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There is a growing body of evidence about diversity in patterns of family formation among Britain's ethnic minorities. Although birth and marriage registration statistics do not record the ethnic group of parents or partners, the Labour Force Survey,¹ the Census² and the Fourth National Survey of Ethnic Minorities³ all provide data about the current structures of families. As in many other fields of investigation, the variations are not between the white population on the one hand and all minorities on the other, so much as between minority groups. If the overall trend in Britain is from 'old fashioned family values' towards

National Statistics

country. (In fact, women who had migrated to this country after a given age had lower fertility rates at that age than those who already lived here. This should not be interpreted as an indication of fertility rates in their country of origin; it seems likely that women who already had children may have had a lower-than-average chance of migrating to Britain.)

While a disadvantage of using this extended sequence of surveys (1987–1999) is that the estimates are not up to date, a converse advantage is that we can observe trends over time. Take as an example a 25 year old woman with a 5 year old child. The child would have been born in 1994 if she had been interviewed in 1999, but in 1982 if she had been a member of the 1987 sample. More generally, the most recent event measured would have occurred in 1998 (1 year old child, interview in 1999); the earliest event would have occurred in 1972 (15 year old child, 1987 sample). But only one year's survey, and one age of child, were capable of recording events right at the beginning or end of this sequence, and most of the action took place in the middle of the period. The teenage birth rates, for example, were based on the distribution of dates shown in Figure 1. The peak years for observations were in the mid 1980s.

Figure 2 compares the LFS-based estimates for teenage fertility, derived as just described, with the age-specific fertility rates published by the Office for National Statistics over the period.8 The two sets of figures are very (one might even say astonishingly) similar to each other, and it may be concluded that the LFS has provided reasonably accurate estimates on which to base the analysis by ethnic group.



The analysis has covered fertility across all age ranges between 15 and 44, and we start by presenting teenage births in the context of women's overall pattern of fertility. Table 2 shows the average estimated rate of births (per thousand women) in five year ranges. Figure 3 shows the same data (omitting the 'other' ethnic group for the sake of clarity).

Over the complete cycle, the estimates imply an average of 1.8 children per white woman before the age of 45.9 This was very similar for Caribbean women (1.8) and slightly higher for Indian women (2.3).

But the outstanding differences related to Pakistani women (4.0 children before 45) and Bangladeshi women (4.7).

In every ethnic group, the same characteristic pattern is shown, with births low in the teens, rising to a peak in the twenties, and falling again through the thirties. Pakistani and Bangladeshi women showed much higher rates of childbearing, especially from the early twenties onwards. The other ethnic groups were much more similar to each other, although Indian women had more children than white or black women during their 20s.

The overall analysis in Table 2 and Figure 3 shows that births to teenagers were much less common than at older ages, in all ethnic groups. The higher fertility rate of Bangladeshis was already outstanding by this stage (75 per 1,000) - nearly three times the rate observed among white women. But Bangladeshis' birth rate as teenagers was still much lower than it became in their twenties and thirties. Pakistani teenagers (41 per 1,000) and Caribbeans (44 per 1,000) were substantially more likely to have children than young white women (29 per 1000). Teenage births among Indian women were substantially less common than among whites (17 per 1,000). The width of the gap between Indian and Bangladeshi women illustrates the importance of distinguishing between specific ethnic minority groups, rather than treating all Asians as a single category.

Figure 4 focuses on teenagers in the age range 15 to 19, considering each year of age separately. The variations between ethnic groups by age 19 were very wide – from 59 per 1,000 (whites) to 249 per 1,000 (Bangladeshis). Policy interest will focus on women who had children early in this period, especially aged 15 or 16. These were very rare: only 12 white 16-year-olds, and 3 white 15-years-olds, had a baby, out of every 1,000 in the population. The rates were so low that they are difficult to determine with great precision, but it may be suggested that it was from the ages of 17 that the high rates of teenage motherhood among Bangladeshi girls stood out from the pattern observed among other ethnic groups, while Pakistani girls emerged from the other groups at the age of 19.

We do not know what the marital status of these women was, at the time they had their babies. By British law, the 15 year olds cannot have been married, though it is possible that some of the Bangladeshi women had married before they came to Britain. The LFS did, though, record

what the marital status of the young mothers was by the time they were interviewed, on average seven years after their babies were born. Among women who had become mothers below the age of 20:¹⁰

47 per cent of whites were coded as married at the time of their interview;

15 per cent of Caribbeans were married;

85 per cent of South Asians (Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis) were married.

