Adults not leaving home

For the under-35s, living with their parents has been described as ‘the new normal’. Explore the facts and figures behind this trend.

A new family life cycle

Sons and daughters under 35 who live with their parents or carers might be your size of alike or purpsity depending on how you got on with the older members of your family. However, it is increasingly a fact of life for many younger people in the UK today (see Figure 1).

Alongside the global financial crash, recent changes in the jobs market, the rise of student loans, and the costs of rents and first-time home purchase, there have been profound longer-term demographic shifts that are helping to shape the living arrangements of young adults today. For many young adults, career choices and moving between jobs, nominations and romances have been described by sociologist Jane Adams as ‘the new normal’. For sociologists, this means rethinking the family life cycle and reflecting on a new psychosexual meaning of independence.

Getting married and having children

An important trend underlying these figures is that young people are waiting longer today than in the past to get married or move in together and have children. The share of UK 18–34 year-olds who are married and have kids has now fallen from 49% in 1970, to 21% in 2000, and just 16% in 2015. Unsurprisingly, married young adults with children are far less likely to live with their parents than single or childless young adults.

On the other hand, Figure 2 shows that the percentage of young adults living with their parents or carers falls considerably for those in the UK in the 20 to 24 age group, by the age of 20 many young adults have moved out of the family home to go to university or to work or move away from their parents. These data also suggest that in the older age range it is more likely than for those in their 20s that people will be more likely to live at home. However, you can start thinking why.

Trends across Europe

The trend of more, older adults staying at home longer is not just a UK phenomenon – it occurs in other parts of the world, too. However, it is more unevenly spread. Both cultural and structural factors seem to be in play here. For example, very large proportions of young adults in southern Europe in the older 25–34 age range are living at home in the UK (see Figure 3). We know that economic changes have hit some of these countries very hard recently and that this is likely to be a key factor. May cultural factors also be having an impact?