



Who is having babies? 2008

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Coverage: England and Wales **Theme:** Population

Background

In 2008, there were 708,711 babies born in England and Wales.¹ The number of births has increased each year since a dip in 2001, when there were 594,634 babies born. There were nearly 19,000 more births in 2008 than 2007. This is a slightly smaller increase than seen in the previous two years, but still equivalent to over 700 additional classrooms when these children start school.²

Recent increases in births have been driven by two main factors – increasing fertility rates among women born in the UK and the increasing population of non-UK born women of childbearing age.³ Trends in the number of births to UK born and non-UK born women have been well documented elsewhere.⁴

This bulletin describes some of the characteristics of mothers and fathers having babies in 2008, using data collected at birth registration in England and Wales. It answers such questions as:

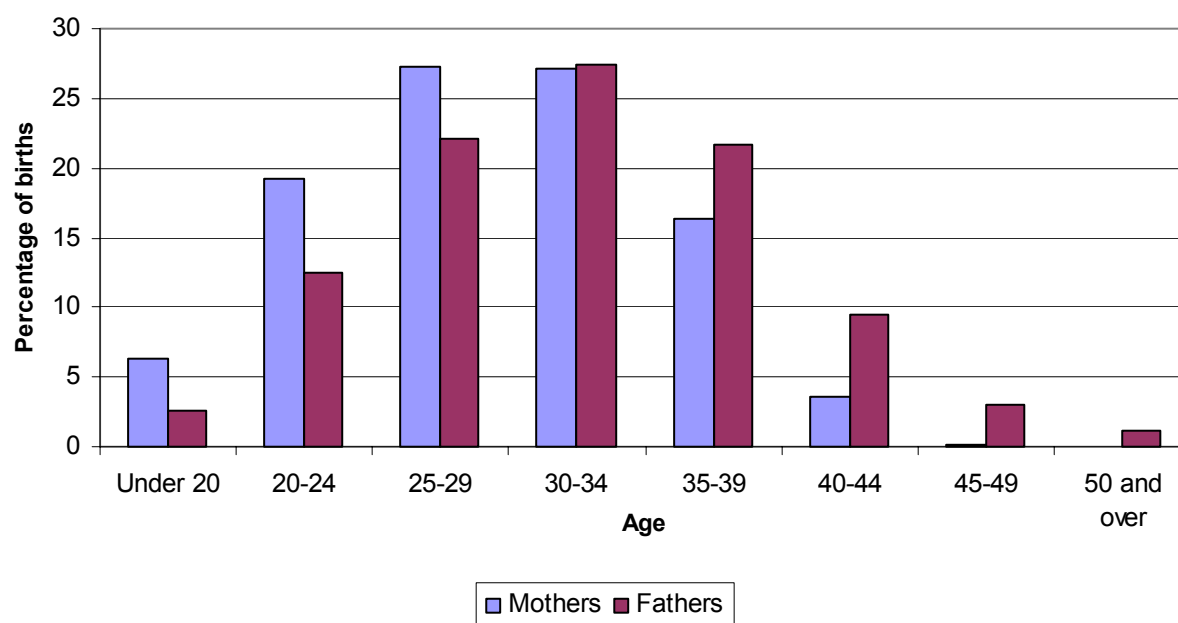
- At what ages are men and women giving birth?
- What proportions of babies are born to cohabiting couples?
- Does the proportion of babies born to married parents vary by mother's country of birth?
- Have recent increases in births occurred across all socio-economic groups?

Age of parents

Babies born in England and Wales in 2008 were most likely to have a mother aged 25-34, with over half (54 per cent) of mothers being in this age group (figure 1).⁵ A further quarter (25 per cent of babies) were born to younger mothers, aged below 25, while one-fifth (20 per cent) had mothers aged 35 or above at the time of birth.⁶

Fathers tend to be older than mothers. Nearly half of all babies born (47 per cent) had mothers aged 30 or over, but nearly two-thirds (63 per cent of babies) were fathered by men in this age group.⁷

Figure 1 - Percentage of live births by age group of mother and father, England and Wales, 2008



Note: For the small proportion of births outside marriage that were sole registered by the mother, age of father has been estimated – see background note 7.

