

Demography of the family in Norway

First report for the project “Welfare Policy and Employment in the Context of Family Change”, drafted for the meeting 12-13 December 2002 in York, UK

Christer Hyggen

in cooperation with Anne Skevik

NOVA – Norwegian Social Research

Box 3223 Elisenberg

0208 Oslo

NORWAY

DEMOGRAPHY OF THE FAMILY IN NORWAY	1
Introduction.....	3
Section I. Partnering	4
Marriage and remarriage	4
Separation.....	5
Divorce.....	6
Cohabitation	8
Break-up of cohabiting relationships.....	11
"Living apart together" - relationships	12
Section II. Parenting	12
Fertility and births: rates, timing and variation	12
Teenage pregnancy.....	15
Extra-marital births	16
Childlessness	17
Age when children leave home	17
Grandparental relationships.....	18
Section III "New" family practices	19
Lone mothers and lone fathers	19
Absent parents (fathers and mothers).....	21
Step parenting.....	23
Same-sex parents.....	25
Section IV. Family practices among Norway's ethnic minorities	26
Summing up.....	29

Introduction

It is a well-known fact that Norway, like the other Nordic countries, has been among the leaders in the world when it comes to moving away from the traditional family forms. People marry late and divorce frequently, and they increasingly cohabit for long periods instead of marrying. The proportion of children not living with both parents is high and increasing. The welfare institutions are also moving away from assumptions of a stable, male breadwinner family, although this has arguably happened later in Norway than in Sweden and Denmark. Both the high female employment and the increasing individualisation are now mirrored in social security legislation.

Those changes started in the 1970s and were continued in the 1980s. What we do in this report is to look more closely at what happened in Norway in the 1990s. How far will these changes go? It is (fortunately) unlikely that the divorce rate will ever reach 100, and equally unlikely that the average age for first births for women rises above 40. Did the Norwegian development grow towards the limits in the 1980s, or did the development continue at the same speed through the 1990s and into the new millennium? Did the 1990s offer something new in terms of family change, or did they mainly calm or accelerate what the turbulent 1970s and 1980s started?

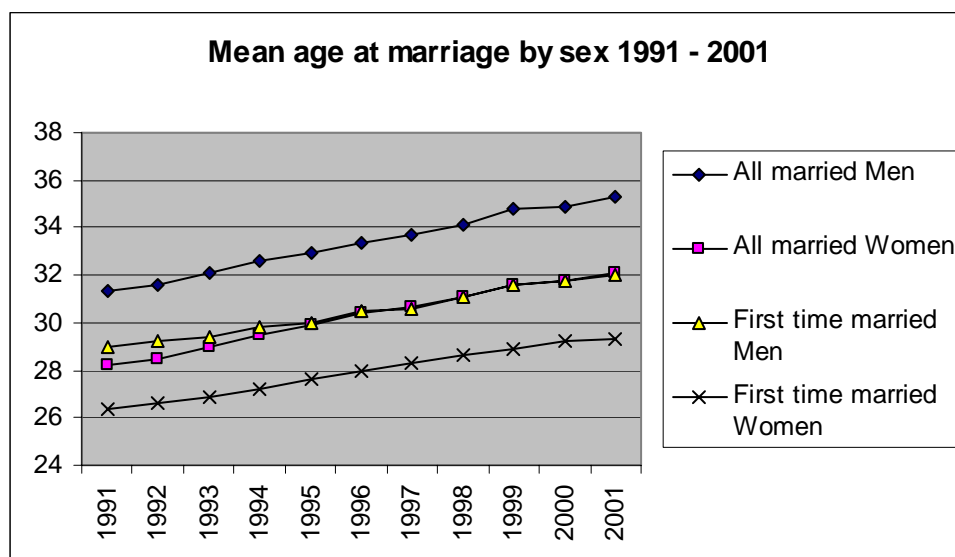
This report presents statistical evidence with regard to different aspects of changing family practices in Norway in the 1990s. We have divided the report into four sections: first, we look at the issues of partnering (marriage, divorce, cohabitation, “living apart together”). Second, we turn to parenting (fertility and births, teen pregnancies, childlessness, age when children leave home, grand parental relationships). The third section discusses “new” family practices (lone parenthood, non-resident parenting, same-sex parenting). We put “new” in inverted commas since these practices are not really novel, but have only become widespread and visible in recent years. The fourth section deals with the family practices of the immigrant population. As this section will show, immigrants, mainly from the third world, behave rather differently when it comes to family formation than do ethnic Norwegians. We therefore deal with these groups in a separate section.

Section I. Partnering

Marriage and remarriage

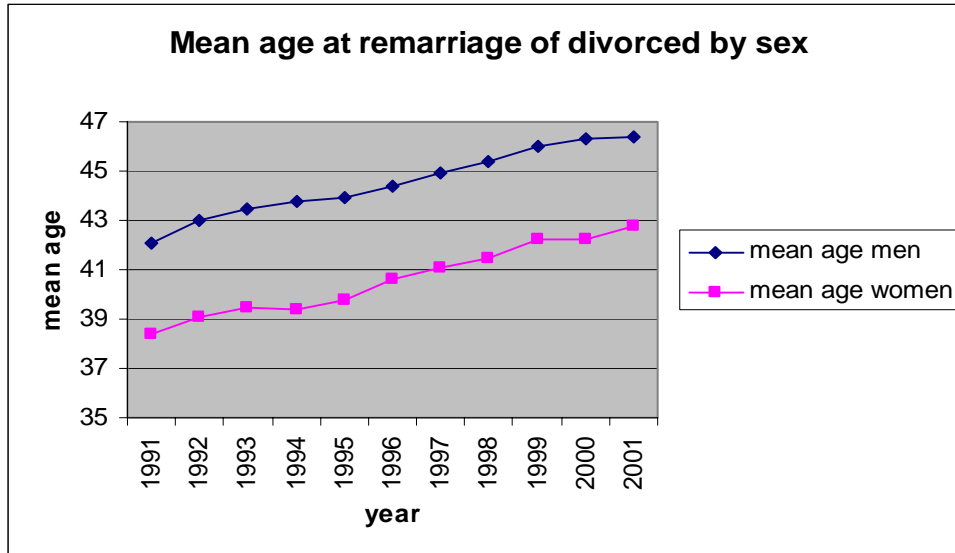
22.967 marriages were entered into in Norway. The number of marriages was markedly reduced from the peak-year of 2000 (25.356 marriages), but still at the same level as in the latter half of the 1990s (SSB.no).

The last decade as a whole has seen a small increase in the total number of marriages contracted, partly because the number of people of marriageable age has increased, but also because there has been an increase in the frequency of marriages contracted among both women and men aged 30 to 44 years. Among women in their 20s however the frequency has not changed much. The fact that more couples get married is probably due to a significant number of people catching up with previously postponed marriages. The increase in the number of marriages in the 1990s is also a result of the higher number of marriages among those previously married. The increase is due to the higher number of divorced people, not to a rise in the frequency of marriages among them. Remarriage is more common among men than women (Social trends 2000 p32-33).



During the 1990's the average age for those who marry for the first time has increased. In 2001 the average age for the first marriage was 29,3 for women and 32,0 years for men. The average age for remarriage has also increased throughout the 1990's at about the same rate as for first time marriages. For those who remarried the average age was 42,8 years for women and 46,4 years for men (SSB.no). Based on calculations of age-specific marriage rates during

the period 1991-1995, 40,3% of the men and 35,1% of the women aged 50 would be unmarried, and for the period 1996-2000 37,3 of the men and 32.5% of the women would be unmarried when reaching the age of 50.



Tabloid newspapers and glossy media have suggested that marriage has become “fashionable” among young people in recent years. This is placed partly in the context of a “protest” against the anti-romantic ideology of their baby boomer-parents, and partly (most recently) in the context of the two very high-profile Royal weddings (the Crown Prince in August 2001 and the Princess in May 2002). This however appears to be misguided: the small increase in the absolute number of marriages in recent years appears to result partly from increasing numbers of people in marriageable age, partly from the catching-up of people who marry later in life, and partly from the increasing numbers of divorcees who remarry.