These findings are consistent with other analyses of family formation in suggesting that the high rates of early fertility among the South Asians probably occurred within marriage, but that the relatively high rates for Caribbeans may have been outside marriage.

It has already been shown that many of the births being analysed would have occurred during the 1980s. So it is important to check whether the ethnic differences seen here would still be true in the late 1990s. This has been done by dividing women into three seven-year groups according to the dates at which they themselves were teenagers (Table 3). For whites, the rate of teenage childbearing increased very slightly between the beginning and end of the period of observation: an increase of about 4 per 1,000 between 1976-82 and 1990-96. For Caribbean women, there appears to have been a decline followed by a rise. For both these groups, though, the pattern of teenage motherhood seems essentially stable. Among the three South Asian communities, though, there are clear signs of a fall in early fertility. Indian women, already below average in 1976-82, had reduced their rate to only 7 per thousand in the 1990s. Pakistani women – much higher than the white average twenty years ago - showed a consistent fall over the period, and were very similar to whites in recent years. For Bangladeshi women, there were too few cases in the early period for a reliable

The primary focus of the analysis has been on births to teenagers. About 29 babies were born to white women below the age of 20 each year, out of every 1,000 of those in the relevant age range. The rate was substantially higher for women of Pakistani or Caribbean origin (41 and 44 per 1,000). It was much higher again for Bangladeshi women, at 75 per 1,000. On the other hand Indian teenagers were less likely to have babies than their white counterparts.

There are strong indications that teenage births occur in different circumstances, depending on the mother's ethnic group.

- MikO@ drwhoptoinging overthat this measure of teenage births does not cover all pregnancies. Getting on for half of all teenagers who get pregnant opt for an abortion,11 but it seems unlikely that many of these are of Asian origin. Young Pakistani and Bangladeshi women would probably come closer to the white average if we were able to base the analysis on all conceptions.
- Most white girls are unmarried when they have their babies; but many of them probably marry later. Most of the Caribbean teenage mothers are unmarried, and most of them probably remain as single parents. The evidence suggests (though it does not prove) that most of the Asian women are married when they have their babies.

These points may mean that Caribbean, Pakistani and Bangladeshi teenagers are behaving broadly within the expectations of their various cultural groups if they have children; whereas white teenagers are

- 4. Berthoud R. Family Formation in Multi-cultural Britain: three patterns of diversity. Institute for Social and Economic Research Working Paper 2000-34. University of Essex.
- 5. Social Exclusion Unit, Teenage Pregnancy. Cm4342 (1999).
- 6. The analysis for this paper was originally based on a comparison of mothers' and children's ages. Some figures were quoted in the Social Exclusion Unit report referred to in note 5, and also in my paper on *Family Formation* referred to in note 4. The estimates have been recalculated for the current paper, using dates of birth as the basis for estimation. The figures here therefore supercede the other references.
- 7. Murphy M. and Berrington A. Constructing parity progression ratios from household survey data. In Ni Bhrolchain M. (ed) *New Perspectives on Fertility in Britain*. HMSO (London 1993).
- 8. As published in *Population Trends*. The LFS figures are for GB, the ONS ones for England and Wales.
- 9. This is calculated as the sum of the figures in the row, multiplied by five to take account of the five-year age-ranges.
- 10. LFS marital-status codes changed several times over the period, depending on whether women were *legally married*, and whether they were currently *living with a partner*. It is likely that the definition of 'married' used here is not fully consistent from year to year.
- 11. See note 5.
- 12. See Hobcraft J. and Kiernan K. *Child Poverty, Early Motherhood and Adult Social Exclusion*. CASE Paper 28. (London School of Economics, 1999).
- 13. We are working with UNICEF on a comparison of the outcomes of teenage motherhood across Europe. It is hoped that a paper will be published during 2001. Watch www.iser.essex.ac.uk for details.
- 14. See note 5.
- 15. For example, Daily Mail, 19 December 2000. See also note 4.
- 16. Berthoud R. *The Incomes of Ethnic Minorities*. Institute for Social and Economic Research, Report 98-1. University of Essex.