



The changing living arrangements of young adults in the UK

More young adults in the UK now remain in the parental home, or live independently outside a family. This research, published in *Demographic Research*, examines for the period 1998-2008, the extent to which these trends are explained by increased immigration of foreign-born young adults, expansion in higher education and increased economic insecurity faced by young adults. The findings suggest that shared non-family living is particularly prominent among those with experience of higher education whilst labour market uncertainty is associated with an extended period of co-residence with parents.

Key Points

- Men remain more likely to be living in the parental home than women, although the gender gap is narrowing.
- The proportion of young adults in the UK born overseas doubled over the decade contributing to the trend towards non-family living in young adulthood.
- The expansion of higher education has tended to: postpone family formation, increase the likelihood of returning to the parental home and increase the number who are sharing accommodation or living alone.
- Over the decade, especially for men, the association between economic disadvantage and living in the parental home has strengthened.

Introduction

Young adults in the UK tend to leave home earlier than in many other European countries. However, increasing house prices, increased labour market insecurity, reductions in welfare support and rising student debt mean that for many leaving home is becoming more problematic. As the transition to adulthood becomes longer and more complex, there are debates as to the roles of choice and constraint in individuals' life courses and whether there exists a new phase of 'emerging

adulthood'. This work contributes to the debate in three ways: by differentiating young adults living outside of the parental home according to whether they are living in a new family, living alone, or sharing with others outside of a family; by exploring the living arrangements of young migrants to the UK and the impact of this migration on overall patterns of living arrangements; and by providing a more detailed description of the socio-economic and gender-based differences in the transition to residential independence.

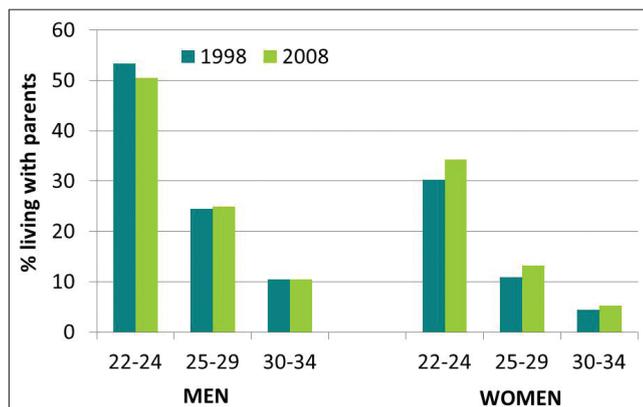


Figure 1: Percentage of young adults in the UK living with their parents in 1998 and 2008, by age and gender

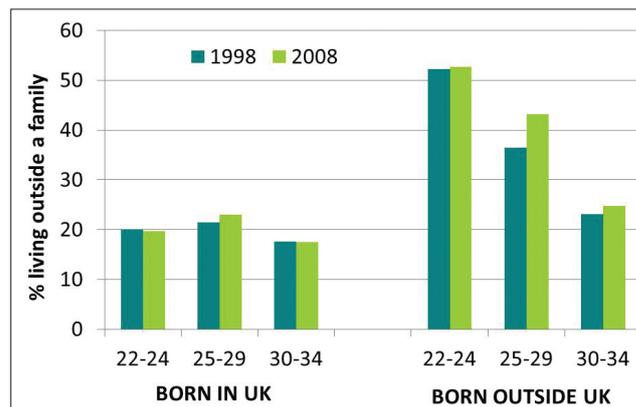


Figure 2: Percentage of men in the UK living outside a family by country of birth, 1998 and 2008

Aims of the research

We explore how the living arrangements of young adults have changed between 1998 and 2008 and whether such changes are different for men and women and for particular age groups. We then look at the role of increased international migration to the UK, increased enrolment in higher education, and increased economic uncertainty in explaining these changes.

The study

The research involves the secondary analysis of data from the 1998 and 2008 Labour Force Surveys. This large survey provides detailed information on the entire household and the relationships between members. We study men and women aged 22 to 34 years and classify their living arrangements in terms of their relationship to other persons in the household: (1) Living with parent(s); (2) Living as a couple; (3) Living as a lone parent; (4) Living outside a family. We consider their country of birth, educational attainment, and economic activity. We contrast those aged 22-24, 25-29 and 30-34.