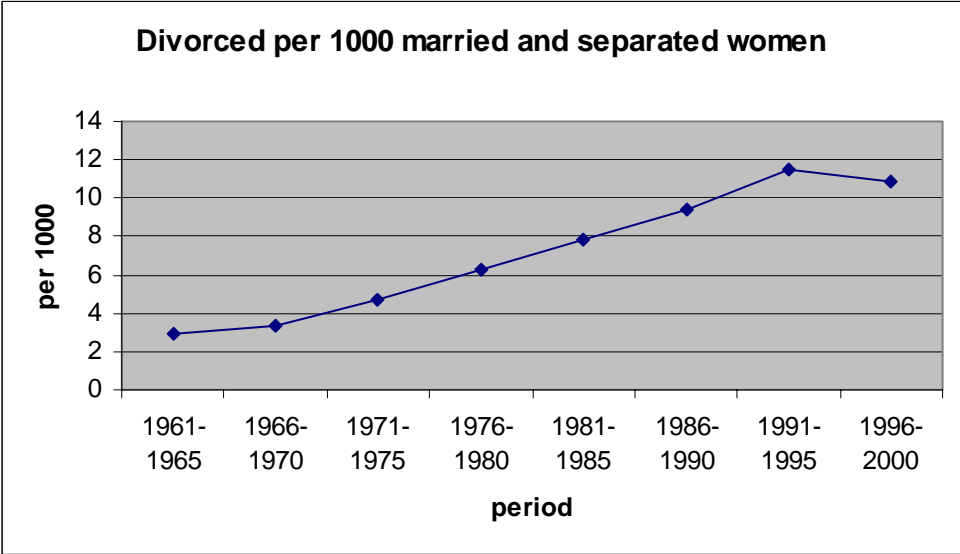
Separation

Separation in Norway is a precursor for divorce. Except in a very few extreme cases where divorce can be granted by court order (as in cases of severe domestic violence), married couples cannot be divorced until after a separation period of minimum one year. Couples can be formally separated for as long as they like, until they make up their minds if they want to divorce or move back in together, but one year is the required minimum. Separated couples are formally still married, and will occur in many statistics as such.

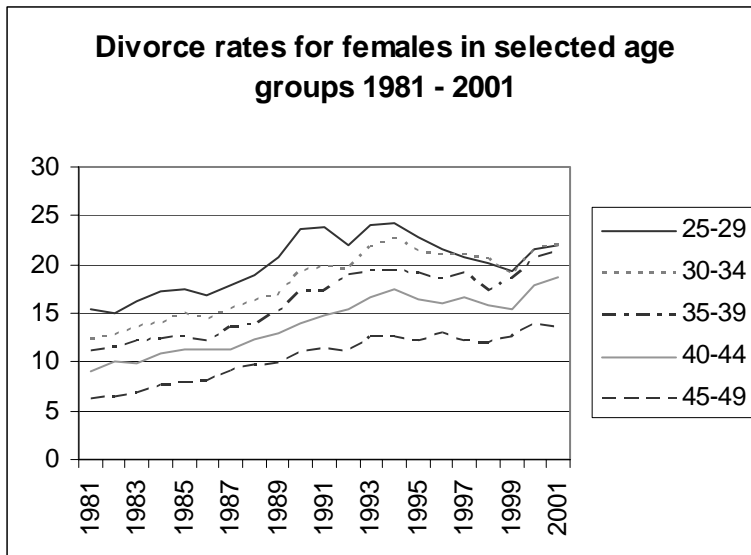
In 1998, 11.579 couples separated, allowing them to divorce at some point during 1999. The actual number of divorces in 1999 was 9.124. Corresponding numbers for 1999 and 2000 were 11.883 and 10.053. This indicates that the period for reflection and “cooling off” – as the separation period is intended to be – is working, that some couples try out life apart and decide, after all, to give their marriage another go.

Divorce

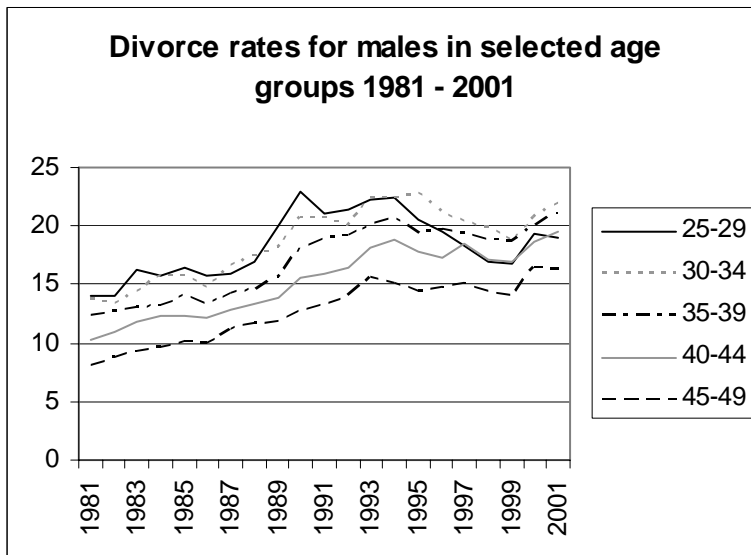
The Norwegian divorce act of 1909 allowed divorce by mutual consent. The law, which was an early formalisation of the liberal divorce practice that had developed in the Scandinavian countries during the nineteenth century, was built on a two-way system including on the one hand divorce following a separation order and divorce by court decision. The liberalization of divorce was part of what is described as a Nordic model of marriage with the strengthening of equality between the spouses and the rejection of Christian marriage (Melby, K. 2001).



Source: Population statistics 2001. Statistics Norway.



Source: Population statistics 2002. Statistics Norway.



Source: Population statistics 2001. Statistics Norway.

The number of divorced per 1000 married and separated increased for males and females in almost all age groups. The divorce rate for females increased most strongly in the age group 20-24 year, and for males in the age group 30-34 years. About 50 per cent of the marriages that were dissolved by divorce had lasted 12 years or less.

10 800 children below 18 years of age experienced parental divorce in 2001. In addition many children were involved in a breakdown in cohabitation between their parents. A survey in 1999 suggested that 7 500 children experienced the break-down of unmarried cohabitation between their parents (Statistics Norway: <http://www.ssb.no/skilsmiss/>).

Projections of the divorce rates for 2001 reveal that 47.8 per cent of all married couples will end up getting divorced. The similar projection for 2000 was 46.8 per cent. The percentage has increased from 9.5 in 1960 to 47.4 in 1994. The period from 1995 to 1999 had lower percentages, but for 2000-2001 the projections were back at 1994-level.

84 per cent of the marriages that were dissolved by divorce were between two spouses who were both Norwegian citizens. In 13 per cent of the divorces one of the spouses was a Norwegian citizen and the other a foreign citizen. (SSB.no)

Cohabitation

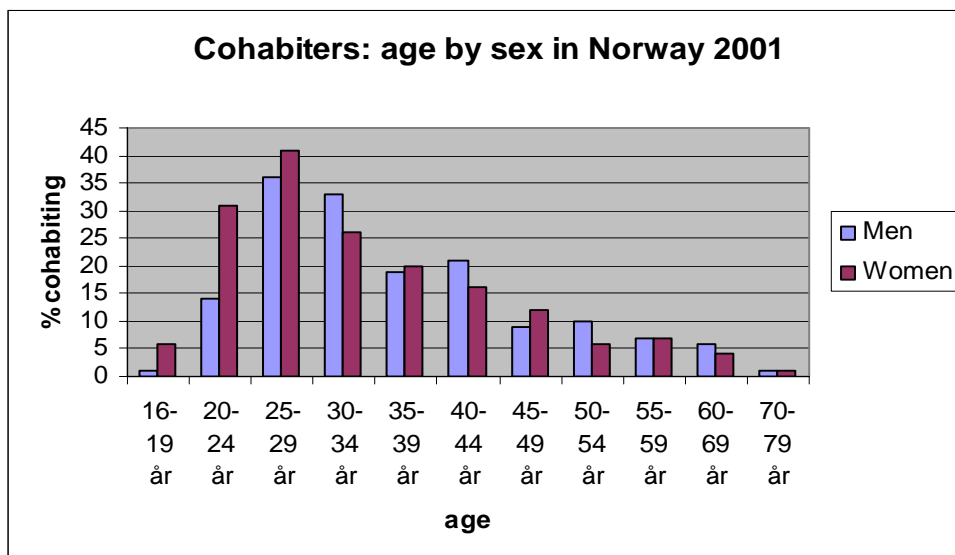
According to Statistics Norway the way cohabitation is affecting family life is one of the most important changes in the structures of both families and households in Norway today, in particular among young people (Social trends 2000). Cohabitation might be a relationship leading to marriage within a relatively short period of time or a stable more long term and permanent way of life. The Norwegian term for cohabiters “sambo” [literally “together-living”] refers to the fact that cohabiters have a common dwelling rather than to the fact that the relationship is marriage-like and sometimes regulated by contracts.

