

Stepfamilies in 2011

Coverage: **England and Wales**

Date: **08 May 2014**

Geographical Area: **Middle Super Output Area**

Theme: **Population**

544,000 stepfamilies with dependent children in 2011

In 2011 there were 544,000 stepfamilies with dependent children in England and Wales. This means that 11% of couple families with dependent children were stepfamilies. Stepfamilies are couple families where there is at least one stepchild in the family.

Table 1: Families with dependent children by family type and stepfamily or non-stepfamily status

England and Wales, 2011

| Family type | Stepfamily or not | 2001 | 2011 |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|------------------|------------------|
| All couples | Non-stepfamily | 4,130,000 | 4,280,000 |
| | Stepfamily | 631,000 | 544,000 |
| <i>Married couples</i> | <i>Non-stepfamily</i> | <i>3,673,000</i> | <i>3,469,000</i> |
| | <i>Stepfamily</i> | <i>346,000</i> | <i>340,000</i> |
| <i>Cohabiting couples</i> | <i>Non-stepfamily</i> | <i>457,000</i> | <i>811,000</i> |
| | <i>Stepfamily</i> | <i>285,000</i> | <i>203,000</i> |
| Lone parents | | 1,616,000 | 1,951,000 |
| All families | | 6,376,000 | 6,774,000 |

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(27 Kb)

While the number of couple non-stepfamilies with dependent children has risen by 4% between 2001 and 2011, the number of couple stepfamilies with dependent children has fallen by 14% from 631,000 to 544,000 over the same period. There are no clear reasons for the fall in the number of stepfamilies but possible factors include:

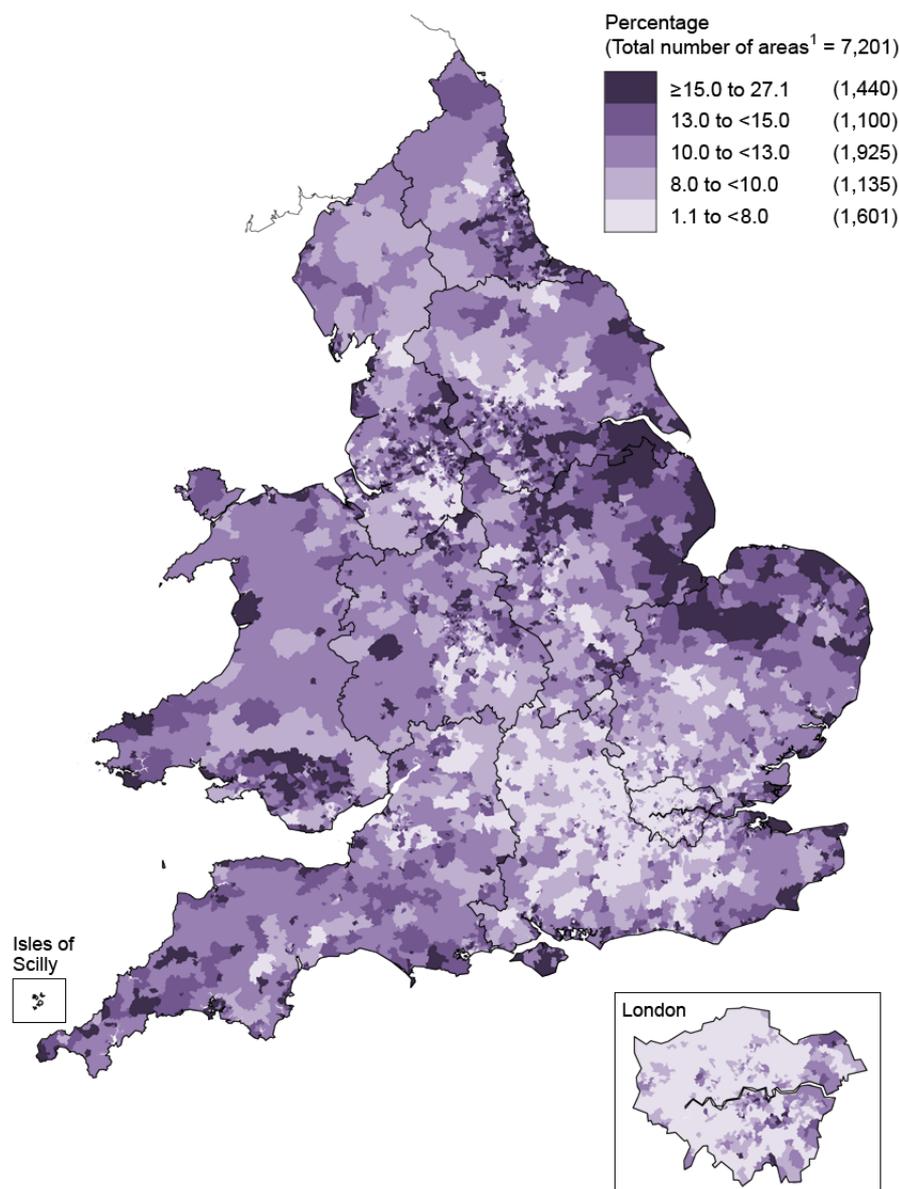
- A rise in the average age at which women have their first baby. This means that children are less likely to be born to younger couples who are more likely to break up. This may lessen the chance of children becoming stepchildren later on
- Lone parents may be increasingly likely to have a partner who lives elsewhere. This partner may be a stepparent to the lone parent's children while not living with them permanently.

