

An overview of 40 years of data (General Lifestyle Survey Overview - a report on the 2011 General Lifestyle Survey)

Coverage: **GB**

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Geographical Area: **GB**

Theme: **People and Places**

Theme: **Population**

Theme: **Health and Social Care**

40 years of data collection

The 2011 General Lifestyle Survey Overview report marks 40 years of results from a continuous household survey. The survey started in 1971 as the General Household Survey and has been carried out every year since then, except for breaks in 1997/98 (when the survey was reviewed) and 1999/2000 when the survey was redeveloped. The survey was renamed The General Lifestyle Survey in 2008 to coincide with its inclusion in the Integrated Household Survey.

In 1971 the General Household Survey (GHS) was created to be a wide ranging Government service to gather information covering several main themes at the same time. These themes have remained constant over the 40 years of the survey:

- Population
- Housing
- Employment
- Education
- Health

Over the past 40 years the survey has monitored changes in the demographic, social and economic characteristics of households, families and people in Great Britain. Among the key changes measured by the survey during this time are:

- **Decline in household size** ([Chapter 3](#))

The average household size has become smaller over the 40 years between 1971 and 2011. In 1971 the average household size was 2.91 persons and by 2011 the average size was 2.35 persons. The fall in average household size was most rapid between 1971 and 1991 and has changed little since then.

The fall in average household size is due to an increase in the proportion of one-person households, which almost doubled between 1971 and 1998 (rising from 17% of households in 1971 to 29% in 1998) and has remained similar since (31% in 2011).

- **Growth in the proportion of one-parent families ([Chapter 3](#))**

Over the last 40 years the proportion of families with dependent children headed by a married or cohabiting couple has fallen and the proportion of one-parent families has increased.

In 1971 92% of families with dependent children were headed by a married or cohabiting couple, by 2011 this had fallen to 78% of families. Over the same period the proportion of one-parent families tripled from 8% in 1971 to 22% in 2011. The changes for both family types occurred predominately in the first 30 years of the survey, between 1971 and 1998, and the proportions have remained similar from 1998 onwards.

- **Increase in the proportion of people living alone ([Chapter 3](#))**

The proportion of adults living alone almost doubled between 1973 and 2011 (9% and 16%), with the increase occurring in the first thirty years (between 1973 and 1998). Across the 40 years of the survey, the proportion of older people, aged 75 and over, living alone has remained similar at around 50%. The increase in single adult households has been among adults aged 25-44 – adults in this age group were five times more likely to live alone in 2011 (10%) than in 1973 (2%), again this increase occurred between 1973 and 1998 and then remained stable.

- **Increase in proportion of one child families ([Chapter 3](#))**

The proportion of dependent children who are the only dependent child in their family has risen steadily from 18% in 1971 to 26% in 2011. This increase is reflected in the fall in average number of dependent children in families from 2.0 in 1971 to 1.7 in 2011.

- **Increase in the proportion of people who are co-habiting ([Chapter 5](#))**

The GHS has collected information about marital history, including pre-marital cohabitation, since 1979 for women aged 18 to 49, and from 1986 these questions have been asked of men.

The survey data shows that since 1979 the proportion of women aged 18 to 49 who were married has fallen from around three-quarters (74%) in 1979 to slightly fewer than half (47%) in 2011. This decline was steady between 1979 and 2003 and has since changed little.

The decline in marriage is mirrored by the increase in the number of women who are single (that is never married) which has risen steadily from 18% in 1979 to 43% in 2011, and the increase in the proportion of women cohabiting. Between 1971 and 2011 the proportion of women aged 18 to 49 who were cohabiting tripled, from 11% in 1979 to 34% in 2011. The increase occurred between 1979 and 2001 and has changed little since then.

- **Increase in the prevalence of self-reported long-standing illness or disability ([Chapter 7](#))**

The proportion of people reporting a long-standing illness or disability increased in the first 20 years of the survey, from a fifth (21%) in 1972 to a third (32%) in 1991, and has remained relatively stable during the 20 years since (32% in 2011).