The legislation on cohabitation has been described as a patchwork of rules and regulations. The most important changes in legislation regarding cohabitation were performed during the 1990's. During the last decade cohabiters as a legal term and a particular group of people have been recognized in both the child support act, the national insurance act and the penal code. The most common arrangement is that cohabiting couples who have lived together for more than one year (sometimes two years), or who have joint children, are treated as if they were married.

These changes in legislation reflect the fact that cohabitation has become a more common arrangement among people in different phases in life, and that social attitudes have changed accordingly. Unmarried cohabitation was formally prohibited by law throughout most of the 20th century in Norway through the so called “concubinage clause”. Surveys both in 1954 and 1977 revealed that about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the population were against abolishing this law, but the clause was nevertheless abolished in 1972 (NOU 1999:25). Still, cohabitation has always existed. One of the first Norwegian sociological studies describes couples living together, with or without children, without being formally married during the 1850s in Norway (Sundt 1980).

This was widespread among the poorest, who would live together while saving up – more or less conscientiously – for their wedding. Among radicals in the higher classes, “marriages of conscience” enjoyed a certain popularity. As a mainstream phenomenon cohabitation is of a more recent origin. During the 1980s this general attitude changed towards acceptance of cohabitation, at least when there were no children involved. In 1997 more than half the population in a general survey stated that they thought cohabitation just as acceptable as marriage. The liberal attitudes towards cohabitation are more widespread among the younger population than the older. The acceptance of cohabitation and unmarried couples having children might be linked to the fact that children born out of wedlock and cohabitating couples are no longer statistical deviations. The Norwegian church still as a principle rejects unmarried cohabitation but this is a heated discussion within different fractions of the Christian community (NOU 1999:25).

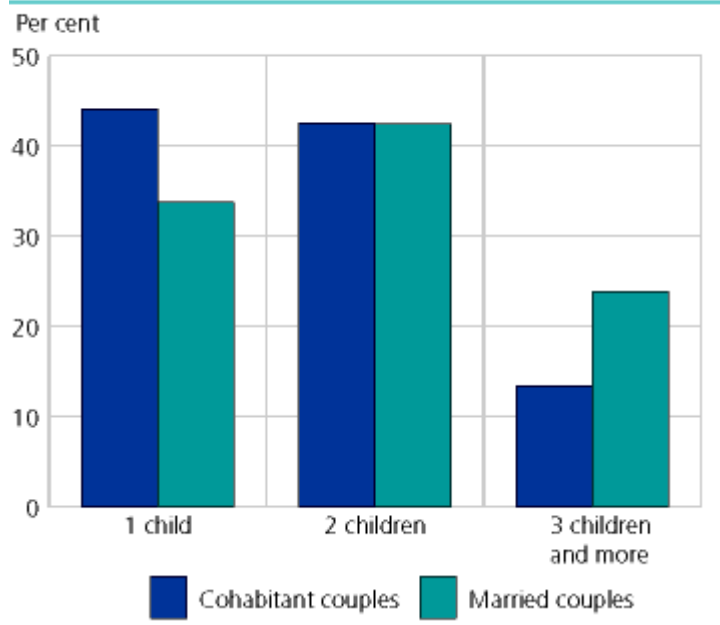
Marriages in Norway are registered with a high degree of precision in the registers constituting the basis for the population statistics. The number of cohabiting couples, on the other hand, is almost impossible to count. It is difficult to define clearly when two people who share a common dwelling should count as a cohabiting couple, and even if this problem could be overcome it would require a lot of resources to do the counting. We therefore have to rely on survey data. Interviews conducted by Statistics Norway suggested that 16% of all people aged 20-79 were cohabitants in 2001. Another way of calculating the percentage of cohabiting couples is to count the proportion of cohabiters among married and cohabiting couples, thereby excluding those not living in couples. Calculated this way, 23,5% of all stable (married/ cohabiting) relationships among Norwegians aged 20-79 were cohabiting. The mean age of cohabiting men (20-79) was 36,8 years, compared to 51,6 years for married men. For women the average age was 34,5 and 48,6 years respectively (SSB.no). Seven out of ten cohabiters are less than forty years old (Noack 2001). Cohabiting couples make up the majority of all married/ cohabiting couples under 30, while the proportion of married people increases with age.



Source: Statistics Norway.

Among cohabitant couples with joint children it's getting increasingly common to have two children. 43 per cent of the cohabitant families consisted of two adults and two children, 44 per cent were three person families in 2001. Ten years earlier the one child family was the most common among cohabitant families with common children: 60 per cent had one child while 31 per cent had two. The corresponding figures for married couples showed that two children were customary at the beginning of 2001. While 42 per cent of the married couples with children had two under children below the age of 18, 34 per cent of them had only one child. Three children or more occurred more frequently among married than cohabitant couples. Also, the married ones more frequently had children above the age of 18, something that reflects the popularity of cohabitation among younger couples and the tendency to marry after a while (ssb/ population statistics/ family statistics, 1. January 2001).

**Number of children for married and cohabitant couples.
1 January 2001. Per cent**



Source: Family statistics, 1 January 2001.

The emergence of unmarried cohabiting relations as a mainstream phenomenon is a result of a complex combination of changing conditions regarding people's value orientations, material conditions and social institutions. Changes in the female participation in the labour market and the national insurance system mean that marriage is no longer the most important source of income for women. The changes in values have led to a wider acceptance of living together without being formally married, the changes in material conditions and a better economy have made it easier to establish "freer" forms of relationships and institutional changes make fewer restrictions on the ways people may choose to live together.

Break-up of cohabiting relationships

Broken cohabiting relationships are more similar to separations than divorces. For most people it is a final break, but some will eventually move back in together (Byberg, Foss & Noack 2001). Surveys show that the risk of relationship break-up is far greater for cohabiters than for married couples and the risk is particularly high during the first years of the relationship (NOU 1999:25). The instability of cohabiting couples compared to married has been explained by on the one hand the institutional framework of marriage, and that this framework has a stabilizing effect on the relationship. Other explanations have suggested that

married and cohabiting couples are two distinct groups of people that are distinctly different on a number of different factors that may support or undermine the relationship.

The risk that a cohabiting couple with children will eventually break up is more than four times higher than for a married couple (Texmon 1999:275). For couples with children, the risk of a break-up is about three times higher if the parents are cohabiting than if they are married (op.cit.). Nor is cohabitation normally a long-term form of living together: data suggest that three years after the first cohabitation is formed, almost 90 per cent have either married or split up (op.cit.). There is however a tendency that younger couples live together for longer periods before they marry, which may suggest that long-term cohabitation may be more widespread in the future.

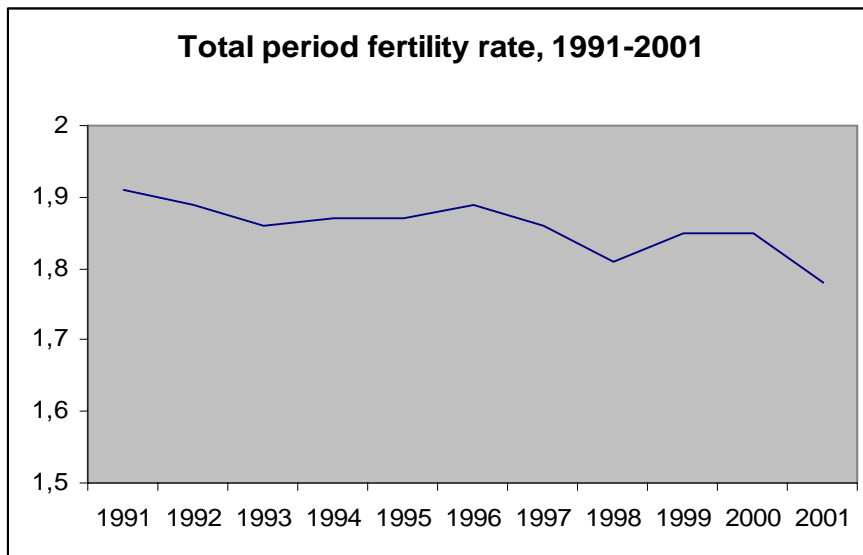
"Living apart together" - relationships

In 2001, Statistics Norway for the first time tried to measure so called living apart together relationships (LATs). To end up in this category, the persons interviewed had to classify their relationship as marriage-like, although they were not living together. 8 per cent of a representative sample of 355 persons not married or cohabiting classified themselves as living apart together. The majority of those were under 40 years old. The reasons for not living together varied greatly. Some said they wanted more freedom, some considered their relationship to be too new, and some were living different places due to work (ssb.no).