Estimates from the General Lifestyle Survey in 2011 for Great Britain show that 85% of stepfamilies with dependent children included children from the woman's previous relationship, 11% included children from the man's previous relationship and 4% from both partners' previous relationships.

Lower proportions of stepfamilies in London

Figure 1: Percentage of couple families with dependent children which are stepfamilies by MSOA

England and Wales, 2011



¹ Middle layer super output area (MSOA).

Source: 2011 Census, Office for National Statistics

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Source: Census - Office for National Statistics

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The lowest proportions of couple families with dependent children which were stepfamilies in 2011 were in and to the west of London, extending along the M4 corridor. Meanwhile, the highest proportions were in coastal areas, south Wales, Norfolk and the East Midlands. Several reasons may contribute to this pattern including:

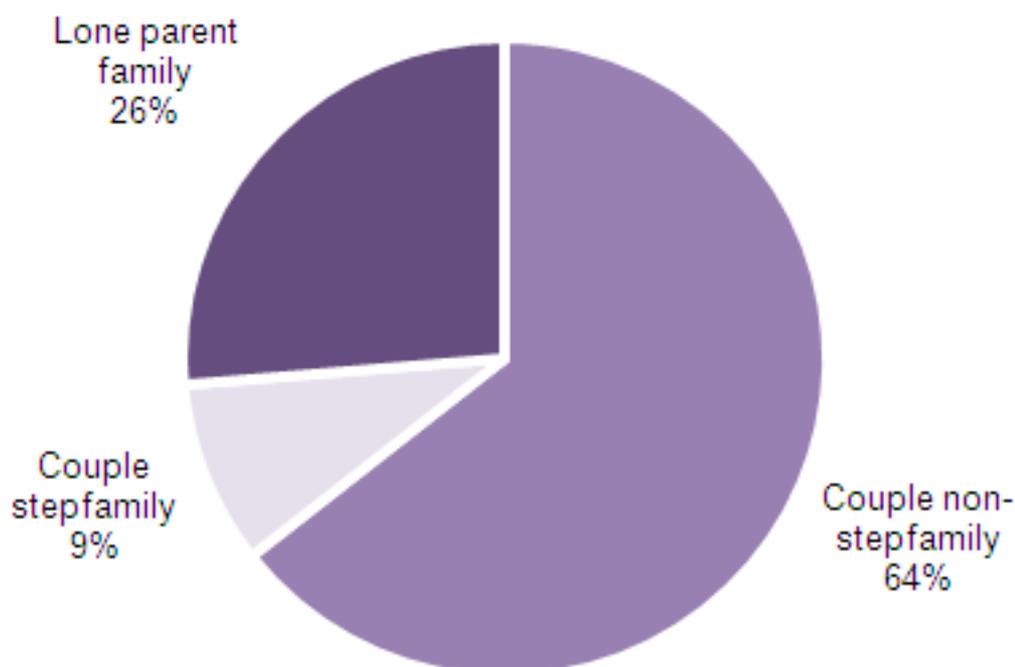
- The presence of affordable housing because stepfamilies tend to be larger. For example, the cost of homes with enough bedrooms to accommodate children may prevent some people who both have children from moving in together in London and the South East
- The presence of lone parents to create stepfamilies. People from certain ethnic groups may have a lower likelihood of divorcing or having children outside marriage, and so of forming stepfamilies. These groups are not evenly spread around the country.

Nearly one in ten dependent children lived in a stepfamily

In England and Wales 1.1 million (9%) dependent children lived in a stepfamily in 2011, 7.7 million (64%) lived in a couple non-stepfamily and the remainder (3.1 million or 26%) lived in a lone parent family. Children living in stepfamilies may include natural children of the couple as well as children of one or both partners from previous relationships.