The proportion of people reporting a limiting long-standing illness or disability has increased slightly since the information was first collected in 1975 (15% of people in 1975 and 19% in 2011 had a limiting long-standing illness or disability).

- **Decline in the prevalence of smoking ([Chapter 1](#))**

Questions about smoking behaviour have been included on the GHS/GLF since 1974. Over the 37 years that this data has been collected the prevalence of cigarette smoking among adults has fallen from 45% in 1974 to 20% in 2011.

Since the 1970s the difference in smoking prevalence between men and women has decreased from a ten point difference in 1974 (51% of men and 41% of women smoked) to a two point difference in 2011 (21% of men compared with 19% of women).

The overall fall in smoking prevalence has been due to a fall in the proportions of both light to moderate smokers (defined as fewer than 20 cigarettes per day) and heavy smokers (more than 20 cigarettes per day). The proportions of adults smoking heavily fell between 1974 and 2011, from 26% to 6% among men and from 13% to 4% among women. Over the same period the proportion of light to moderate smokers fell from 25% to 15% for men and 28% to 15% for women.

The overall average number of cigarettes smoked by men and women has changed little over the last 40 years. Consistently, men have smoked more cigarettes, on average, per day than women. In 1974 men smoked an average of 18 cigarettes per day and women 13, and in 2011 men reported smoking 13 cigarettes per day and women 12. The average number of cigarettes smoked per day by men has slowly declined since the early 1980s, from 17 in 1982 to 13 in 2011. Among women the average number of cigarettes consumed per day has remained constant over the 40 years with the average number of cigarettes smoked per day staying between 12 and 14 throughout that time.

- **Decline in frequent drinking and heavy drinking ([Chapter 2](#))**

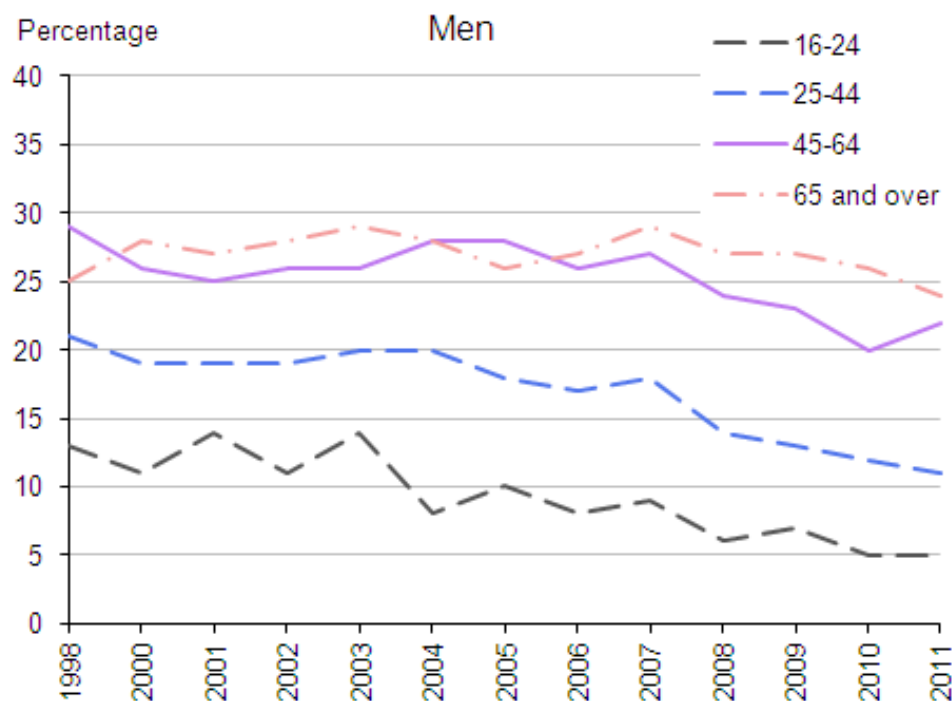
The GHS/GLF has collected information on drinking behaviour for over 30 years, however changes in the way that alcohol consumption has been measured makes providing trend data difficult. Since 1998 the methodology has remained similar, although calculation of alcoholic units was revised for 2005 data onwards, allowing trends over the last 13 years to be observed.