Section II. Parenting

Fertility and births: rates, timing and variation

The total period fertility rate (that is, the number of children that will be born to a woman if the current pattern of fertility persists throughout her childbearing life) has remained relatively stable in Norway in the 1990s, starting at 1,91 in 1991 and falling to 1,78 in 2001. The most important fall in fertility rates happened between the periods 1971-75 and 1976-1980, when the fertility rate dropped from 2,24 to 1,77, and never again increased above 2,0 for the remainder of the century (Statistics Norway: Yearbook 2000:91).

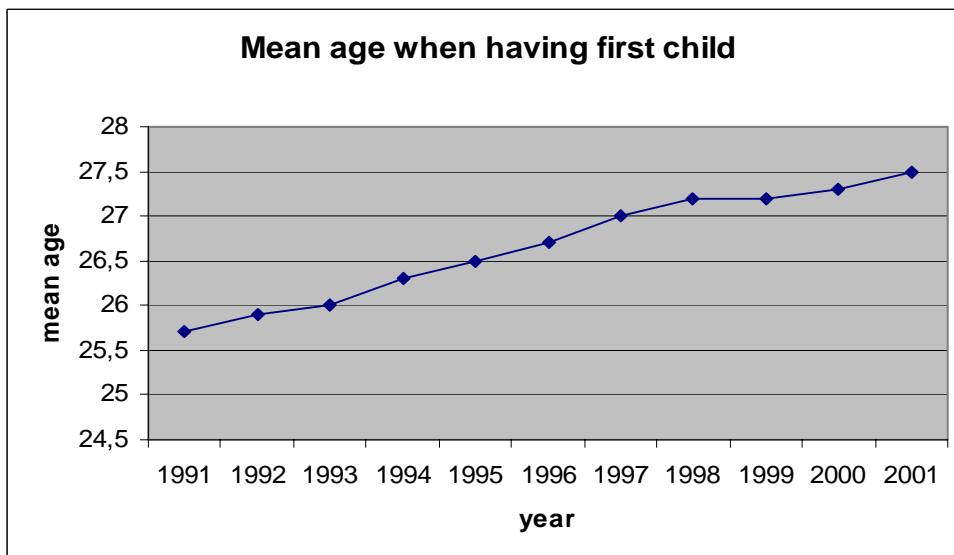
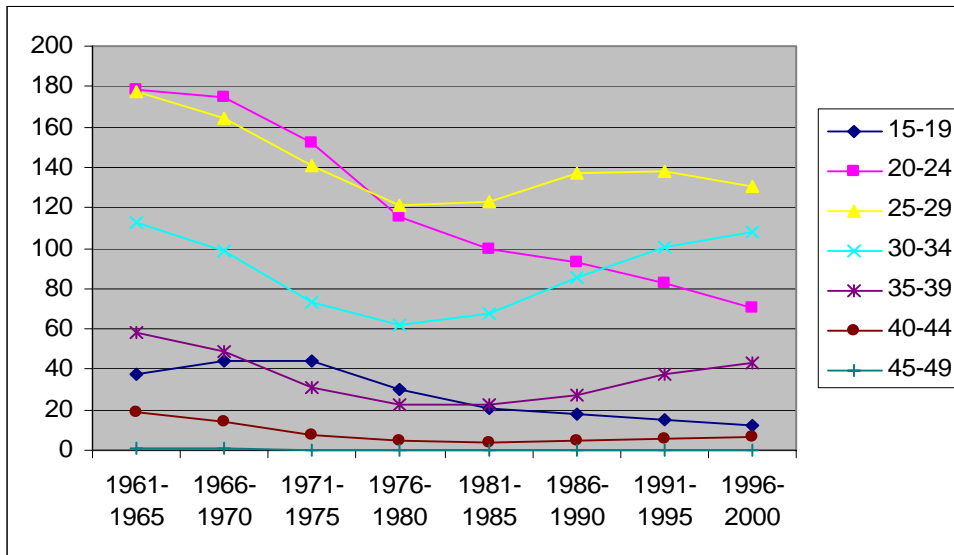


The changes in the birth rates since the 1960's might be explained to some extent by changes in family types and size. Families with 3 or 4 children are replaced by families of 2 children. The birth rates are also affected by the increasing mean age of first time mothers. The small increase in birth rates in the mid-1990 could be understood as a "catching up" for women who had postponed having children to a later stage in life (Knudsen & Wærness 1996).

Explanations of the development of new patterns of fertility are often based on descriptions of value orientations and normative understanding of our social roles (Lappegård 2000). The development during the last decade are usually described as a shift in ideology where we today will find individualistic attitudes to a greater extent than earlier. As a consequence personal freedom and self-realization is highly valued (Lappegård 2000). This has to be seen in the context of the greater openness, and better access to birth control and abortion. The development of technology in relation to birth control and abortions have made the changes in the fertility rates possible by making births a matter of choice.

Even if we see a pattern of delayed first births among Norwegian women the general fertility is comparatively high, and has been relatively stable throughout the 1990s. However there is a clear tendency towards postponing the first birth among Norwegian women. The average age for women giving birth was 29,8 in 2001, while the average age for men was 32,8. The average age for women giving birth *for the first time* was 27,5.

Age-specific birth rates among Norwegian women, 1961-2000



The birth rates show that women aged 25-29 are the most fertile. Even if the birth rate of this group still is the highest it has been declining for the past ten years. During the 1990s the birth rates in general have declined for women in their 20s and increased for women in their 30s. The equalisation of the birth rates between these age groups and the greater distribution among different age groups indicates a situation where women are in very different situations when becoming parents (Lappegård 2001). Those who wait to become mothers wait even longer than they might have done previously, but there is still a group of women who have children at a young age. Education has a strong effect on the timing of the first birth, which indicates a strong distinction between those who chose a higher education and those who do

not (op.cit.). A recent study also suggests that *type* of education has a more decisive influence on women's fertility in Norway than the *level* of education. Women educated for female-dominated occupations have more children than women educated for other occupations, but there is also a high level of fertility among women whose education has high-career orientation (doctors, dentists). This shows that through choice of occupation and adjustment on the labour market, women combine high level of fertility with an active career (Lappegård 2002).

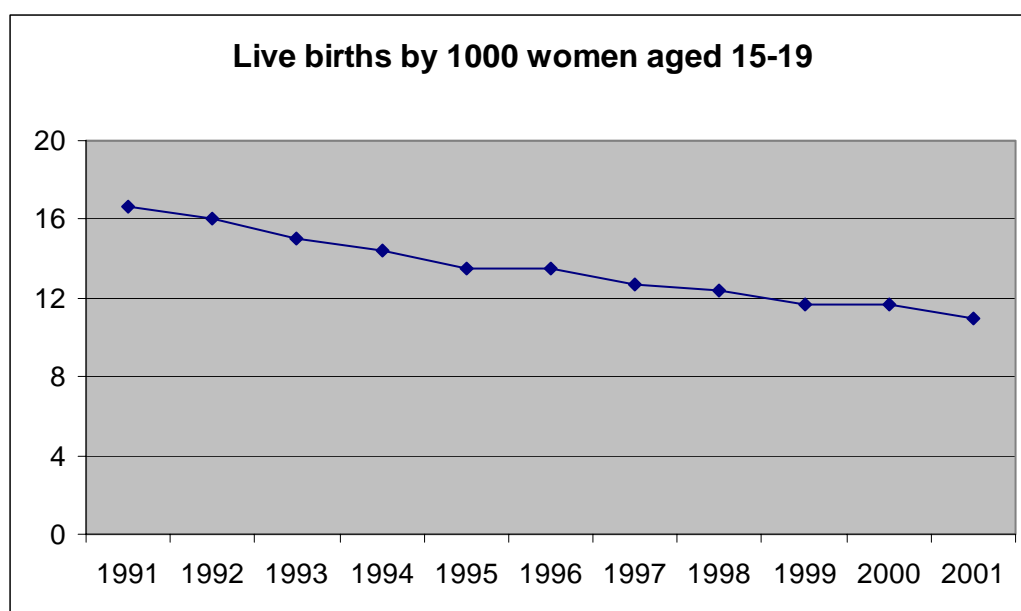
How will the postponement of first births influence the number of children? Most women who have a baby also have a second one within a period of 6 years (SSB.no), but the question is if women who postponed their first birth will be able to catch up with the number of children that the women who had their first child at an earlier age. The distance between the first and the second birth is influenced by a number of factors, both biological, societal and personal. A legal requirement that may make women less likely to time their births in rapid succession, is that women must have been in employment for at least six out of the last ten months before delivery in order to qualify for the full wage compensation. At the moment there are no signs that women will have children at shorter intervals (Lappegård 2001).