The average woman giving birth in England and Wales in 2008 was aged 29.3 years, while the average father was three years older, at 32.4 years.⁸ These figures refer to all births; however the average woman having her *first* birth in 2008 was estimated to be 27.5 years old.

Family context at birth

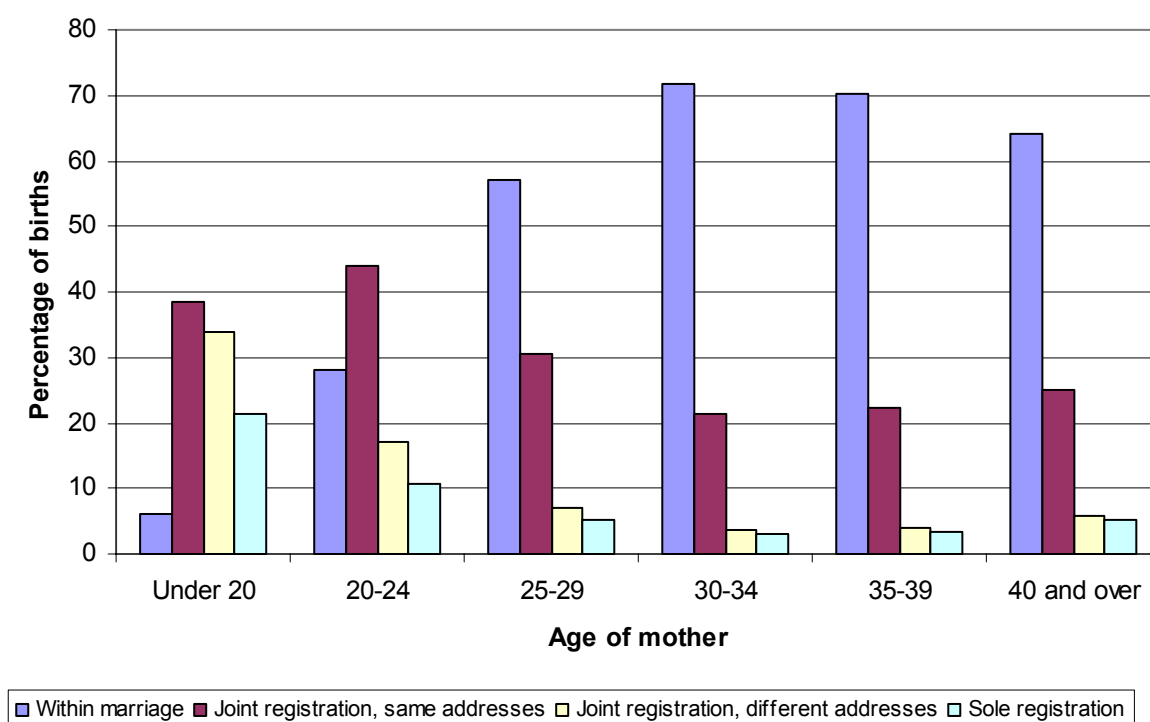
Marriage remains the most common family context for births in England and Wales as a whole, although the proportion of births registered to married couples has been falling steadily for the last three decades. In 2008, over half (55 per cent) of births occurred within marriage.