Dependent children in families by family type

England and Wales, 2011



Source: Census - Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Percentages don't sum exactly due to rounding

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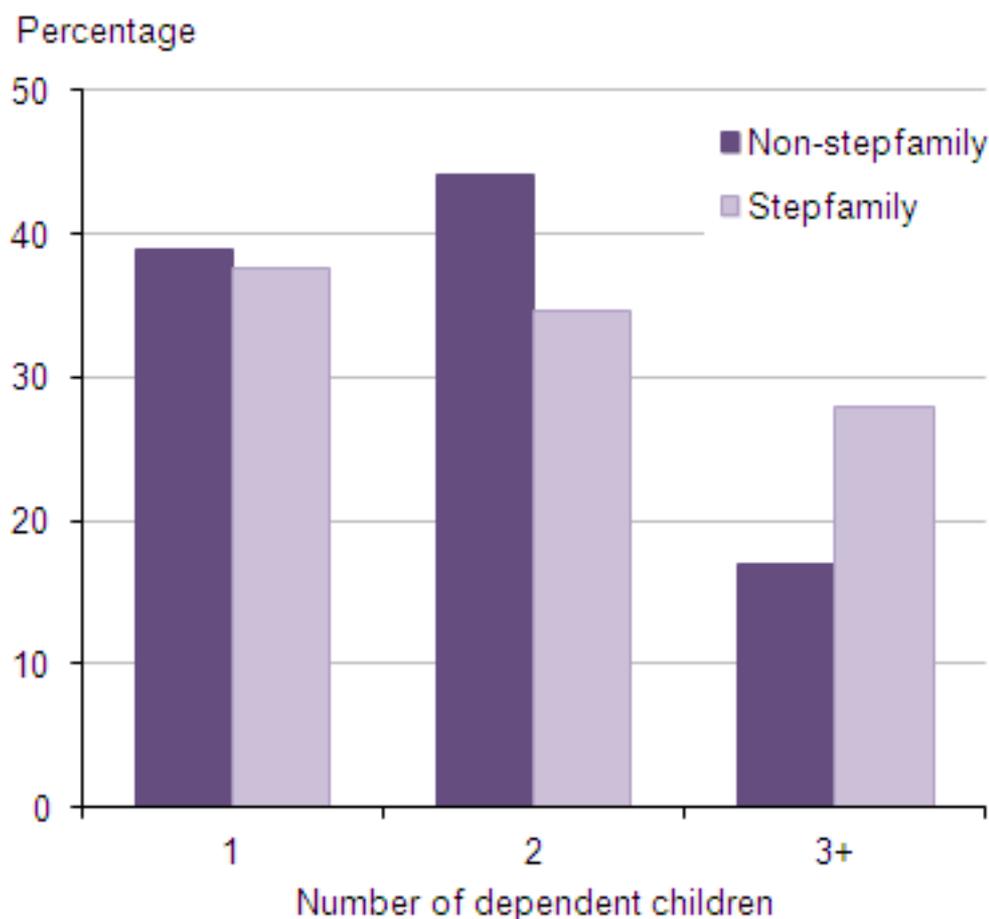
In 2011, 689,000 dependent children lived in married couple stepfamilies. This represents 10% of all children who lived in married couple families (of which there were 7.1 million). A smaller number of dependent children (418,000) lived in cohabiting couple stepfamilies. However, with 1.7 million children living in cohabiting couple families in total, this means that nearly a quarter (24%) of dependent children in cohabiting couple families lived in stepfamilies.

Stepfamilies tend to be larger than non-stepfamilies

The chart below shows that 28% of married couple stepfamilies had three or more dependent children compared with 17% of married couple non-stepfamilies. This may be expected as some couples may have one or more children from a previous relationship and go on to have another child within their current relationship. Alternatively, children may come from both partners' previous relationships.

Percentage of married couple stepfamilies and non-stepfamilies by number of dependent children