It is still a fact in Norway that women with the highest education have fewer children than women with less education, but this might be changing to some degree. The active family policy in Norway has reduced the cost of children for the individual family, particularly for educated women who often receive high wages and therefore gain most from the wage compensations. The differences in the average number of children were greater for women with different levels of education in the older cohorts than what is the case for the younger. This equalisation between different education categories is mainly caused by the fact that women with low levels of education have reduced their number of children more than women with higher education (Lappegård 2001).

Teenage pregnancy

During the 1970s teenage pregnancy was highly debated and on the political agenda in Norway. At present teenage pregnancy is declining, while the age when youth become sexually active is falling at the same time. The group of teenage mothers have become a smaller and possibly a more "unusual" group than earlier. The median age of sexual debut is

lower in Norway than other European countries. This is often explained by the increased openness in matters of sexuality and liberal attitudes towards pre-marital sex. Women born during the 1970s had a median age of 16,8 years when making their sexual debut, compared to a median age for women born in the 1960s of 17,2 years (Træen 1997). There has also been a general decline in the number of abortions performed during the 1980s and 1990s among teenagers. All in all, we note a lower fertility among teenagers, and also fewer abortions performed on women under 20. This indicates that few teenagers get pregnant, and when they do, they are more prone to chose abortion than earlier.



Extra-marital births

The extra-marital birth rate increased strongly in the 1980s, and continued to increase at a slightly slower pace in the 1990s. In 1999, 51 per cent of all live births occurred to unmarried women. In 2000 and 2001, the proportion fell slightly to just below 50 percent. It is estimated that less than 5 per cent of all children in Norway are born by “genuinely single” mothers, and that this proportion has remained relatively stable since the 1960s (Noack and Keilman 1993: 292, Jensen and Clausen 1999:288). The increasing extra-marital birth rate is therefore almost fully explained by the increase in cohabitation rates. As shown above, cohabitation became much more widespread in the 1990s.

Childlessness

For many years, the proportion of Norwegian women who remain childless has been stable at about ten percent. In recent years, there appears to have been a small increase in this figure, and some estimates suggest it will be closer to 15 percent in the future. It is hard to determine to what extent this is voluntary, but studies suggest there is an increase in voluntary childlessness. In the majority of cases this appears to be not so much a definitive choice among women, but rather “it just did not happen”. Women are having children later, and some put it off for so long that time runs out, or they lack a suitable partner when they get to the point in life where they had expected to have children. There is no evidence to support the popular myth that women sacrifice having children in order to give priority to their careers (Noack og Rønsen 1994).

Age when children leave home

Overall there are more young people living away from their parents in the 1990s than in the 1980s. This is a general trend in Norway, but there are large differences according to both sex and place of residence. Reasons given for leaving home have changed over the last decades. The importance of marriage as an explanation for leaving the parental home is reduced as work, education and other living arrangements are becoming more important factors. Less than 50% of men and women enter directly into a cohabiting or married relationship when leaving the parental home. Moving in with a partner, married or cohabiting, is more common for women than for men (Texmon 1995).

Proportion of Men and Women living with their parents 1980 - 1995. Percent.

	1980	1983	1987	1991	1995
Men					
16 - 19	86	81	86	87	84
20 - 24	46	49	53	49	42
Women					
16 - 19	84	73	76	75	80
20 - 24	24	23	26	18	21

Survey of Level of Living, SSB

There is a greater proportion of young women leaving home than men, particularly for people aged 20 – 24. About twice as many young men were living with their parents than was the case for women in 1995. By the beginning of the 1980s it was getting more usual to leave home for women aged 16 – 24 as well (Roalsø 1997).

Living with parents by sex and place of residence 1995. Percent

	Urban - More than 100.000	20- 99.000	Less than 20.000	Rural
Men	51	64	54	68
Women	49	36	46	32

Survey of Level of Living, SSB

Contributing to the gender differences is the fact that men living in rural areas to a great extent tend to live with their parents for a longer period than does young women. This is due to a tendency seen in Norway where young women in rural areas have to go away for education and work whereas men tend to find work locally and thus have the opportunity to stay with their parents for a longer period (Roalsø 1997).

Researchers and demographic analysts have noted that the general trend throughout this century of a decreasing age of leaving home was levelling out by the beginning of the 1990s. Various explanations have been given including increasing economical difficulties in relation to costs of living, housing and the increasing youth unemployment. Recent statistical sources and research are scarce on this matter in Norway and we have no indications yet if this means that age when leaving home has been or will be increasing.

Grandparental relationships

In the discussion regarding family development, lack of contact between generations is often presented as a fact in Norway. This is probably misleading. Historians argue that modern-day children probably have more regular contact with grandparents and other relatives than in any previous period. This is due to radically extended life expectancy, shorter working hours, and better and less expensive communication that allows for visits, phone- and e-mail contact. Figures from Statistics Norway's Surveys of Level of Living indicate that the extent of face to face contact with close relatives has been relatively unchanged the last 20-25 years (Rønning 2001). This survey however only provides information about the contact *adults* have with close relatives, but we can assume that if parents maintain contact with close relatives, the children will too. Studies of families after divorce/ cohabitation break-up also indicate that children maintain contact with grandparents, even after the break-up of the parent's relationship (Skevik & Hyggen 2002, Moxnes et. al 1999).

Absent fathers inclusion of grandparents in visiting contact.

	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Not applicable
Grandparents	31	45	11	5	9

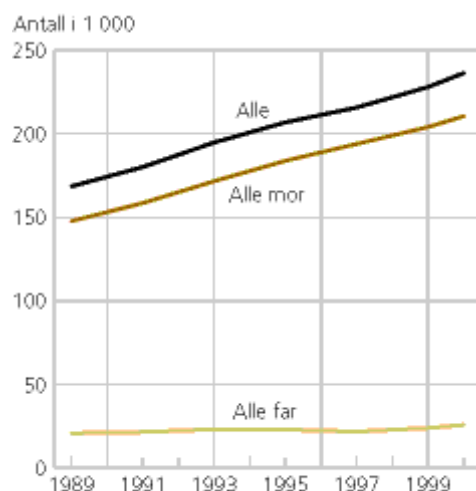
Source: Samværsfedrenes situasjon, Skevik and Hyggen 2002. N=408

Section III “New” family practices

Statistics Norway has published specific information on children (barnestatistikken) since 1989. There has been quite a few changes regarding children’s lives and families in Norway in this period. By January 2002 the proportion of children living in a family with married parents had dropped from 78 (1989) to 62 percent. This does not necessarily mean that they do not live with both their parents as cohabiting parents has become a common way of living. Adding up married and cohabiting couples, 76% of Norwegian children live with both their parents. In 1989 this proportion was 83%. The proportion of children not living with both their parents has increased from 18 to 24 percent (Population Statistics 1. Januar 2002).

The proportion of cohabitants has increased for all age-groups during the last 30 years. At the same time, the proportion of people not living in a relationship has increased. This is probably not explained by the fact that there is a great number of people not wanting to live in a relationship, but rather that the increase in divorces and other relationship break-ups implies an increase in the number of people that at any given time are living alone (Noack 1996).

