages in England & Wales 2021 and 2022', Tables 14a and 14b (ONS 2024). Data show how marriage rates under 25 have collapsed, how both women and men are marrying later, and how fewer adults marry at all.

Because the typical newlywed husband is two years older than the typical newlywed wife (within the context that there is a spread of age differences), men on average marry even later than women and even fewer men than women end up married at all.

Among women:

- Just 4% of those women who have most recently reached age 25 have ever married, compared to 61% of women born in 1960
- 58% of those women who have most recently reached age 40 have ever married, compared to 85% of women born in 1960

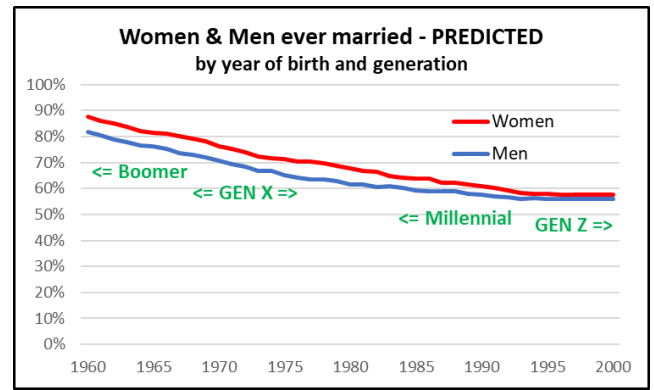
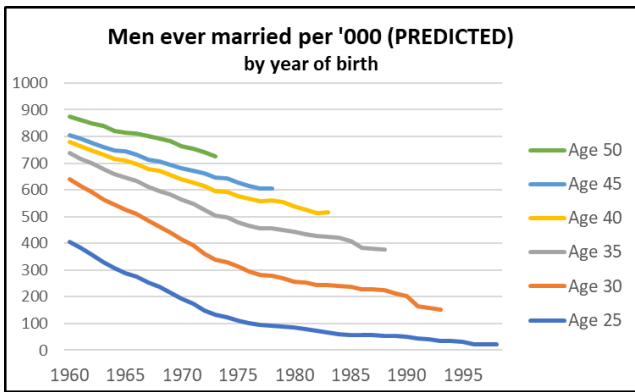
	25	30	35	40	45	50
1960	61%	77%	83%	85%	87%	88%
1965	47%	67%	75%	78%	80%	82%
1970	35%	56%	67%	72%	75%	76%
1975	22%	45%	59%	66%	69%	
1980	17%	38%	54%	62%		
1985	12%	34%	50%			
1990	10%	29%				
1995	6%					
Latest	4%	23%	46%	58%	67%	72%



Among men:

- Just 2% of those men who have most recently reached age 25 have ever married, compared to 41% of men born in 1960
- 52% of those men who have most recently reached age 40 have ever married, compared to 78% of men born in 1960

	25	30	35	40	45	50
1960	41%	64%	74%	78%	81%	82%
1965	29%	53%	65%	71%	74%	76%
1970	19%	41%	56%	64%	68%	71%
1975	11%	31%	48%	58%	63%	
1980	9%	26%	44%	54%		
1985	6%	24%	41%			
1990	5%	20%				
1995	3%					
Latest	2%	15%	38%	52%	60%	67%



## Predicted trends in marriage

Using the latest annual marginal increase in marriage rates for each birth cohort, it is possible to extrapolate the lifetime likelihood of marriage for each age group. The table below shows how these latest trends might apply to the current generation of 20-somethings. For example:

- 58% of women currently aged 30 or under are predicted ever to marry, compared to 88% of those aged 60 who have actually already married.
- 56% of men currently aged 30 or under are predicted ever to marry, compared to 82% of those aged 60 who have actually already married.

	25	30	35	40	45	50
1960	61%	77%	83%	85%	87%	88%
1965	47%	67%	75%	78%	80%	82%
1970	35%	56%	67%	72%	75%	76%
1975	22%	45%	59%	66%	69%	71%
1980	17%	38%	54%	62%	65%	68%
1985	12%	34%	50%	57%	61%	64%
1990	10%	29%	45%	54%	58%	61%
1995	6%	22%	42%	51%	56%	58%
Latest	4%	22%	42%	51%	55%	58%

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1960	41%	64%	74%	78%	81%	82%
1965	29%	53%	65%	71%	74%	76%
1970	19%	41%	56%	64%	68%	71%
1975	11%	31%	48%	58%	63%	65%
1980	9%	26%	44%	54%	59%	62%
1985	6%	24%	41%	50%	56%	59%
1990	5%	20%	37%	48%	55%	58%
1995	3%	15%	35%	47%	53%	56%
Latest	2%	15%	35%	47%	53%	56%

The final chart below shows the overall trend in lifetime marriage rates for both women and men.

## Conclusion

The trend away from marriage in the UK coincides with record levels of family breakdown and associated negative social consequences for both adults and children. This analysis of marriage data from the Office for National Statistics shows that UK marriage rates continue to fall for both women and men. Based on present trends, we predict that 58 percent of Gen Z women and 56 percent of Gen Z men will ever marry.

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