How changes to the Population Statistics Act will affect birth statistics

July 2012
Changes to the Population Statistics Act

ONS has recently implemented a legislative change to improve the statistical information collected at birth registration in England and Wales. Two amendments have been made to the Population (Statistics) Act 1938, the legislation which requires registrars to collect confidential information for statistical purposes. The changes were made within the Welfare Reform Act 2009 and were implemented by the Identity and Passport Service in May 2012.

Until May 2012, information on

(a) number of previous children with a current or former husband; and
(b) whether the mother had previously been married;

was only collected for births occurring within marriage. When the Population (Statistics) Act came into force in 1938, only 4 per cent of live births in England and Wales occurred outside marriage so the information required was collected for nearly all mothers. However by 2011 nearly half of births (47 per cent) took place outside marriage or civil partnership and so the legislation no longer reflected the reality of modern society.

The two amendments made to the Population (Statistics) Act mean that:

(a) information is now collected at all birth registrations on the total numbers of previous live births and previous stillbirths that the mother has had (not just those with the current or former husband). This has simplified the question asked by registrars and will provide improved coverage.

(b) information is now collected at all birth registrations on either (i) whether the mother has been previously married or in a civil partnership (if she is currently married or in a civil partnership) or (ii) whether the mother has ever been married or in a civil partnership (if she is not currently married or in a civil partnership). This brings the birth registration process more in line with equality legislation.

The statistical benefits from this change include the following:

- ONS currently publishes some births tables covering number of previous children for married women only. Following implementation of the changes to the Population Statistics Act, it will be possible to publish more births tables that represent the characteristics of all births rather than just births to married women.

- It will be possible to cross-tabulate number of previous children with variables other than age for the first time, enabling new analyses on health and demographic topics - for example number of previous children by mother's country of birth.

- ONS currently estimates 'true birth order' for all women by combining the partial information available for married women from birth registration with social survey data. 'True birth order' will no longer need to be estimated, as full information on number of previous children will be collected from all women. This is expected to improve the quality of birth order data used in fertility analysis such as the Cohort Fertility release. Because birth order data are also used in the fertility component of national population projections, there is expected to be a similar improvement in the quality of population projections.
It will be possible for the first time to ascertain the proportion of births outside marriage or civil partnership that are to single (never married) women versus women who have previously been married or in a civil partnership. This will enable more detailed social reporting, for example of the characteristics of cohabiting women who give birth.

Proposals for changes to annual published births tables are outlined below.

**Proposed content of future publications**

The content of all birth tables currently published has been reviewed in order to incorporate the new data available following the changes to the Population Statistics Act. Details on the planned changes to the current suite of birth outputs are outlined below. A table summarising the changes to each package/table can be found at the end of this document. In general, only minor changes will be made to the published tables for 2012 births, as the new data are not available for the full year. The main improvements will be to published tables for births occurring in 2013.

**Birth Summary tables – First Release**

ONS plan to discontinue table 3 because the mean age of mother for all births will be available in the package Characteristics of Mother 1.

All other tables will remain unchanged.

**Parents Country of Birth, England and Wales**

ONS plan for table 8 to remain unchanged for 2012 data but 2013 will include previous children information for all women. There will only be one year of data available (for 2013 data year) but a time series will be built up over time.

All other tables will remain unchanged.

**Births by area of usual residence of mother, England and Wales**

There are no planned changes to these tables.

**Characteristics of birth 1, England and Wales**

There are no planned changes to these tables.
Characteristics of birth 2, England and Wales

ONS plan to change two tables:

- Table 5 will remain unchanged for 2012 data year but in 2013 it will be changed to represent all maternities – not just those within marriage/civil partnership.

- Table 7 will remain unchanged for 2012 data year but in 2013, the inside/outside marriage/civil partnership split will be removed and the table will show number of maternities by age of mother, previous live born children and place of occurrence – not just for those within marriage/civil partnership.

All other tables will remain unchanged.

Live births by socio-economic status of father, England and Wales

Changes for the tables included within Live Births by socio-economic status of father are also being considered including the possible implementation of the combined method for deriving the National Statistics Socio-economic classification (using the highest NS-SEC of both parents rather than the NS-SEC of the father). A proposal for changes to outputs for 2012 data will be available on the ONS website alongside the release of 2011 data.

Characteristics of Mother 1, England and Wales

ONS plan to change three tables:

- Tables 4a and 4b will appear unchanged for 2012 and 2013 data years, but will incorporate the new data on previous children from late May 2012 onwards.

- Table 5 will remain unchanged for 2012 data year. From the 2013 data year we will remove the inside/outside marriage/civil partnership split and switch to using birth order instead of estimated true birth order.

All other tables will remain unchanged.

Characteristics of Mother 2, England and Wales

ONS plan to change five tables:
• Tables 2, 3 and 4 will remain unchanged for 2012 data and will only include live births within marriage/civil partnership. For 2013 data the table will be changed to represent all live births and will not include an inside/outside marriage/civil partnership split.

• Table 5 will be discontinued, this table is much less relevant now as women often have a baby with a partner and then marry that partner sometime after the birth.

• Table 6 will remain unchanged for 2012. Data published for 2013 will only contain median birth intervals and not births by socio economic classification for women married once and remarried women, as duration from marriage to first birth is much less relevant now.

All other tables will remain unchanged.

**Cohort Fertility, England and Wales**

ONS plan for these tables to use birth order rather than estimated true birth order for 2013 data year. For 2012 data year, true birth order estimation will be used until the changes came into place (May 2012) and combined with the new data post May 2012 which will include previous children information for all births.