The proportion of births occurring outside marriage (45 per cent overall) varies considerably by age. Among women under 20 who gave birth in 2008, most were not married (94 per cent). In contrast, at age 30-34 the majority of women giving birth were married, with only 28 per cent of births outside marriage, the lowest of any age group.⁹

Births outside marriage can be registered jointly by both the mother and father, or solely by the mother. Where the birth is jointly registered and the parents give the same address, it can be inferred that they are cohabiting.¹⁰ The proportion of births registered to cohabiting parents has increased in recent years, reaching 30 per cent of all births in 2008. Overall, 84 per cent of babies were born to parents living together, whether married or unmarried. Of the remainder, a further 9 per cent of births in 2008 were registered jointly by parents living at separate addresses, while only 6 per cent were registered by the mother alone.¹¹

Births to mothers aged under 25 are the most likely to be jointly registered by cohabiting parents, while for women aged 25-29 and older, marriage is the most common setting for births, followed by cohabitation (figure 2). Sole registrations and joint registrations to parents living at different addresses are also more common among younger mothers than among those aged 25 and above.

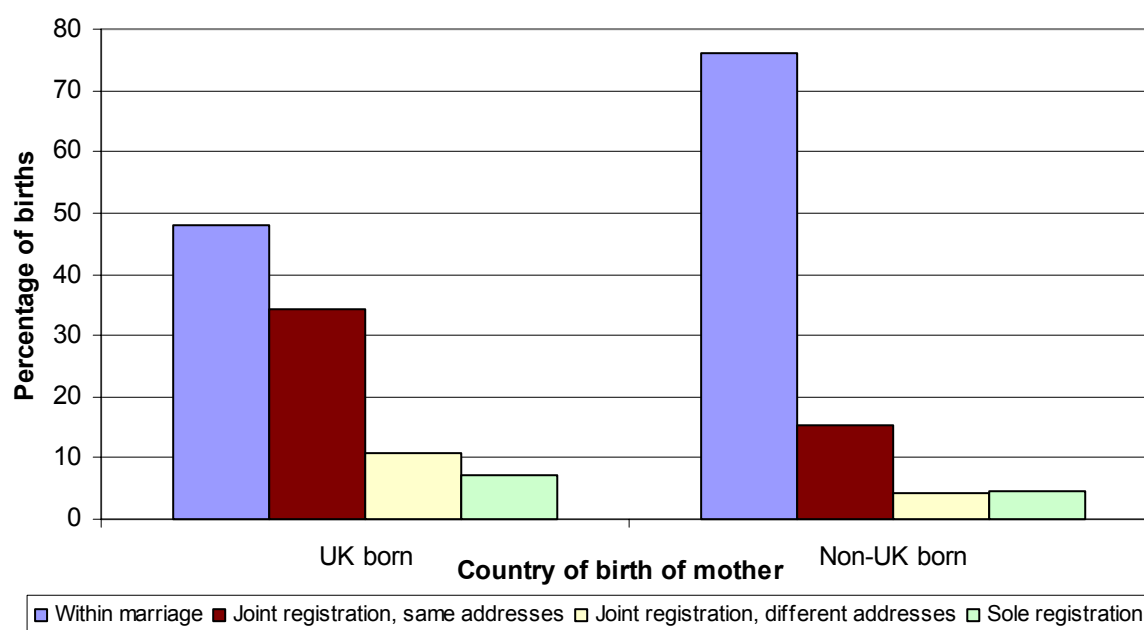
Figure 2 – Percentage of live births by mother's age and type of registration, England and Wales, 2008



There is considerable variation in the family context of births according to the country in which the mother herself was born. Just under half (48 per cent) of births to UK born women were to married couples in 2008, compared with three-quarters (76 per cent) of births to women born outside the UK (figure 3). The proportions of births to cohabiting parents and to parents jointly registering but living at different addresses were both twice as high among UK born women as for non-UK born women.

