Families and Households

Worksheet 5.2: Single-Person Households

Study items A, B and C, then answer the questions that follow

Item A

The number of households in the UK grew from 22.9 million in 1991 to 24.9 million in 2006. However, the number of family households has not grown as fast as the overall number of households. Census data shows that the proportion of family households decreased between 1991 and 2001, from 70.6% to 67.0%, a drop of 3.6%. This decrease was offset by a 3.9% increase in the proportion of one-person households over the same period. The growing trend in people living alone accounted for much of the increase in the overall number of households and, as a result, the average household size has decreased.

This increase in one-person households has been one of the most notable changes in household composition since 1971. The number of people living alone in Great Britain increased from 3 million in 1971 to 7 million in 2005. In the mid-1980s and 1990s these households mainly comprised older women. This was a reflection of there being fewer men than women in older age groups and, in particular, the tendency for women to outlive men. In 2005, 60% of women aged 75 and over were living alone, much the same proportion as in 1986/87. More recently there has been a tendency for people to live alone at younger ages. The largest increase over the past 20 years has been among those aged 25 to 44 years. The proportion of men in this age group who lived alone more than doubled between 1986/87 and 2005 from 7% to 15% and the proportion of women living alone also more than doubled from 4% to 9%.

Adapted from the Office for National Statistics

Item B

Household Composition, 1991 and 2001

England & Wales	Percentages	
	1991	2001
One-person household	26.1	30.0
Pensioner	14.9	14.4
Other	11.2	15.6
Family households	70.6	67.0
One family and no others	66.2	63.3
One family with others	3.4	2.9
Two or more families and no others	0.9	0.7
Two or more families with others		0.1
Multi-person household	3.3	3.0
All student	0.3	0.4
Other	3.0	2.6
All Households	100	100

Source: Office for National Statistics

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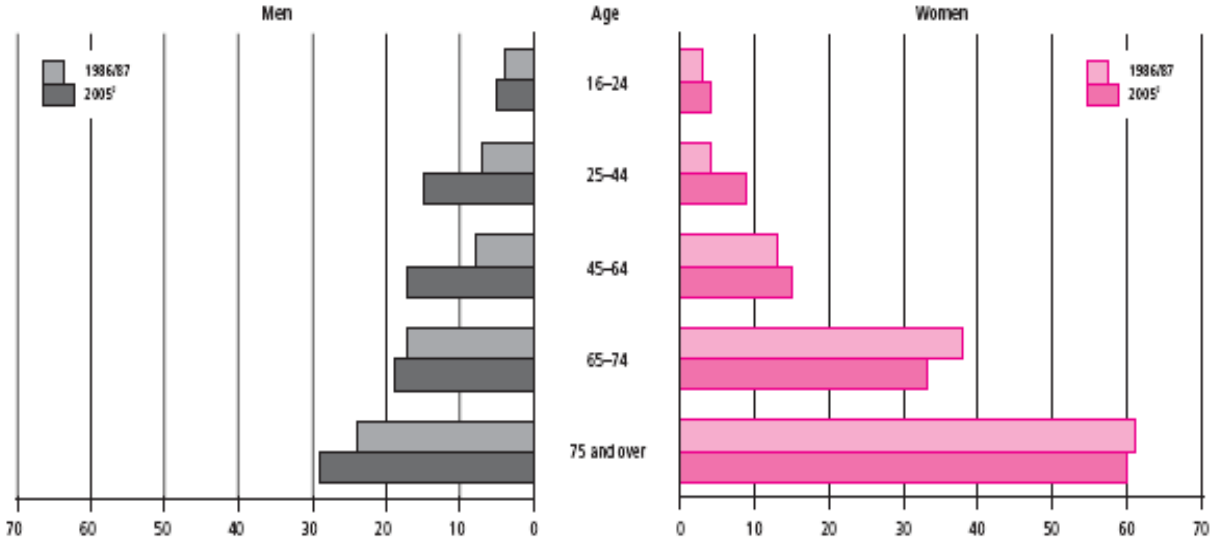
Item C

Figure 2.7

People living alone: by sex and age[1]

Great Britain

Percentages



1 Data from 2001/02 onwards are weighted to compensate for nonresponse and to match known population distributions.
2 Data for 2005 includes last quarter of 2004/05 due to survey change from financial year to calendar year. See Appendix, Part 2: General Household Survey.

Source: General Household Survey (Longitudinal), Office for National Statistics

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Questions

1. What reason is given in Item A for the fact that while the overall number of households increased in the UK between 1991 and 2006, the number of family households has not?

2. According to Item A, by how many did the number of people living alone in Great Britain increase between 1971 and 2005?

3. According to Item A, which age group and sex showed the largest increase in living alone between 1986/87 and 2005?

4. Suggest three reasons why single pensioner households are more likely to consist of women than men.

5. With reference to Item B, describe the changes in the composition of households between 1991 and 2001.

6. What evidence is there in Item B that the growth of single households cannot be explained by the growing proportion of older people in the population?

7. According to Item C, which age group and sex is the least likely to be living alone?

8. According to Item C:
a) what percentage of 45-64 year old women were living alone in 2005?
b) what percentage of men over 75 were living alone in 1986/87?
c) by how much did the percentage of women aged 65-74 who lived alone change between 1986/87 and 2005?

9. Suggest four reasons why the number of people living alone in Britain is increasing.