



CENTRE FOR POPULATION CHANGE



UK second generation young adults' expectations for living together, marriage and parenthood

Do current adolescents' cohabitation, marriage and parenthood expectations differ by ethnic group? Are differences similar for men and women? Are ethnic differences mediated by individual or parental socio-economic characteristics? This research explores whether family transitions among descendants of post second-world-war immigrants are converging towards those of white British young adults. We do this by examining 16-21 year-olds expectations about living together, marriage and parenthood collected in the Understanding Society household survey.

Key Points

- Expectations for marriage and parenthood are unanimously high, but there is greater uncertainty among white British and black Caribbean adolescents as to the age at which these transitions will occur.
- South Asians, particularly second-generation Bangladeshi and Pakistani adolescents, have significantly lower expectations that they will cohabit.
- Ethnic group differences remain when religiosity, parental background and individual characteristics are taken into account.

Introduction

Gender, ethnicity and class background all influence the paths people take into adulthood, often in an intersecting way. Second generation adolescents often have to negotiate contrasting value systems; those associated with their parents' heritage culture, and those which dominate in the UK. First generation immigrants from collectivistic cultures, such as those migrating from south

Asia, often retain strong support for their heritage culture where marriage is often seen as the only acceptable setting for intimate relations. The extent to which young adults from more collectivistic cultures adopt more individualistic attitudes towards family formation depends upon their socialisation, religion, and structural integration into the host society.

The study

This study uses two samples, the first being 7366 individuals born between 1989 and 1999 either in the UK, or born abroad but who arrived in the UK prior to age 6. These individuals were interviewed when they were aged 16-21 in the UK household survey 'Understanding Society'.

In waves 2, 3 and 5 of the study young adults were asked;

“How likely it is that the following events will happen in your life in the future. On a scale from 0% to 100%, where 0% means ‘No chance of happening’ and 100% means ‘Totally likely to happen’ how likely is it that you will Marry at some time / Live together unmarried with a partner / Have a child?”

A second sample of 3240 people interviewed in wave 6 permits us to investigate ethnic group differences in the expected timing of family formation.

In wave 6 of Understanding Society, respondents were asked;

“At what age do you want to get married/ would you like to start a family?”

Individuals self-identified their ethnic group which was coded into: white British, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, black African, black Caribbean, other and mixed.

Multivariate analyses were undertaken, but controlling for religion, parental background characteristics, and the individual's own characteristics did not substantially alter the association between ethnicity and expectations for family formation so here we focus on descriptive results.

Main findings

To look at differences between the ethnic groups we compared the distribution of responses and average response values to the questions above.

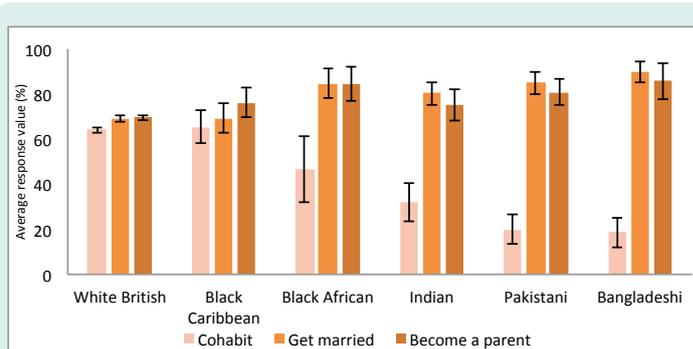


Figure 1a: UK born men aged 16-21, 2010-2014, UK

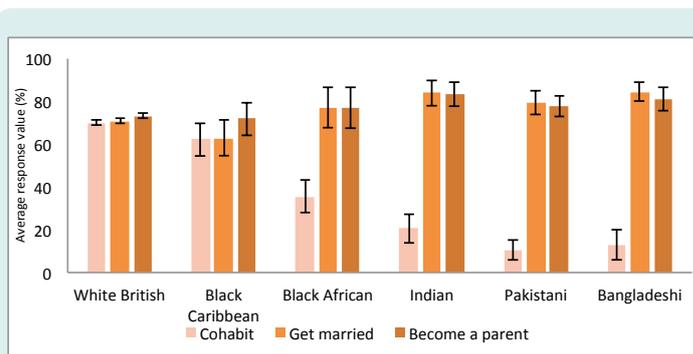


Figure 1b: UK born women aged 16-21, 2010-2014, UK

Ethnic differences in expectations for cohabitation, marriage and parenthood

Just over half of Pakistani and Bangladeshi men, and almost three quarters of Pakistani and Bangladeshi young women scored their expectation of cohabiting as zero ('No chance of happening'). Expectations for cohabitation are higher among young second generation Indian men and women with only around one third of men and one half of women reporting zero likelihood of cohabiting. All of these groups are in marked contrast with white British youth, among whom only 5% of women and 4% of men have zero expectation of cohabiting in the future.