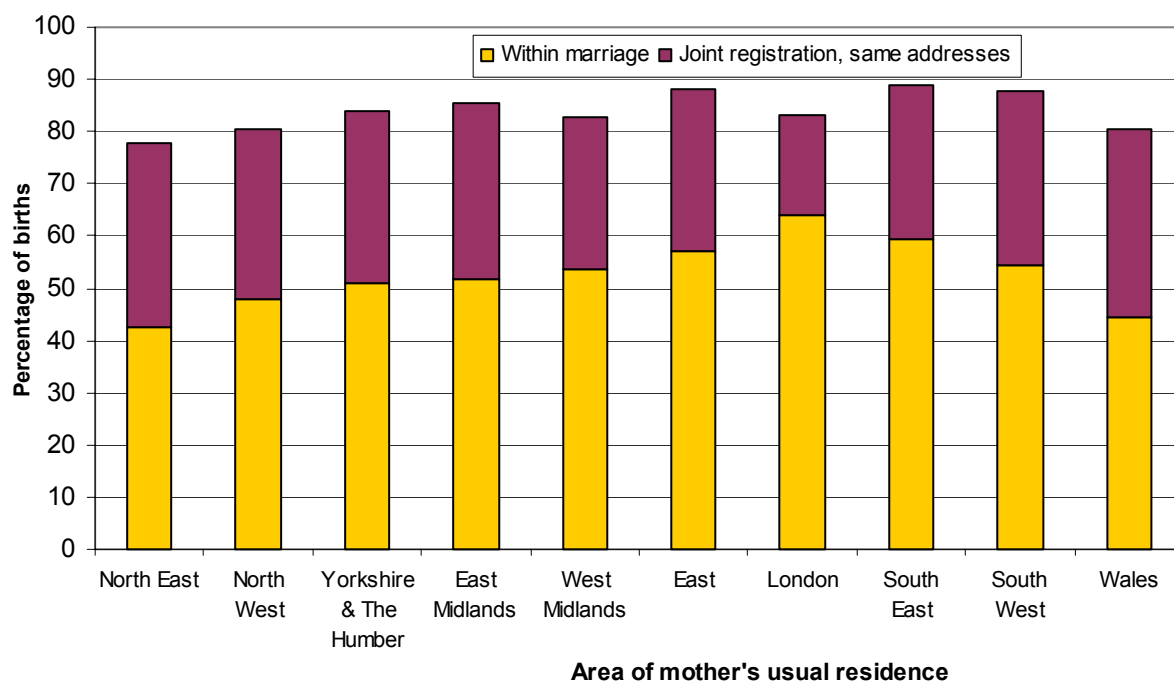
However women born outside the UK are not a homogenous group in terms of the family context in which births take place. For example 98 per cent of births to women born in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh occurred within marriage in 2008. This compares to 39 per cent of births to women born in Caribbean countries.¹²

Figure 3 – Percentage of live births by mother's country of birth and registration type, England and Wales, 2008



The proportion of births registered to two parents living together (whether married or cohabiting) varies across England and Wales (figure 4). Babies were most likely to be born to married or cohabiting parents in the southern and eastern areas of England: 89 per cent in the South East, and 88 per cent in both the East and South West. Babies born in the North East (78 per cent), North West (80 per cent) and Wales (81 per cent) were least likely to be born to two parents living at the same address.

Figure 4 - Percentage of live births to two parents living together, Government Office Regions in England, and Wales, 2008



Note: births not occurring to two parents living together may be either joint registrations by two parents living at different addresses or sole registrations by the mother.

Larger geographic differences can be seen in the proportions of babies born within marriage. Less than half of births in 2008 took place within marriage in the North East (43 per cent), Wales (44 per cent) and the North West (48 per cent).¹³ In contrast, London experienced the highest proportion of births within marriage (64 per cent in 2008).