Changes in living arrangements 1998-2008

Men remain more likely to live with their parents than women, although the gender gap is narrowing. Women, particularly those in their early twenties, are increasingly likely to live with a parent (figure 1). For men, the most pronounced change is an increase in living outside a family for men in their twenties. While fewer men and women are married in early adulthood, the increase in cohabitation over the past decade means that the proportion of young adults living as a couple has remained constant.

International migration

Young people born outside the UK are significantly more likely than those born in the UK to be living outside a family and show a more pronounced increase in non-family living (figure 2). This means that much of the overall move towards non-family living among young men can be accounted for by increased immigration.

Higher education

The increase in living at home is especially notable for graduates in their twenties, as well as men and women with no qualifications in their thirties. Figure 3 shows that by 2008, almost half of female graduates aged 22-24 are living in the parental home, compared with only a third of non-graduates. At all ages, female graduates are much less likely to be living as a lone parent than those without a degree. For both men and women, those with previous experience of higher education are more likely to be living outside a family, either alone or sharing with others. Shared living is more common for young adults in their early twenties, while living alone becomes more prevalent once they reach their early thirties. These findings suggest that the expansion in the UK in the numbers of young adults entering higher education is likely to have acted to i) delay family formation to older ages, ii) increase the proportions returning to the parental home and iii) increase the number of young adults living outside of the parental home who are sharing accommodation or living alone.

Economic uncertainty

Increasingly, young adults face economic uncertainty. The research found important differences in living

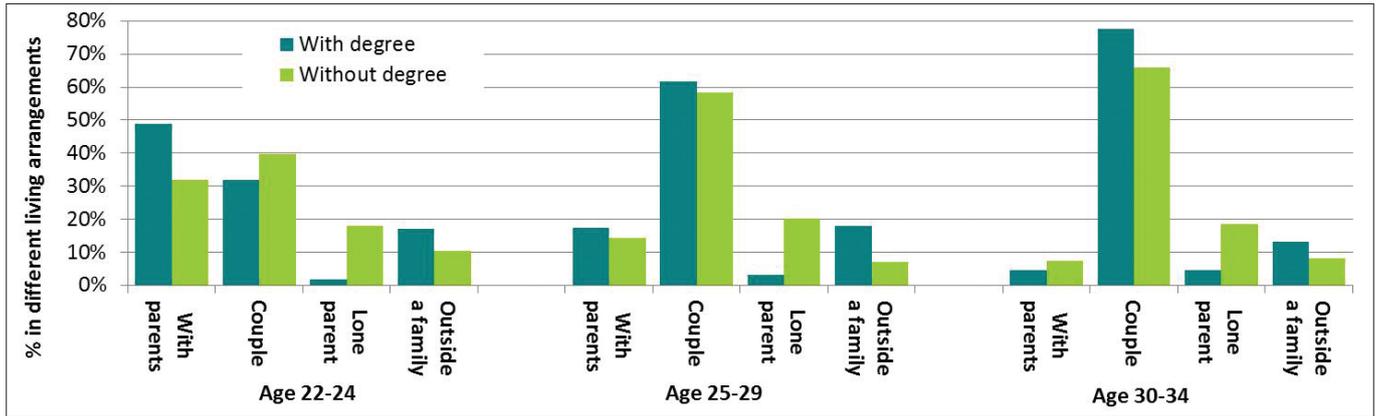


Figure 3: Distribution of living arrangements by age group and whether has a degree, females, 2008, UK

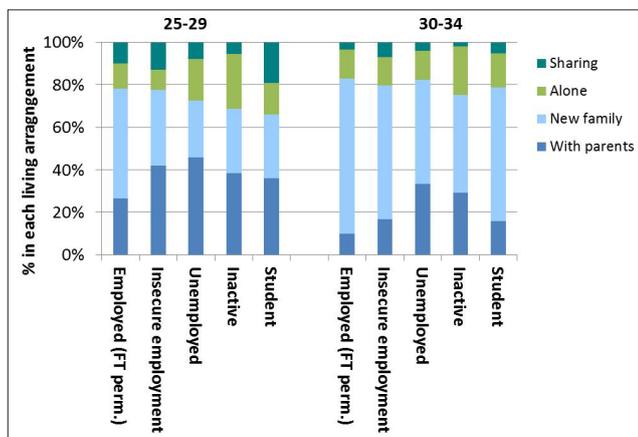


Figure 4: Distribution of living arrangements by age group and economic activity, males, 2008, UK.

