

# Variety now the spice of mid-life

September 23 2011

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The characteristics of mid-life have seen big changes over recent decades, according to research by the University of Southampton revealed in the final edition of *Population Trends*, a journal published by the *Office for National Statistics* (ONS).

The study, led by Southampton's Professor Jane Falkingham, finds that people's experiences of mid-life – defined as the period between age 45 and age 64 – are much more varied now than in previous decades. Changes in partnership formation, patterns of family life and employment have meant that people can expect to see more differences between their lifestyles and those of their peers than they might have thirty years ago.

Fewer people in the mid-life age group now have a child or grandchild than they did ten years ago, but more still have a parent or grandparent alive. Meanwhile those who do have children are more likely in early mid-life to still have dependent children living with them than those 25 years ago.

More people in mid-life, particularly men, are now living alone – related to the fact that fewer people in mid-life are married, and more are divorced. However, the overall socio-economic position of the middle-aged has improved, particularly for women, and the gap between men and women has narrowed.

Also published in this issue of [Population Trends](#), a special edition produced in conjunction with the ESRC Centre for Population Change

(CPC) at the University of Southampton and a consortium of Scottish universities, is an article on cohabitation and marriage in Britain since the 1970s.

The study shows that men and women now enter their first partnership about two years later, on average, than in the early 1980s. Marriage is five years later, on average, with the additional delay due both to the growth in the frequency of cohabitation before marriage and to couples living together for longer before their first marriage.

A third article uses data from a range of national surveys to measure unmet needs for social care among older people. It concludes that different kinds of need tend to be supported by particular sources of care, and that there is a significant level of ‘unmet need’ for certain activities, such as help with bathing – with half of all [people](#) over 65 who need assistance with this, not receiving it.

Provided by University of Southampton

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