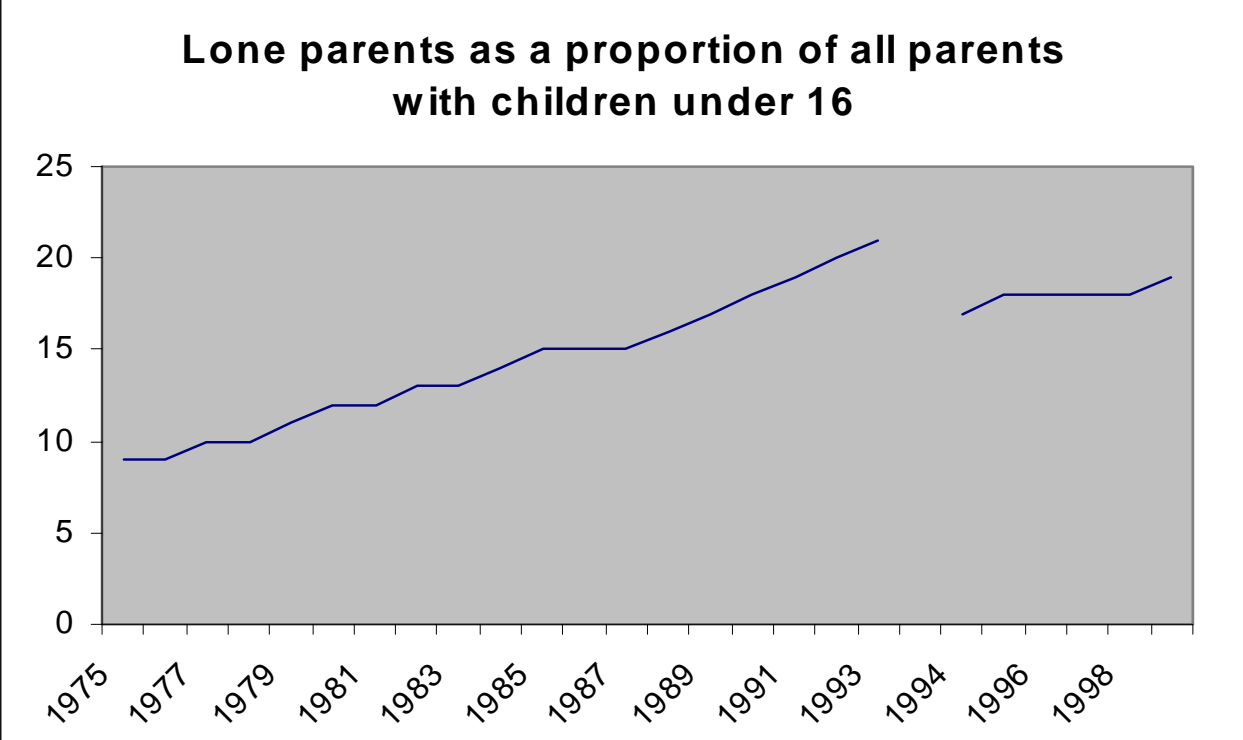
Lone mothers and lone fathers



Kilde: Barnestatistikk.

Children living with one parent, by whether they live with the mother or the father. 1989-2000. Numbers in 1 000s. (Jensen 2001).

The prevalence of lone parenthood in Norway, measured as lone parents as a proportion of all families with children under 16, is shown in the figures. Until 1994, this statistic included



parents who cohabited with a partner who was not the child’s other parent. From 1994 onwards, parents who have cohabited with a new partner for more than one year are excluded. This change caused the statistics to drop by about 5 percentage points. It can be seen that the curve raised more steeply in the 1980s, and has remained stable after 1994 at about 18 per cent. Thus in the latter half of the 1990s, just under one in five Norwegian children under 16 lived in a lone parent family.

Statistics on the characteristics and circumstances of lone parents are not published regularly in Norway, and the figures that are published are often misleading given the insufficient registration of cohabitation. In the large-scale surveys, the sample of lone parents is normally much too small to analyse. Lone parenthood does not generally attract the kind of interest among Norwegian politicians nor in the media which creates a demand for constantly updated information; generally, lone parenthood is not regarded as a social problem. A special sample of lone parents was however drawn in the 1991 Survey of Level of Living. This survey is the latest set of high-quality data we have regarding the situation of lone parents. Some key characteristics of lone parents in 1991 are presented in the table below. Although these data are from the beginning of the 1990’s, we have no reason to believe that the picture has changed notably in later years. As the table shows, a majority of Norwegian lone mothers

were separated or divorced, while 43 per cent had never been married. The vast majority of these will be ex-cohabiters. Almost half are 35 years or older, while only 13 per cent were under 25. Two out of three have only one child, and only about one in four have children under five.

Characteristics of lone parents in Norway, 1991

		Lone mothers						
	Lone fathers	Single	Separated/divorced	Widowed	Under 25	Over 35	Child under 5	With one child
Per cent	9	43	52	6	13	47	27	65

Source: 1991 Survey of level of living

Lone mothers and married/ cohabiting mothers with children in different age groups. Norway 1999. Per cent

	Married/ cohabiting mothers	Lone mothers
0-2	31	16
3-6	29	32
7-10	20	28
11-15	20	25
N=	443.000	76.000

Source: Kjeldstad and Rønsen 2002:81. Based on the 1999 Labour Force Survey

Absent parents (fathers and mothers)

Parenthood is not necessarily linked to a cohabiting or married relationship in the modern family. Biological parenthood is not affected by the breaking up of two people living together in a relationship or whether or not the parents never lived together in the first place. Two parents who do not live together as a couple are exposed to very different conditions in the Norwegian society. One is most often categorized as a lone parent, which is a well established category within official statistics and social security legislation. The other is no longer seen as a part of the household and is, by the Norwegian terms “bidragspliktig” [“maintenance-liable”], characterized by his or her economical obligation towards the child or by his or her right to be a visiting parent (“samværsforeldre”, “contact parent”). This group of parents, non-resident or “absent” fathers and mothers, is not singled out in national statistics in Norway. We therefore have very little information about their numbers and circumstances. The number of lone parents included in statistics is not a good measure of the number of absent parents, as lone parents who remarry or establish a stable cohabiting relationship cease to be lone parents, while the father remains a non-resident parent.

The only existing record of absent parents in Norway is the number of parents registered as paying child maintenance. By June 30th 2002 these records included 129.779 absent parents (Rikstrygdeverket 2002). According to estimates done by the Department of Children and Family affairs 10% of the total number of cases involving child maintenance is handled privately and hence not part of this record. Based on this estimate the total number absent parents would be approximately 144.198. The fathers registered with the National Insurance paid child maintenance for 159.650 children. If those make up 90 percent of all children maintenance is paid for, the total number of children affected is about 177.330. These loose calculations indicate that about 16% of all Norwegian children aged 0-17 lived in a situation where one of their parents were absent by the beginning of 2002.

Usually, when two Norwegian parents live apart the children live with their mother (Dahl 1993, Jensen and Clausen 1997:103, Jensen 2001), there are however some cases where the children live with their fathers. An estimated 90 per cent of non-resident parents in Norway are men. A recent study designed to find out more about the situation among Norwegian absent fathers and their children however show that most fathers do not lose or interrupt contact with their children when breaking up with the mother (Skevik and Hyggen 2002).

Absent fathers visiting contact. Time since last visit.

	Prosent
Less than a week	57
Less than a month	20
1 – 3 months	6
3 – 6 months	5
Between 6 – 12 months	4
More than a year	6
Never seen the child	2
Total	100

Source: Samværsfedrenes situasjon, Skevik and Hyggen 2002. N=582

More than three out of four non-resident fathers have seen their child in the last month, 57 per cent in the last week. For four per cent there had been more than six months, and an additional six percent had not seen their child in one year. Two percent have never seen their child. The vast majority of non-resident fathers thus come across as active and involved parents. Absent fathers' time spent with children depend to some degree on the age of the child. As the child

grows older, school and friends take up more of their time. The following table show how many days and nights the absent fathers spent with their children in different age groups¹.

Absent fathers' Time spent with children. Mean number of days and nights last month.

Children's age (years)	N	Number of days	Number of nights
under 3	49	9,5	5,0
3-7	112	8,3	6,2
8-11	159	7,1	5,4
12-15	142	6,0	4,2
16-19	103	4,5	3,0
Total	565	6,8	4,8

Source: Samværsfedrenes situasjon, Skevik and Hyggen 2002.

Step parenting

There is a slight increase in the proportion of children living with their step-parents. By 2000 they were a total of 4,4 percent of children below 18. This constituted close to 46.000 children compared to 29.000 in 1989. Even if the group of children living with step-parents is relatively small it's by *percent* the fastest growing group of children (Jensen 2001). About 20% of the children who did not live with both parents lived with step-parents in 2000 compared to about 17% in 1989. The most usual situation for children living with one parent and a step-parent is to live with his or her biological mother and her new partner. Less than 5000 children are living with their father and his new partner compared to 40.000 children living with their mother and a step-father (Jensen 2001).

Children 0-17 years of age, by type of family. 1 January 2002. Percent.

	Married parents	Cohabitants	Mother alone	Father alone	Mother, step- father	Father, step- mother	Others	Total
1989	78	5	12	2	3	0	1	100
1991	75	6	14	2	3	0	1	100
1993	71	8	15	2	3	0	1	100
1995	69	10	15	2	3	0	0	100
1997	67	12	16	2	3	0	0	100
1999	65	13	16	2	4	0	0	100
2000	64	14	16	2	4	0	0	100
2002	62	14	17	3	4	1	0	100

¹ If the absent father have more than one child, the figures correspond to the youngest child.