**Further parental characteristics, England and Wales**

There are no planned changes to these tables

Note that although all tables where previous children for women having a birth in marriage/civil partnership will continue to be published in 2012, there will be a small definitional change in the data after implementation of the Population Statistics Act changes. Up to late May 2012, previous children include only those with a current or former husband, while after late May 2012 all previous children should be counted. This is not expected to make a large difference to the figures as it is not clear how accurately the original question was understood or answered.

**Analysis on how the changes affect the data**

ONS intends during 2012 and 2013 to analyse the new data on previous children with the previously estimated true birth order figures. The current intention is to report on this in 2014 (alongside the publication of 2013 data). However a full analysis will not be possible as there is no period where data is collected using both approaches.

**Comments on proposals:**

Comments are requested on the proposed changes outlined in this discussion document. Please email any comments to: vsob@ons.gov.uk by the 30th November 2012.
List of current birth outputs:

- Birth summary tables, England and Wales
- Parents’ country of birth, England and Wales
- Births by area of usual residence of mother, England and Wales
- Characteristics of Birth 1, England and Wales
- Characteristics of Birth 2, England and Wales
- Live births by socio-economic status of father, England and Wales
- Characteristics of Mother 1, England and Wales
- Characteristics of Mother 2, England and Wales
- Cohort Fertility, England and Wales
- Further Parental Characteristics, England and Wales
How changes to the Population Statistics Act will affect birth statistics

### Summary of changes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New table name</th>
<th>Table name</th>
<th>Age groups</th>
<th>Existing time series</th>
<th>Proposal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Birth Summary tables – First Release</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Table 3: Unstandardised mean age of women at marriage and of mothers at live birth by birth order</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Annual: 1938 onwards</td>
<td>Discontinued</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Parents Country of Birth, England and Wales</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Table 8: Live births (numbers and percentages): occurrences within/outside marriage/civil partnership, number of previous live-born children and country of birth of mother</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>1999 and 2006-2010</td>
<td>Unchanged for 2012 data but for 2013 data previous children information for all women will be included. There will only be one year of data available (for 2013 data) but a time series will be built up over time.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Characteristics of birth 2, England and Wales</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Table 5: Maternities with multiple births (numbers and rates): age of mother and number of previous live-born children</td>
<td>Table 5: Maternities within marriage/civil partnership with multiple births (numbers and rates): age of mother and number of previous live-born children</td>
<td>Under 20, 20-24, 25-29, 30-34, 35-39, 40-44, 45 and over</td>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td>Unchanged for 2012 data. 2013 data will change to represent all maternities and not just those within marriage/civil partnership.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 7: Maternities: age of mother, number of previous live-born children and place of birth</td>
<td>Table 7: Maternities: age of mother, occurrence within/outside marriage/civil partnership number of previous live-born children and place of birth</td>
<td>Under 20, 20-24, 25-29, 30-34, 35-39, 40-44, 45 and over</td>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td>Unchanged for 2012 data year. For 2013 data the inside/outside marriage/civil partnership split will be removed and the table will show number of maternities by age of mother, previous live born children and place of occurrence for all live births and not just for those within marriage/civil partnership.</td>
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</table>
## Characteristics of Mother 1, England and Wales

<table>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Table 4a: Unstandardised mean age of mother by birth order</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>1938-2010</td>
<td>Will include birth order data for all live births from late May 2012.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Table 4b: Standardised mean age of mother by birth order</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>1938-2010</td>
<td>Will include birth order data for all live births from late May 2012.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5: Components of Total Fertility Rates: birth order and age of mother</td>
<td>Table 5: Components of Total Fertility Rates: occurrence within/outside marriage/civil partnership birth order and age of mother</td>
<td>Under 20, 20-24, 25-29, 30-34, 35 and over</td>
<td>1999-2010</td>
<td>Unchanged for 2012 data year. Will drop inside/outside marriage split and use birth order from 2013 data year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New table name</td>
<td>Table name</td>
<td>Age groups</td>
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<td>Characteristics of Mother 2, England and Wales</td>
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<td>Table 2: Live birth: number of previous live-born children and age of mother (five-year age groups)</td>
<td>Table 2: Live births within marriage/civil partnership: number of previous live-born children and age of mother (five-year age groups)</td>
<td>Under 20, 20-24, 25-29, 30-34, 35 and over</td>
<td>1999-2010</td>
<td>Unchanged for 2012 data only including live births within marriage/civil partnership. For 2013 data the table will be changed to represent all live births and will not include an inside/outside marriage/civil partnership split.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3: Live births: number of previous live-born children and age of mother</td>
<td>Table 3: Live births within marriage/civil partnership: number of previous live-born children and age of mother</td>
<td>Under 16, single years 16-48, 49 and over</td>
<td>2009-2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>Table 4: Live births and stillbirths (numbers and sex ratios): number of previous live-born children, age of mother and sex</td>
<td>Table 4: Live births and stillbirths within marriage/civil partnership (numbers and sex ratios): number of previous live-born children, age of mother and sex</td>
<td>Under 20, 20-24, 25-29, 30-34, 35-39, 40-44, 45 and over</td>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Table 5: First live births within marriage/civil partnership: duration of marriage/civil partnership and age of mother</td>
<td>Under 20, 20-24, 25-29, 30-34, 35-39, 40-44, 45 and over</td>
<td>1999-2010</td>
<td>Discontinued as this table is much less relevant now. Women often have a baby with a partner and then marry that partner sometime after birth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6: Median birth intervals</td>
<td>Table 6: Median birth intervals: socio-economic classification of father as defined by occupation (for interval to first birth), and mother's marriage order</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>2001-2010</td>
<td>From the 2013 data year, this table will only contain median birth intervals and not births by socio economic classification for women married once and remarried women</td>
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</tbody>
</table>