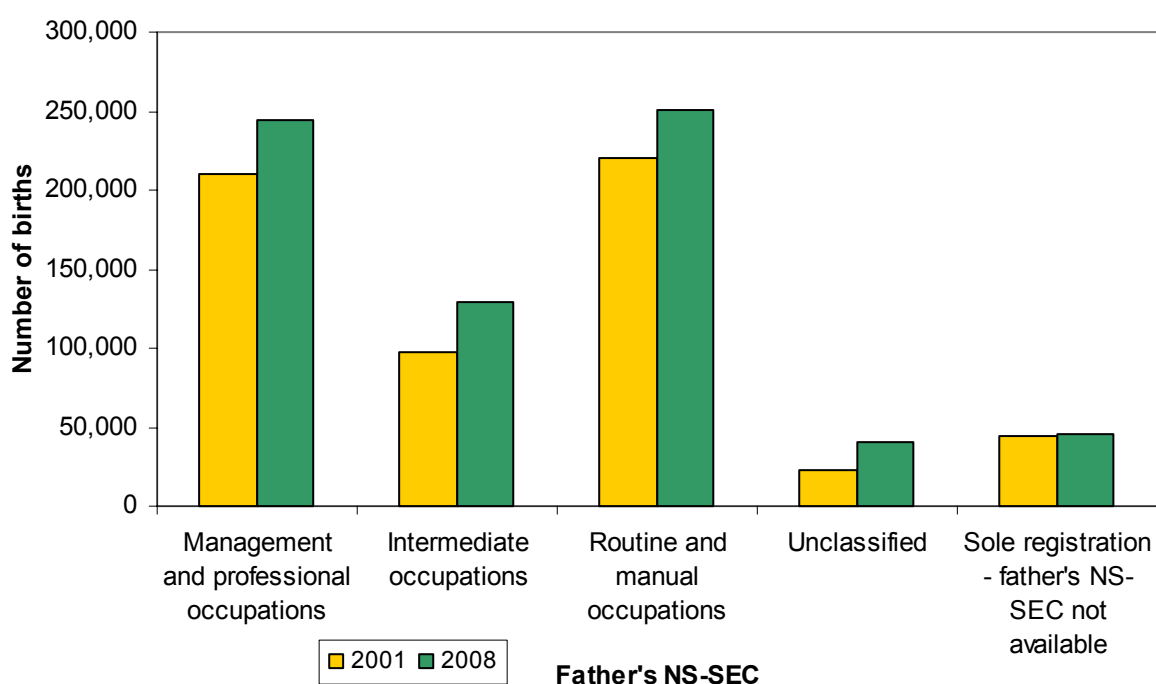
London's high proportion of births within marriage is likely to be associated both with its above-average proportion of births to women born outside the UK (55 per cent compared with 24 per cent nationally¹⁴) and its high proportion of births to older mothers (25 per cent of births to women over 35, compared with 20 per cent nationally¹⁵). This is because both older mothers and non-UK born mothers are more likely than average to be married when they give birth.

Socio-economic status of fathers

Out of every 100 babies born in 2008, 34 were registered as having a father in a management or professional occupation and 18 had a father in an intermediate occupation.¹⁶ A further 35 babies in every 100 had a father in a routine or manual occupation. Of the remainder, six babies had a father whose occupation was 'unclassified' and six babies were sole registered by their mothers (and therefore no socio-economic information is available for the father). Note that socio-economic information on the mother is also collected at birth registration, but is not presented here due to the high proportion of mothers in the 'unclassified' group.

The increasing number of births since 2001 has not been confined to a specific socio-economic group (figure 5). The number of births registered to fathers in management or professional occupations increased by 16 per cent between 2001 and 2008, while the number registered to fathers with routine or manual occupations rose by 14 per cent. The largest relative increase in births among the three main socio-economic groups was in births to fathers with intermediate occupations, where numbers increased by 31 per cent.

Figure 5 – Live births by father's socio-economic classification (NS-SEC), England and Wales, 2001 and 2008