The following table shows the same categories as the table above, but utilising a different data set (survey data collected by An-Magritt Jensen in 1988 and 1996 for the project “Children’s families”). Those data cover only two points in time, but have the advantage of being more detailed.

Children by family type, 1988 and 1996. Per cent

	1988	1996	% change
Two parents	86,6	81,6	-5,0
Mother alone	6,9	10,5	+3,6
Father alone	1,1	1,6	+0,5
Mother +new partner	4,7	5,7	+1,0
Father+ new partner	0,7	0,6	-0,1
Total	100	100	
N=	3045	3497	

Source: Jensen and Clausen 1997:33

The proportion of children living in step-parent families increase with age, as the following table shows. The difference is big between 4 year olds and 10 year olds, while there are only small changes between 10 and 16 year olds. Only 2,4 per cent of 4 year olds lived in step-families in 1996, compared to 8,4 per cent of 10 year olds and 8,2 per cent of 16 year olds. This is hardly surprising: few people split up and re-partner (implicitly in a stable cohabiting or married relationship) within their child’s first four years. The big changes appear to happen to children between 4 and 10.

Children by family type and age, 1996. Percent.

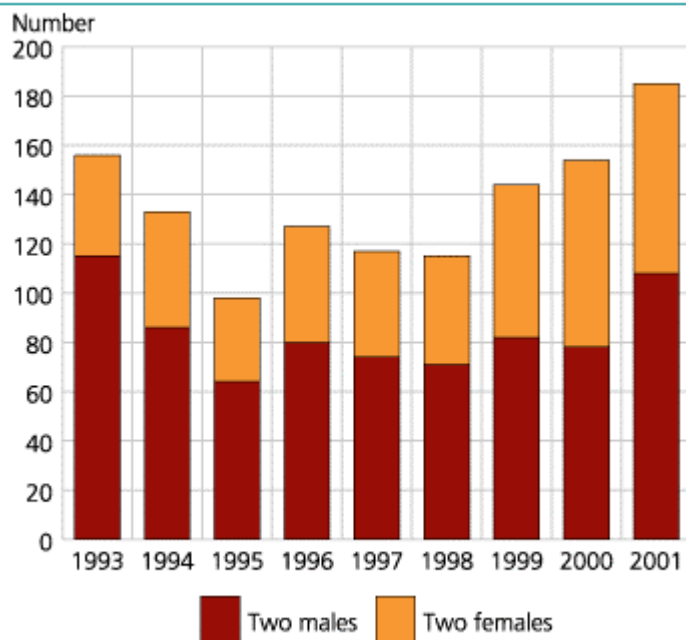
	Child’s age		
	16 years	10 years	4 years
Both parents	78,8	80,5	85,3
Lone parent	13,1	11,2	12,2
- lone mother	10,6	10,0	10,9
- lone father	2,5	1,2	1,3
Step family	8,2	8,4	2,5
- mother and new partner	7,1	7,8	2,4
- father and new partner	1,1	0,6	0,1
	100	100	100
N=	1078	1198	1221

Source: Jensen and Clausen 1997:31

Same-sex parents

The Registered Partnership Act was passed in Norway in 1993 giving lesbian and gay couples a right to register their relationship and to obtain all the same rights as heterosexual married couples have. The exception is adoption: one party may adopt the other party's child from a previous relationship, but otherwise homosexual couples are not allowed to adopt children. Also, as the Church is strongly opposed to the Registered Partnership Act, they are not allowed to have an ecclesiastical wedding. The practical consequences of the act appear so far to have been rather modest, with relatively few couples registering their relationship (Halvorsen 1999).

Partnerships contracted, by sex.¹ 1993-2001



¹ Elder partner resident in Norway.

After a decline in the number of registered partnership the first years after the act was implemented, 2001 was a new peak year for registered partnerships. The first people registering as partners, the so called “pioneers”, are different in several ways from the people following in their footsteps. They were older, more likely to be male and most of them were living in Oslo (Noack, Fekjær & Seierstad 2002). Now the male and female proportion of people registering as partners is levelling out, the mean age of registering is dropping and the Oslo-dominance is slowly declining. This has been interpreted as a result of the increased visibility of the relationship through the legislation, which strengthens and maintains the more liberal attitudes that have developed in recent years (Lae 2000). To the extent this is true, it

will also become easier to enter into partnership in local areas where the social control is stronger than what is the case in Oslo. The proportion of women registering as partners has increased markedly from 27% in 1993 to 47% in 2002.

In almost 20 per cent of the cases, at least one party in the registered partnership has been previously married. In at least 16 per cent of the cases, one party was also a parent. There are however a very small proportion of those who still live with their children. In some cases the children are grown up, in other the children live with the other parent. In 2001 only 5 per cent of the people living as couples in registered partnerships had children in their household. 18 persons – nine couples – have become parents while living as registered partners. This is not encouraged in the law, but physically it is obviously possible for lesbian women. The total number of children under 17 in Norway living with registered partners was 44 by the beginning of 2001, most of them living with their mothers (Noack et. al 2002). The Registered Partnership Act is still quite new and most of the relationships have lasted for a relatively short period. As a consequence it is not unlikely that more registered partner couples will have children at a later stage (Hegna, Kristiansen & Moseng 1999).

The legislation on separation and divorce is similar for registered partners and married couples. There is no way to find out how long the relationships lasted before the persons decided to formalize them into registering as partners. After 4 and 6 years the probability for the relationship to have ended in divorce is calculated to be 8 and 16 per cent respectively for registered partners. There are however great variations in the probabilities for divorce. The risk of divorcing is 2,4 times higher for female partners than for male partners and 2,8 in the cases where one of the persons is from a third-world country (Noack et al 2002).

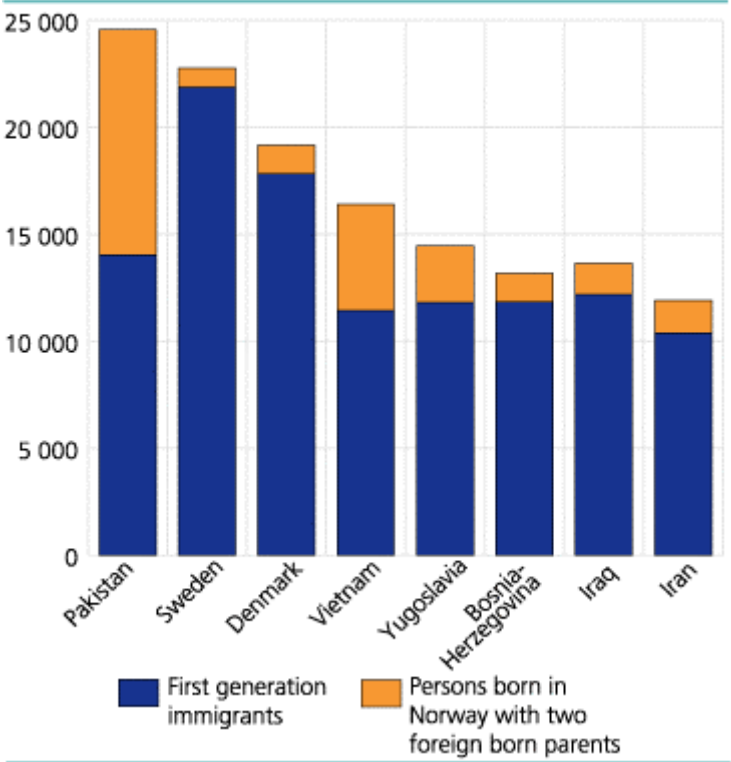
Section IV. Family practices among Norway's ethnic minorities

Norway has an indigenous people, namely the Sami, which constitute the country's original ethnic minority. No separate statistics are however published on the Sami. Despite growing recognition and pride in the last couple of decades, which peaked with the establishing of the Sami Parliament in 1989, many people still wish to avoid being recognised as Sami. By 2001, 9.923 persons were registered in the "Sami public register". Those are people who recognise themselves as Sami and speak Sami as their first language, or have at least one parent, grandparent or great-grand parent who had Sami as their first language (source: the Sami

Parliament, “Samediggi” web-pages). The number of people who have Sami ancestors is almost certainly higher, but information on this is limited.

The immigrant population in Norway numbered approximately 310 700 persons at the beginning of 2002, thereby making up 6.9 per cent of the total Norwegian population (ssb.no). The number of immigrants is highest in urban areas and especially in the Oslo region with immigrants making up close to one fifth of the population (Innvandring og innvandrere 2002).