England and Wales, 2011



Source: Census - Office for National Statistics

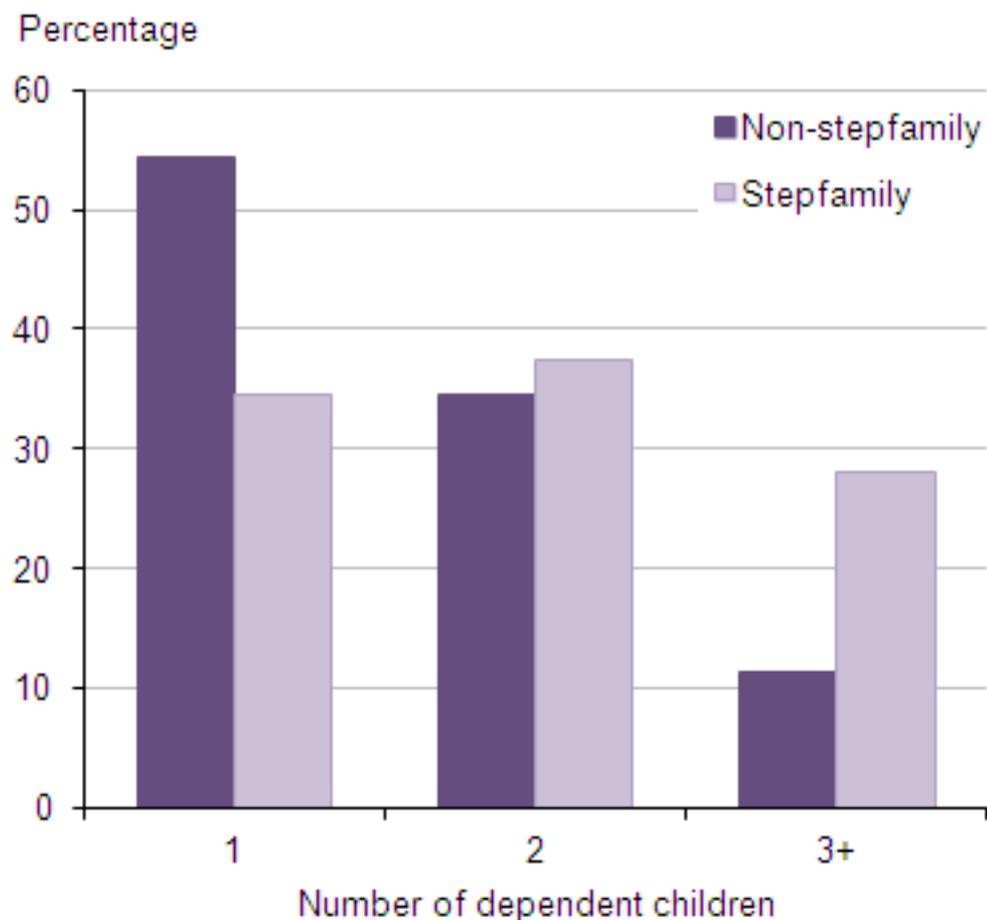
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As for married couples, cohabiting couple stepfamilies tend to be larger than cohabiting couple non-stepfamilies. The chart below shows that 28% of cohabiting couple stepfamilies had three or more dependent children compared with 11% of cohabiting couple non-stepfamilies. In addition, at 54%, cohabiting couple non-stepfamilies are more likely to have only one dependent child than their married counterparts (39%). These patterns partly reflect the stability of parental partnerships: Previous research has indicated that marital partnerships are more stable than cohabiting partnerships¹. Further, some couples may cohabit with one child, then marry and have another. In other words, cohabitation may be a transitory stage before marriage for some people.

Percentage of cohabiting couple stepfamilies and non-stepfamilies by number of dependent children

England and Wales, 2011



Source: Census - Office for National Statistics

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Notes

1. Population Trends article ["Do partnerships last? Comparing marriage and cohabitation using longitudinal census data"](#) (255.1 Kb Pdf)
2. The source of the statistics in this section is table DC1114EW from the [nomis website](#).

What these statistics are used for

These statistics are used by those who want to understand the society in which they live, those concerned with families, family breakdown and blended families. Such people include policy makers,

journalists, charities helping families and stepfamilies, researchers, academics and members of the general public.

These statistics were compiled and analysed by the Demographic Analysis Unit. If you'd like to find out more about our statistics about families you can read our [annual publication](#) and see further stories, for example on [young adults living with their parents](#). If you have any comments, suggestions or questions, we'd like to hear them. Please email us at families@ons.gsi.gov.uk (preferred) or call +44(0)1329 444677.

Background notes

1. Get the data about [stepfamilies \(30 Kb Excel sheet\)](#) and [children in stepfamilies \(171.5 Kb Excel sheet\)](#).
2. For data for smaller areas, and to see the source data about families, go to the [nomis website](#). The sources of the 2001 statistics about families are tables S007 (for stepfamilies) and S006 for all other families. The sources of the 2011 statistics about families are tables DC1114EW and DC1118EW.
3. Estimates of the number of number of stepfamilies with dependent children in 2011 were first published on 23 January 2014, while estimates of the number of dependent children in 2011 living in stepfamilies were first published on 8 May 2014.
4. Stepfamilies are couple families where there is at least one stepchild in the household. The analysis excludes stepfamilies which cross households. For example, in the case of a child living with their mother where their father lives with a new partner, this would be counted as a lone parent family (for the child and the mother) and a cohabiting couple (for the father and new partner), but not a stepfamily as the child is not usually resident with their father's new partner.
5. A family is a married, civil partnered or cohabiting couple with or without children, or a lone parent with at least one child. Children may be dependent or non-dependent.
6. Dependent children are those aged under 16 living with at least one parent, or aged 16 to 18 in full-time education, excluding all children who have a spouse, partner or child living in the household.
7. Children living in stepfamilies may include natural children of the couple as well as children of one or both partners from previous relationships.
8. Married couple families here include civil partner couple families for 2011. These are referred to as just married couple families in this report for both simplicity, and because most children are in married (rather than civil partner) couple families. Cohabiting couple families include both opposite- and same-sex cohabiting couple families.
9. 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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