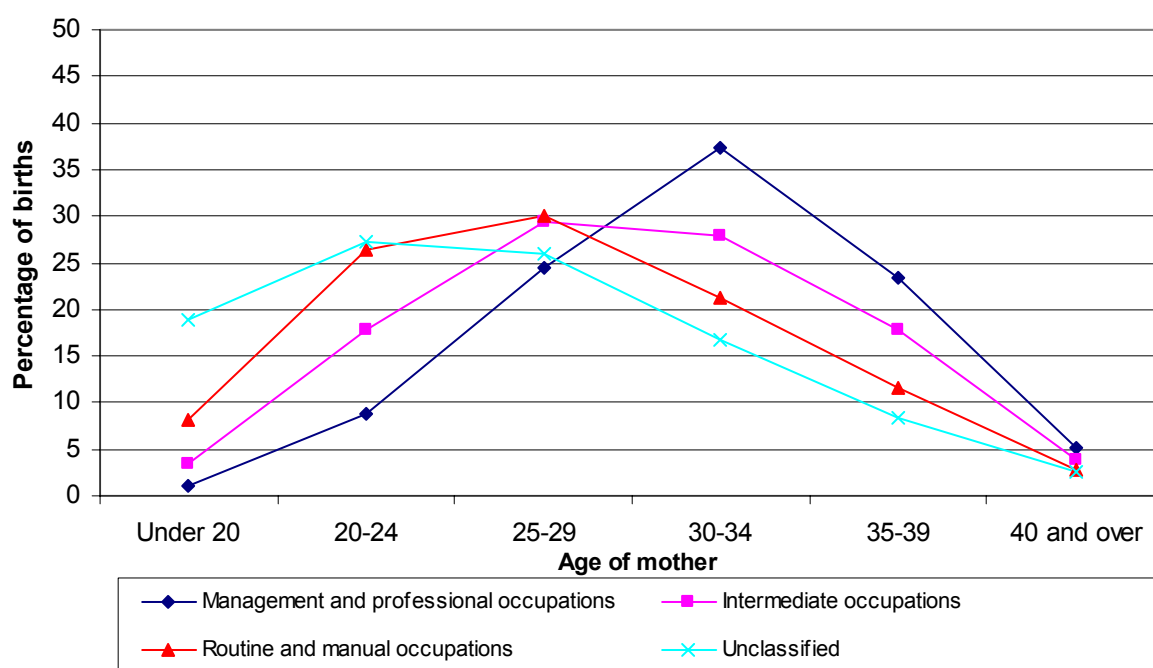
Note: first four categories (NS-SEC) refer to births within marriage and births jointly registered by both parents outside marriage.

Changes in the number of births to fathers in each group may reflect changes in fertility rates in each group and also changes in the number of men in each socio-economic classification. Further research is needed to improve understanding of the importance of these two factors.

The age profile of women having babies in 2008 varied according to the father's socio-economic group (figure 6). Women having babies fathered by men in management or professional occupations tend to be older, with 30-34 the most common age of mothers in this group. In contrast, 25-29 is the most common mother's age at childbirth where the father is in a routine or manual occupation.

Similarly, the percentage of mothers aged 35 or above is twice as high among births to fathers in management or professional occupations (29 per cent) as for births to fathers in routine or manual occupations (14 per cent). These age differences are likely to reflect differences between socio-economic groups in age at childbearing, but also age variation in the proportion of adults in each socio-economic group.

Figure 6 – Percentage of live births in each age group (mothers) by father's socio-economic group (NS-SEC), England and Wales, 2008



Note: chart refers to births within marriage and births jointly registered by both parents outside marriage. Sole registrations are excluded.

Babies born to fathers in management and professional occupations are the most likely to have two parents living together at the time of the birth: 96 per cent of such babies had married or cohabiting parents in 2008. This compares to 92 per cent of babies registered to fathers in intermediate occupations, 86 per cent of babies with fathers in routine or manual occupations and 74 per cent of babies to fathers in unclassified occupations. These figures exclude sole registrations, where information on the father's NS-SEC is unavailable.

A similar NS-SEC gradient can be seen in the proportion of births within marriage in 2008 (from 74 per cent of babies born to fathers in management and professional occupations to 43 per cent of births to fathers in unclassified occupations). However the proportion of babies born to married parents decreased in all four socio-economic groups between 2001 and 2008, in line with the overall trend.