The immigrant population 1 January 2002. The largest groups



The largest groups of immigrants in Norway is the Pakistani followed by Swedes and Danes. Immigration from Sweden is a newer phenomenon, following mainly from the economic slump in Sweden, and we may assume this is mainly people moving in to take temporary employment.

The immigrant population is younger than the Norwegian population in general. The greatest differences are found in the age group 25 – 44. 47 per cent of the first-generation immigrants were found in this age group in 2001 while the corresponding number for the population in general was 30 percent. This is because most immigrants have come to Norway while they

were relatively young, many have been in the country only for a few years, and most children born to two immigrant parents are still young (Innvandring og innvandrere 2002).

Most marriages within the immigrant population consist of a man and a woman from the same region, there are relatively few cross-national marriages. There are however quite a few marriages between Norwegian-born and people from other Scandinavian countries and the USA (Innvandring og Innvandrere 2002).

Generally the age distribution in a population will have a great impact on the family patterns. The proportion of the total population in Norway living in families consisting of 4 people or more was 39% by the beginning of 2001. Among Asian, African, South and Latin- American and Turkish immigrants this proportion was 53%. The proportion among this group of immigrants living in families consisting of 6 or more people was 16%, four times the proportion of the general population. The greatest proportion of persons living in small households is found among immigrants from western countries. Among immigrants from African countries we however find many in the categories “living alone” and “single mother/ father with children”. 24 per cent of persons from African countries live alone and 17 per cent belong to the group “single mother/ father with children”. Corresponding figures for persons with non-immigrant background are respectively 16 and 6 per cent. Almost 30 per cent of immigrants from Somalia are in the category “single mother/ father with children” (ssb.no).

The proportion of immigrants living in multiple-family households, i.e. households of two or more families, is more than twice as high as for non-western immigrants compared to the persons with non-immigrant background (ssb.no).

The total fertility rate among all women in Norway was 1,84 in 1998-2000. Fertility rates among female non western immigrants and western immigrants were 2,58 and 1,87 respectively. There are however great regional differences regarding fertility with women from the third world (Asia, Africa, South- and Latin- America and Turkey) as the most fertile with a fertility rate of 2,8. Looking at the mean number of children for first-generation female immigrants aging 35-44 from some specific countries we find great variations. Women from Somalia gave birth to 3,87 children, Pakistan 3,62 and Iraq 3,42.

Summing up

In some areas, the 1990s in Norway has been a period of stabilisation. The divorce rate has levelled out after a period of strong increase in the 1970s and 1980s. The same is true for the proportion of lone parents, that does not appear to increase above the present level of about 16-18 per cent of all families with children. Also, fertility rates seem to have stabilised, although they have fallen a little in the last couple of years. It remains to be seen if this fall indicates a new trend towards lower birth rates – as is the case in many other European countries – or if they represent a temporary dip.

In other respects, the development in the 1990s has strengthened the tendencies that started in the 1970s and 1980s. The mean age for when the first marriage is entered into, as well as the mean age for having the first child, keep increasing. The “young, free and single”-period appears to be longer for every year. If the postponement of first births for women continues, it follows that the fertility rate probably will drop and the number of childless women will increase: if women are having children very late (from a biological standpoint), they will not have time to have as many children as women might have done in previous generations. A third trend is that the number of cohabiting couples keep increasing. Cohabitation is now a more popular way of living together than marriage for the under-30s, and more than half of all children are born to unmarried (that is, normally cohabiting) parents. The mean age for having the first child (27,5) is now lower than the mean age for first marriage (29,3 for women). All in all, people may still express a preference for marriage and wish to marry – as the relatively high remarriage rate indicates – but they no longer see marriage as a necessity, and they have no desire to rush into it, even if they plan to have children.

Some developments and debates were relatively new to the 1990s. It is perhaps symptomatic that the two most heated debates in family policy at the moment (fall 2002) revolve around what we may call “new” family matters: should homosexual couples be allowed to adopt children? And how can we deal with the occurrence of arranged/ enforced marriages within certain immigrant communities? Immigration to Norway from Asia peaked in the early 1970s, which implies that the vast majority of “second generation immigrants” only reached marriageable age in the 1990s. The fact that so many immigrants marry persons from their parent’s country of origin causes concern, partly after some young immigrant women told their stories on how they were tricked or forced into doing so. These debates are new to the 1990s, and unlikely to disappear in the near future.

References

- Byberg, I.H, Foss, A.H, Noack, T. (2001): *Gjete kongens harer – arbeidet med å få samboerne mer innpasset i statistikken*. Rapport 2001/40 Statistics Norway. Oslo – Kongsvinger.
- Giddens, A. (1992): *Intimitetens forandring*. Hans Reitzels forlag.
- Halvorsen, R. (1999): *The ambiguity of lesbian and gay marriages*. Tidsskrift for samfunnsforskning 40(3): 310-334.
- Hegna, K., H. W. Kristiansen & B.U. Moseng (1999): *Levekår og livskvalitet blant lesbiske kvinner og homofile menn*. Rapport 1/99. NOVA. Oslo.
- Jensen A.M. (2001): *Barn bor med far når far bor med mor*. Samfunnsspeilet nr. 3, 2001
- Jensen, A.M., Clausen S.E. (1997): *Samvær og fravær – foreldres kontakt med barn de ikke bor sammen med*. NIBR Notat 1997:103.
- Knudsen, K & Wærness, K. (1996) *Er ekteskapet som institusjon på vei ut?* Tidsskrift for samfunnsforskning årg. 37:3.
- Lappegård, T. (2000): *Tenåringer og fruktbarhet – Sex, men ikke barn*. Samfunnsspeilet nr. 6, 2000. SSB.
- Lappegård, T. (2001) *Fruktbarhet og familiepolitikk – Bør det bli enklere å få barn med kortere mellomrom*. Samfunnsspeilet nr. 6, 2001.
- Lappegård, T. (2002) *Education attainment and fertility pattern among Norwegian women*. Tidsskrift for samfunnsforskning, vol. 3, 2001, 409-435.
- Melby, K. (2001): *Liberalisering av skilsmisse – en nordisk modell?* Historisk tidsskrift, bind 80. s283 – 301. Universitetsforlaget.

Moxnes, K., Haugen, G. & Holter, T. (1999): *Skilsmisens virkning på barn: foreldres oppfatning av skilsmisens konsekvenser for deres barn*. Trondheim: Allforsk.

Noack, Turid (2002): *Skillsmisje blant lesbiske og homofile partnere – hvem er mest stabile?* Samfunnspeilet 2002:3.

Noack, T. (1996): "Familieutvikling i demografisk perspektiv" i Brandt, B og Moxnes, K. (red.) *Familie for tiden*. Oslo: Tano/ Aschehoug.

Noack, T. (1996): *How many people are involuntary childless?* I Yearbook of population research in Finland, 33 (1996).

Noack, T. & Rønsen, M (1994) "Når er det tid for barn ? Livsløp mellom jobb og familie" i I. Frønes & Hompland, A. (red): *Den nye barne- og familieboka*, Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

Noack, T., Fekjær, H., Seierstad, A. (2002): *Skillsmisser blant lesbiske og homofile partnere – hvem er mest stabile*. Samfunnsspeilet nr. 3, 2002.

Nordic Statistical yearbook 2000. The Nordic council. Copenhagen.

NOU 1999:25 "Samboerne og samfunnet"

Roalsø, K.M 1997: *Ungdoms levekår i 1990 årene*. Statistical analyses, Statistics Norway. Oslo – Kongsvinger.

Rønning, E. (2001): *Barns levekår før og nå*. Samfunnsspeilet nr. 4, 2001.

Social trends 2000. Statistics Norway

Skevik, Anne and Hyggen, Christer (2002), *Samværsfedrenes situasjon*. Rapport fra en spørreundersøkelse. Oslo: NOVA, report series 15/02

Sundt, E 1980: *On marriage in Norway*; translated and introduced by Michael Drake. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1980.

Texmon, I. 1999. *Samliv i Norge mot slutten av 1900-tallet. En beskrivelse av endringer og mangfold*. NOU 1999:25 "Samboerne og Samfunnet".

Texmon, I 1995: *Ut av redet – en demografisk analyse av flytting fra foreldrehjemmet*. Rapport 95/4. Statistics Norway. Oslo – Kongsvinger

Træen, B. (1997) *Seksuallivet i Oslo 1997 – noen resultater fra Folkehelsas undersøkelse av livsstil, seksualitet og Helse i Oslo*, Statens institutt for folkehelse.