The proportion of men and women drinking on 5 or more days a week fell from 23% of men in 1998 to 16% in 2011, and from 13% to 9% for women. This decline has occurred in the last five years, since 2007. Consistently across this 13 year period, men and women aged 45 and over are more likely to drink on 5 or more days a week than younger people. In 2011, men aged 45-64 and 65 and over were at least twice as likely as those aged 16-24 and 24-44 to have had a drink on 5 or more days in the week before interview (22%,24%, 5% and 11% respectively).

Amount of alcohol consumed is measured in terms of the maximum amount of alcohol consumed on at least one day in the week before interview. The GHS/GLF uses the current guidance issued

by the Chief Medical Officer to define light, moderate and heavy drinking. Heavy drinking among men is defined as drinking more than 8 units on at least one day, and among women heavy drinking is defined as drinking more than 6 units on at least one day. Over the last 7 years, since 2005, the proportion of men and women who were heavy drinkers has fallen, with the decline occurring since 2007. The proportion of men aged 16-24 who were heavy drinkers fell by almost a third between 2007 and 2011 (32% in 2007 compared with 22% in 2011), and among women aged 16-24 the proportion who were heavy drinkers fell by a quarter (24% in 2007 compared with 18% in 2011).

Figure 40.1a: Drank on 5 days or more in the last week by sex, 1998 to 2011 (Men)

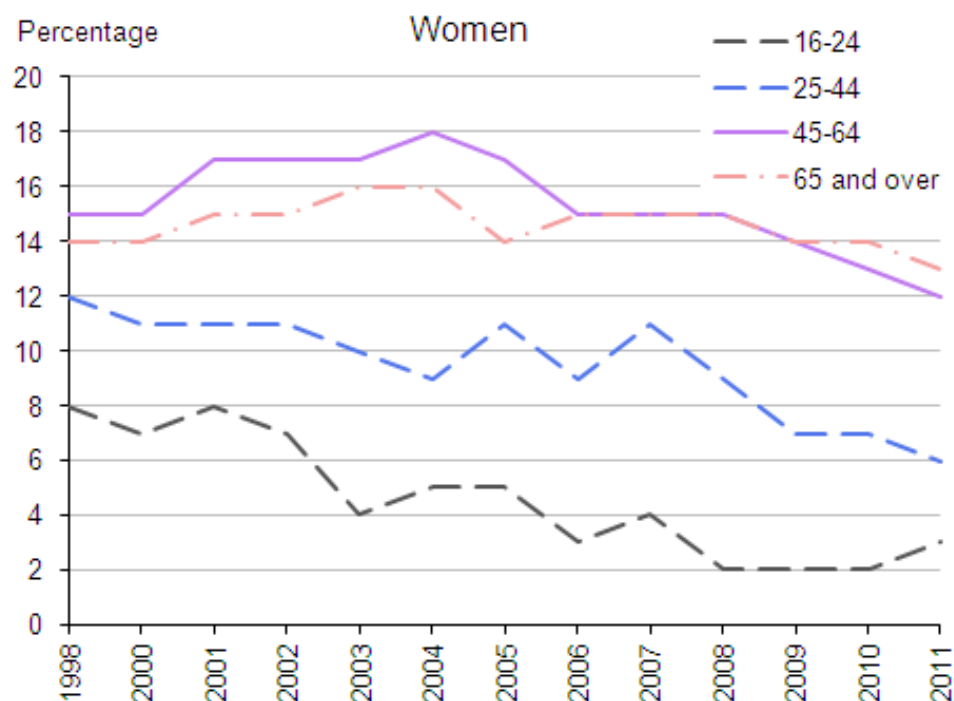


Source: General Lifestyle Survey - Office for National Statistics

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(21 Kb)