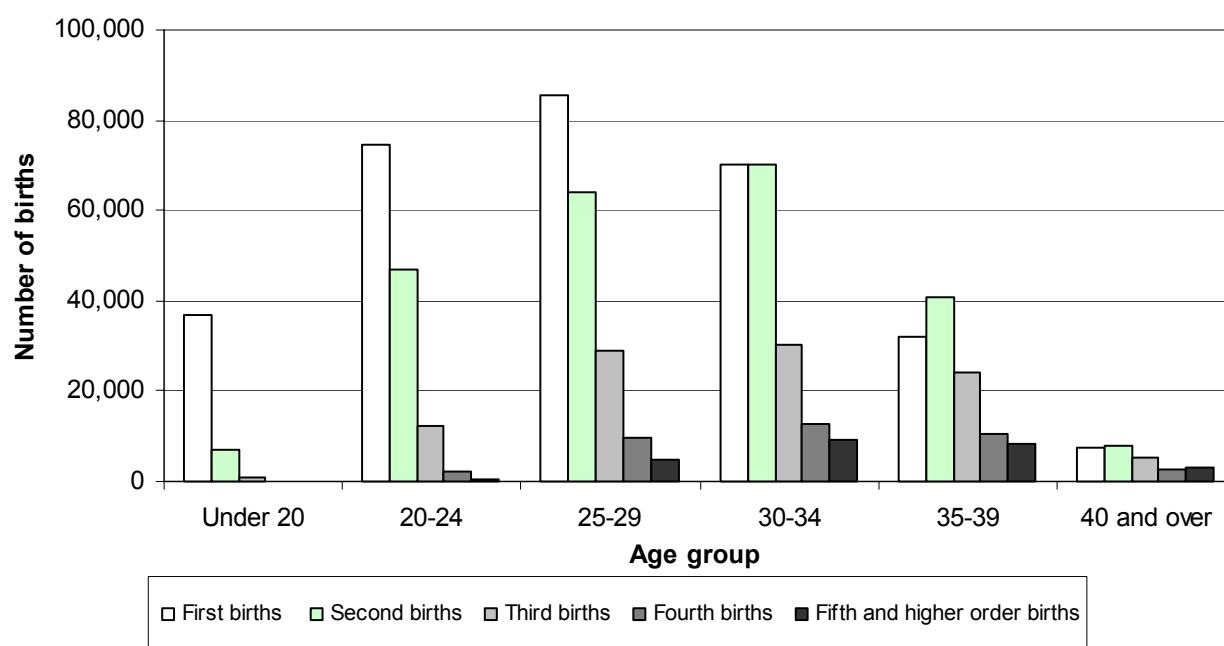
Number of previous children

In 2008, an estimated 43 per cent of births were first births to previously childless women.¹⁷ A further 33 per cent of births were second births and 14 per cent were third births. Only 9 per cent of births were the fourth or subsequent birth to that mother. These percentages have been fairly stable since 2001.

As might be expected, first births are the most common type of birth among mothers aged under 30 (figure 7). At age 30-34, the numbers of first and second births are roughly equal, while at ages 35-39 and 40 and over, second births are the most common.

A higher proportion of babies born to women aged 35 and over are fourth, fifth or subsequent births than at younger ages. However, the largest numbers of fourth and fifth or subsequent births are to women aged 30-34. The largest numbers of first births are to women aged 25-29 and the largest numbers of second and third births are to women aged 30-34.

Figure 7 – Live births by mother's age and birth order, England and Wales, 2008



Background Notes

Footnotes to text

1. This bulletin refers to live births throughout. Stillbirths have been excluded from this analysis.
2. Based on average Key Stage 1 class size of 26.2 in England in January 2009 - "DCSF: Schools, Pupils and Their Characteristics: January 2009" (www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000843/index.shtml). The illustration assumes that the number of live births will equal the number of children starting school in 4-5 years time, but this match will not be exact due to international migration, mortality and other factors.
3. These two factors have been documented elsewhere e.g. Population statistics Statistical Bulletin, August 2009 (www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=601).
4. See Tromans N, Natamba E and Jefferies J (2009), 'Have women born outside the UK driven the rise in UK births since 2001?', *Population Trends* 136, pp 28-42. (www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/article.asp?ID=2243).
5. Note that fertility rates in England and Wales in 2008 were highest at age 30-34 but since there were more women aged 25-29 than 30-34 in the population in 2008, the number of births to mothers in each age group was very similar.
6. See Table 3.1a in Birth Statistics FM1 series no.37 for live births by age of mother, 1998-2008. (<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=5768>).