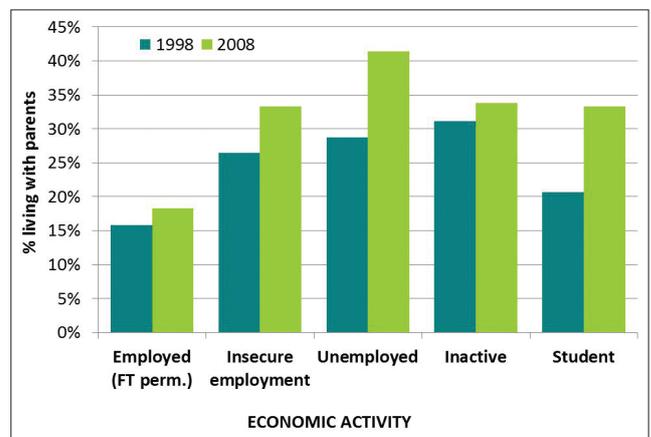


Figure 5: Percentage of men aged 25-34 living with parents in 1998 and 2008, by economic activity, UK.

arrangements according to current economic activity. In Figure 4, those living outside a family are split into those living alone and those sharing with others. Living outside of a family in a shared house is more common among the younger age groups and among students.

Economic uncertainty – as defined by unemployment, working on temporary contracts or in part time work (insecure employment), or being economically inactive – is associated with living in the parental home. This is particularly the case for men in their early thirties. In contrast men in full time employment are more likely to be living in a new family. Living alone is most prevalent among men who are unemployed or economically inactive.

Figure 5 shows the changes between 1998 and 2008 in the proportion of men living with a parent according to economic activity. While all groups have seen an increase, this is particularly pronounced for unemployed men. The increase in living in the parental home among young men

was counteracted by a fall in the prevalence of living in a new family at ages 25-29 and living outside a family at ages 30-34 years.

Policy implications

Shared accommodation with non-relatives is more common for ex-students, especially those in their twenties. This is likely to increase further with more people going on to higher education. For some, shared living would appear to be a living arrangement of choice, with a cultural expectation for shared living. However, among single men and women in their early thirties shared living is a minority practice – the majority have formed a family by this age, and among those living outside a family, the majority are living alone. The increasing cost of housing and changes in welfare support may mean that shared living will become more common as a result of economic constraint. From 2012, the age threshold for the shared-accommodation rate for housing benefit has risen from 25 to 35. This

change, together with decreased affordability may result in an increase in shared living amongst these older age groups. A key policy consideration would be the way in which the shared-accommodation rate may restrict the type of housing that is affordable to young, non-resident fathers, hence in practical terms limiting their ability to co-parent. Young adults who live with their parents in their thirties are often economically disadvantaged. Policy must respond to these more disadvantaged young adults, particularly men, who may struggle to achieve residential independence and who face an on-going or renewed reliance on parental support. In addition, it is worth noting that just because a young adult has left home, it does not

mean their parents are not supporting them. The balance between parental and state support for young adults and how this varies among different social groups continues to be an important area for policy consideration.

Acknowledgements: The Labour Force Survey is conducted by the Office for National Statistics and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency. Access to the data is provided by the UK Data Archive.

Reference: Stone, J., Berrington, A. and Falkingham, J. (2011) 'The changing determinants of UK young adults' living arrangements' *Demographic Research*, 25, (20), 629-666.

Authors

Juliet Stone
(University of Southampton, CPC)

Ann Berrington
(University of Southampton, CPC)

Jane Falkingham
(University of Southampton, CPC)

Edited by Teresa McGowan
(University of Southampton, CPC)

ESRC Centre for Population Change
Building 58, Room 2043
Faculty of Social and Human Sciences
University of Southampton
SO17 1BJ

Office: +44(0)2380592579

www.cpc.ac.uk