Figure 40.1b: Drank on 5 days or more in the last week by sex, 1998 to 2011 (Women)

Source: General Lifestyle Survey - Office for National Statistics

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- **Changes in the proportion of respondents belonging to occupational pension schemes** ([Chapter 6](#))

The GHS/GLF has collected information about membership of occupational pension schemes for 30 years - since 1981. Over that time the proportion of men, working full-time, who were members of their employer's occupational pension scheme has fallen from 64% in 1989 to 53% in 2011, the decline occurred between 1989 and 2000 with little change since then.

The pattern among women is different and dependent upon whether they were working full or part-time. Among women working full-time, there has been very little change since 1989 with the proportion rising slightly from 55% in 1989 to 60% in 2002 and then remaining very stable at around 58% during the decade up to 2011.

The proportion of women working part-time who were members of their employers pension schemes has more than doubled between 1989 and 2011, increasing from 15% in 1989 to 38% in 2011. This trend may be partly explained by changes following a European Court of Justice ruling in 1995 that made it illegal for pension schemes to exclude part-time workers.

- **Increase in the household availability of consumer durables** ([Chapter 4](#))

Since 1971 the survey has been used to monitor the availability of different consumer durables and over the 40 years the list of items asked about has changed to reflect current trends and also saturation. For example, the possession of a refrigerator was included in the survey from 1972 until 1985 when it was dropped because nearly every household had one. Similarly, questions about ownership of video recorders, DVD players, mobile telephones, and home computers are among items that have been included in the questionnaire as they have become more available to households.

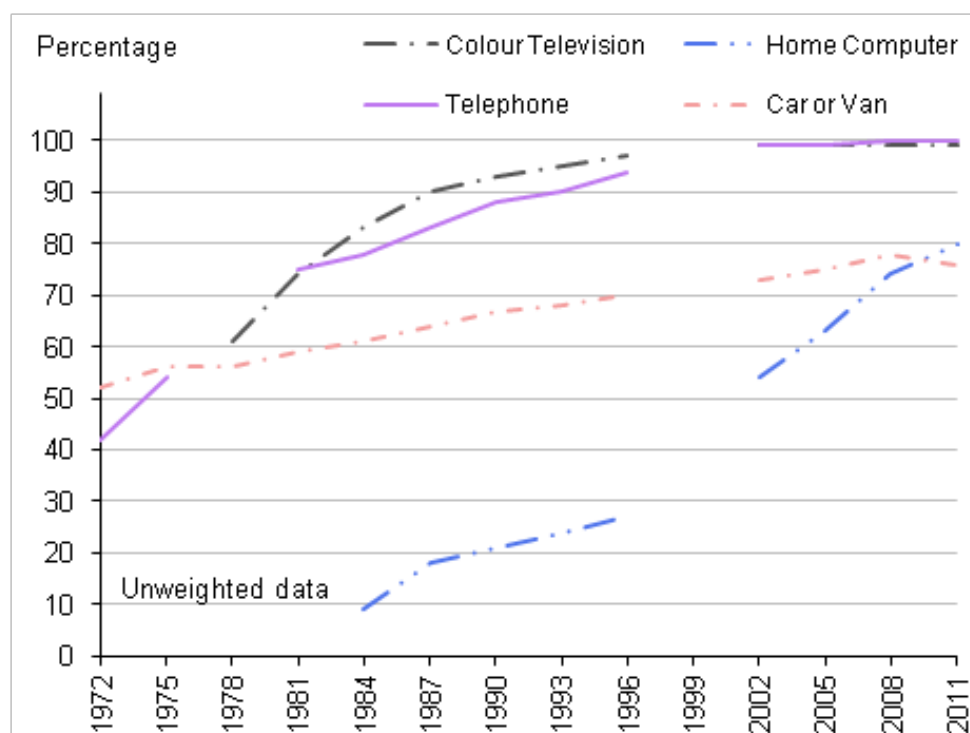
Since 1972 the proportion of households with:

- A telephone has increased from 42% to almost all households (100%) (this includes mobile telephones)
- A washing machines has increased from 66% to 96%
- Central heating has increased from fewer than two-fifths (37%) to almost all households (98%)

The proportion of households with access to at least one car or van has increased from half (52%) in 1972 to three-quarters (76%) in 2011. However, the number of households with access to one car has remained the same over the forty years between 1972 and 2011 (44% in 2011). The number of households with access to more than one car has more than trebled over this period, from one in ten households (9%) in 1972 to a third of all households (32%) in 2011.

Since the GHS first asked about home computers in 1984, the proportion of households with one has risen from 9% (1984) to 80% in 2011.

Figure 40.2: Percentage of consumer durables and cars, 1972 to 2011



Source: General Lifestyle Survey - Office for National Statistics

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(37.5 Kb)

Survey timeline

- 1971 The General Household Survey began and has been carried out annually since then, except for breaks to review it in 1997/1998 and to redevelop it in 1999/2000.
- 1972 questions included for the first time about household burglary and theft.
- 1973 questions about leisure time were included for the first time, including questions on social activities and holidays away from home.
- 1974 new questions were introduced to assess the degree of potential house movement that had been frustrated or abandoned for various reasons, particularly on account of the steep rise in house prices over the two years 1972/3.
- 1975 new questions included asking respondents about their experience of unemployment in the 12 months before interview. These questions were asked between 1975 and 1977, and then repeated in 1983 and 1984.
- 1977 questions about hearing were introduced, asking about hearing problems and the use of hearing aids. These questions were asked every couple of years up until 2001/02.
- 1978 questions first asked about drinking from all adults aged 18 and over.
- 1979 questions about the attendance of children under 5 at various types of educational and childcare facilities, there was particular interest in the arrangements which provided a child with opportunities for social development.
- 1981 questions introduced on Occupational Pensions.
- 1983 questions first asked about dental health, these were repeated on alternate years until 1995, and then in 2003.
- 1984 questions included to measure the accessibility of computers in the home and questions to ask whether an individual had signed on at an Unemployment Benefit Office, either to claim benefit or National Insurance credits.
- 1985 question asking whether the household has access to a refrigerator removed because majority of households now have a refrigerator.
- 1986 respondents were asked about their main reason for not looking for work.
- 1987 questions on personal pensions and libraries were introduced.
- 1988 questions on drinking asked of 16-17 year olds for the first time.
- 1991 questions concerning divorce, remarriage and tenure were included as divorce has implications for housing demand because many divorces result in one household being replaced by two.
- 1992 last time the usual job of father was asked, this had been a regular question from 1971.
- 1997/8 the survey is suspended while it is reviewed.
- 1998 questions about alcohol consumption on the heaviest drinking day in the week before interview are introduced, as well as asking whether the respondent drinks more or less alcohol than 5 years ago.
- 1999/2000 the survey is suspended while it is redeveloped.
- 2000 first asked about mobile telephones (58% of households in 2000 had a mobile telephone compared with 86% in 2011).

- 2004 questions about accessing NHS Direct introduced.
- 2005 the survey changed to being conducted over a calendar year and in line with European requirements the GHS adopted a longitudinal sample design in which households remain in the sample for four years.
- 2005 the self-assessed general health question is harmonised with national surveys across the European Union.
- 2006 the calculation of alcoholic units is revised. The revised method had a large impact on the estimates of units of alcohol consumed from wine because it changed both the assumed ABV of wine (from 9% to 12%) and the size of a glass of wine.
- 2008 the survey is renamed The General Lifestyle Survey and is incorporated into the Integrated Household Survey.

Background notes

1. Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available by visiting www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html or from the Media Relations Office email: media.relations@ons.gsi.gov.uk

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