7. See Table 3.8 in Birth Statistics FM1 series no.37 for live births by age of father, 2008, but note that this table does not include father's age for births registered solely by the mother. The percentages in figure 1 of this bulletin include sole registrations, for which fathers' ages have been estimated – see the following report for the methodology used to estimate fathers' ages: ONS (2009) 'Patterns of fatherhood in England and Wales, 1964-2007', *Population Trends* 136, pp 103-107.
(www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=6303).
8. Mean ages given here are standardised, which eliminates the impact of any differences in the age distributions of the male and female populations. See Table 1.7b of Birth Statistics, series FM1 no.37 for mean ages of mothers and fathers, 1998-2008.
9. See Table 3.1a in Birth Statistics FM1 series no.37 for live births by age of mother and occurrence within/outside marriage, 1998-2008. This is discussed further in ONS (2009) 'Annual Update: Births in England and Wales, 2008', *Population Trends* 138.
10. Registration type provides a rough estimate of parental partnership status at the time of birth. However, sole registration does not necessarily imply that there is no relationship between the parents (see Smallwood S (2004) 'Characteristics of sole registered births and the mothers who register them', *Population Trends* 117, pp 20-26). Also, registration type cannot tell us about the family context of children as they grow up.
11. See tables 3.9 and 3.10 in Birth Statistics FM1 series no.37 for live births outside marriage by age of mother, whether sole or joint registration and whether parents were usually resident at the same or different addresses, 1998-2008.
12. See table 9.6 in Birth Statistics FM1 series no.37 for live births within/outside marriage by country of birth of mother, 2008.
13. See Table 7.1 in Birth Statistics FM1 series no.37 for live births outside marriage per 1,000 live births by mother's usual residence, 2008.
14. See Table 9.2 in Birth Statistics FM1 series no.37 for live births by birthplace of mother and area of usual residence, 2008.
15. See Table 7.3 in Birth Statistics FM1 series no.37 for live births by age of mother and area of usual residence, 2008. For a fuller discussion of regional age differences in fertility, see Tromans N, Natamba E, Jefferies J and Norman, P (2008), 'Have national trends in fertility between 1986 and 2006 occurred evenly across England and Wales?', *Population Trends* 133, pp 7–19.
16. Information on father's occupation (based on current or most recent employment) and employment status is provided by the informant at birth registration. Occupation is coded for only a sample of one in ten births and is combined with employment status to derive the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC) of the father for the 10 per cent sample. Published figures on live births by father's NS-SEC have been grossed up to known birth totals and should be treated as estimates rather than counts. In the three-class version of NS-SEC, 'Managerial and professional occupations' include groups 1.1, 1.2 and 2; 'intermediate occupations' include groups 3 and 4; 'routine and manual occupations'

include groups 5, 6 and 7; and 'unclassified' includes the never-worked, students and inadequately described occupations. Further information can be found in section 3.10 of Birth Statistics FM1 series no.37, and further breakdowns of live births by father's NS-SEC can be found in tables 11.1 to 11.5. Mother's NS-SEC is also coded for a one in ten sample of births but is not presented here due to the high proportion of mothers that are 'unclassified'.

17. Birth order is the number assigned to a birth based on the mother's previous number of live births. The information on birth order collected at registration in England and Wales is incomplete, so is supplemented with data from the General Household Survey (GHS) to provide estimates of 'true birth order' for all live births. For more information see section 2.9 of Birth Statistics FM1 series no.37.

General notes

1. Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available from the media office.
 2. National Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. They undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure that they meet customer needs. They are produced free from any political interference.
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