White British youth are more likely to give a response of 100% expectation that they would cohabit, with 17% of men and 25% of women reporting it was 'totally likely to happen'. Black Caribbean youth expect to cohabit more than south Asians. However, 8% of Indian men had a 100% expectation of cohabiting, and expectations for cohabitation are higher for Indian men and women than for Pakistanis or Bangladeshis.

South Asian men have the highest expectations for marriage and parenthood with an average score for the question 'how likely is it that you will marry at some time' at 80-90%. British and black Caribbean men are less likely to expect to marry or become a parent in the future, with an average response of 69%. The lowest average expectation for marriage is found for black Caribbean women at just 63%. As shown by the relative heights of the bars in Figure 1a and 1b, it is only among black Caribbean youth that we see a greater expectation for childbearing, than for either cohabitation or marriage.

Ethnic differences in expected age at family formation

Figures 2a and 2b show the mean expected age at marriage and parenthood by sex and ethnic group. Given the small sample sizes caution is required in interpretation, especially because a significant minority are not included because they say that they "don't know" when they might get married or start a family. Whilst many young adults are uncertain, relatively few (less than 4%) said they did not want to marry or have a child.

The age at which women expect to marry is on average one year lower than men. Expected age at marriage varies more between the ethnic groups than expected age at parenthood. Pakistani and Bangladeshi youth reported younger expected ages at marriage (around age 25 among men and 24 for women) compared to white British youth (28 and 27 respectively). Expected age at marriage among our small sample of black Caribbean men is particularly high - at almost 30 years.

The overall expected age for entry into parenthood is high at 30 years for men and 28 years for women. On average, young women of south Asian ethnicity expect to become mothers at age 27. This is older than the actual age of entry into motherhood for south Asian women born in 1960-79 suggesting a future postponement fertility among this group, particularly for women of Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage. Among south Asian ethnic groups the expected mean age of marriage is somewhat lower than that of marriage, this is reversed among men and women of Black Caribbean heritage who expect to become parents prior to marriage.

Implications

Very few adolescents do not expect to marry. However, marriage is being foregone by increasing numbers of especially white British and black Caribbeans. Further research is required to identify what causes them to change their mind as they grow older, or the barriers which prevent them from marrying.

Second generation Indians born in the 1960s and 1970s were already postponing their entry into parenthood. Our research suggests that Pakistani and Bangladeshi young people are also expecting to postpone their entry into family formation. This is likely to be related to high aspirations for education. We might expect family size to fall within these groups in the future.

Young second generation Indian men and women are more likely to expect to cohabit in their future life courses than are Pakistani or Bangladeshis. Further research is required to elucidate reasons for this differentiation which are likely to include religious beliefs and traditional marriage rules.

Read more in the full paper published in the Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies <https://tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1369183X.2018.1539276>

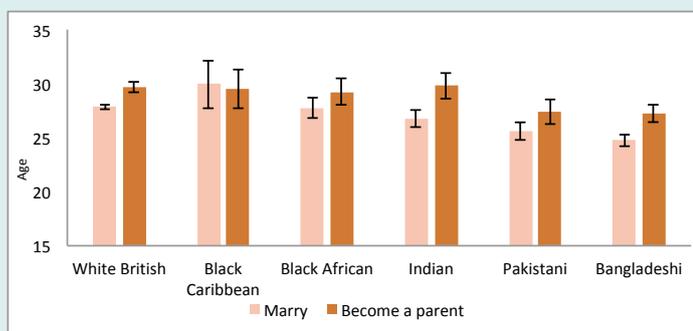


Figure 2a: UK born men aged 16-21, 2010-2014, UK

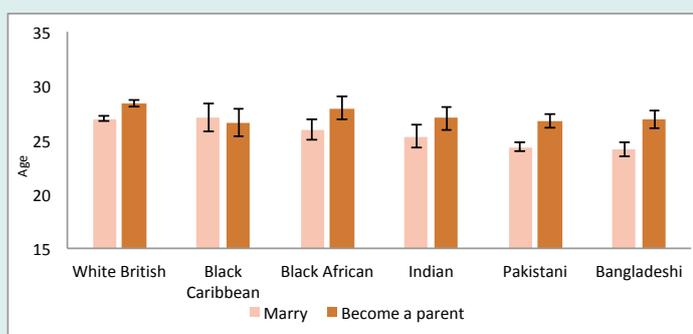


Figure 2b: UK born women aged 16-21, 2010-2014, UK

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