Households and families : a repercussion of changing definitions in the ONS Longitudinal Study

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In the 2001 Census, the definition of a child changed, compared with previous census points. In the 2001 Census, a 'child' was defined as an individual of any age and marital status living with a parent, who was not themselves in a co-residing couple or a parent, grand-parent or step-parent of anyone else in the household . In contrast to previous censuses, a child could now include ever married, divorced or widowed individuals, where previously only those who were single (never-married) were included.

This change affects a number of the classifications that researchers may use, such as the official definition of a family. Prior to 2001, ONS had defined a family as either a co-resident couple; a couple and never-married child (ren); a lone parent and never-married child(ren) or a grandparent and never-married children if the intervening generation was absent. Households refer to co-resident groups sharing common housekeeping or common living space and may include one or more families, or none.

In 2001 the change in the definition of a child meant that the definition of a family also changed, as did descriptions and definitions of households based on the families within them. In 1991, for example, a widowed mother and divorced daughter living together with no-one else would not have been classified as a family, nor would their household have been classified as a family household. In 2001 the same two people would have been classified as a lone-parent family and their household as a lone-parent household.

This change presents difficulties for those undertaking longitudinal analyses who may want to analyse change in household and family status over census points, or for those who are interested in looking at period changes between different censuses.

We have previously derived a variable describing the household and family circumstances of each LS member at the 1971, 1981 and 1991 Censuses. The variable, which we have labelled 'housefam', includes the following categories: living alone; couple only; couple and children; couple and others; couple and children and others; lone parent; lone parent and others; two or more families; no family but living with others; child in family; and living in a communal establishment.

In the construction of 'housefam' in 2001, the new definition of a child will alter the respective sizes of some housefam categories, compared with previous census points. This will directly affect the following housefam categories (which all include children) : couple and children; couple and children and others; lone parent; lone parent and others; 2 or more families; and child in family. For example, a divorced child in 2001 would be classed as a 'child', whereas previously they would be classed as 'other', indicating that they are a member of the LS member's household, but not a member of their family. Therefore, using the new definition, 'couple and children' or 'child in family' will appear

larger, and other categories such as 'couple and other' will appear smaller than they would have done using the earlier definition.

In order to help users with analyses over time we have derived two ho usefam variables for 2001. One, which we named housefam0 uses the 2001 definition of a child. The other, housefam09, uses the older definition. This latter variable was rather more complex to derive than the former . One complexity involved the fact that the changing definition affects not only LS members who are children in families, but also LS member parents in a family with ever-married children. We developed an algorithm, which was applicable whenever an LS member, or a child in the same family as an LS member was married, widowed or divorced (so not in line with the 1991 definition of a child). However, to make matters more complicated, the change in family definition depends on whether there was an additional never-married child in the household. Table 1 below shows the algorithm used to assign families and households to the new appropriate category. The algorithm was used when an LS member and ever-married child, or a parent and ever-married LS member were in the same family .

Table 1: Algorithm to make housefam 2001 compatible with previous census points

Household and family composition with 2001 definition of child		Never married siblings ? (for LS children) *OR* never married children ? (for LS parents)	Household and family composition with 1971-1991 definition of child	
Value	Description		Value	Description
4	Couple & children	NO YES	5 6	Couple & others Couple & children & others
6	Couple & children & others	NO YES	5 6 – SAME	Couple & others Couple & children & others
7	Lone parent	NO YES	2 8	No family & others Lone parent & others
8	Lone parent & others	NO YES	2 8 – SAME	No family & others Lone parent & others
9	Two or more families	- -	2 * 9 – SAME **	No family & others Two or more families

* Change to 'no family & others' if the changed definition of a child 'disbands' the LS members family, and there is only one other family in the household (i.e. two families in household in total). The LS members family will be 'disbanded' when the LS member is no longer defined as a child and when:
- The LS member is a child and had a lone parent in family and no other never -married siblings.
- The LS member is a parent and has no spouse AND no never -married children in family (but has married, widowed, or divorced children).

** Keep as t wo or more families if there are already or more families in the household or there are two families in the household and the following conditions apply:
- If the LS membe r is a child, either there are two or more parents (presume in a couple) or one parent plus never-married siblings in the LS member's family.
- If the LS member is a parent and has an ever-married child in the same family , either they have a spouse or parent or have never-married children.

In addition to the changes above, the category 'child in family' is derived after all other categories have been assigned, and only applies if the LS member is an ever-married child in a family.

The table below shows the frequencies and percentages of the whole LS population at 2001 for the two versions of Housefam. The final two columns show the change in number and frequency for each affected category comparing the newly derived housefam variable with the original 2001 variable. This table indicates that, as expected, categories with children decrease in size and categories including 'other' grow. For example, the category 'couple and others' increases in size by 36.25%, while 'couple and children' decreases by 1.59%. Note that for these two categories of housefam, the frequency change is approximately the same. The percentage changes are so different because they depends on the initial size of the respective categories, and 'couple and children' is a much larger category than 'couple and others'.

Table 2: Proportions and numbers in housefam categories according to different definitions of a child

Housefam category	Definition of a child							
	2001			1991			Difference 2001-1991	
	Frequency	Percent		Frequency	Percent		Frequency	Percent change
Solitary	64,399	12.2		64,399	12.2		0	0
Couple only	122,690	23.3		122,690	23.3		0	0
Couple & children	123,589	23.4		121,622	23.1		-1967	-1.59
Couple & others	5,827	1.1		7,939	1.5		2112	36.25
Couple & child & others	8,192	1.6		9,047	1.7		855	10.44
Lone parent	20,862	4.0		19,994	3.8		-868	-4.16
Lone parent & others	3,325	0.6		3,505	0.7		180	5.41
Two or more families	6,718	1.3		6,747	1.3		29	0.43
No family & others	12,277	2.3		13,925	2.6		1648	13.42
Child in family	151,117	28.7		149,128	28.3		-1989	-1.32
Communal establishment	7,827	1.5		7,827	1.5		0	0
Missing	378	0.1		378	0.1		0	0
Total	527,201	100.0		527,201	100.0		0	0

This difference between the two variables will vary by age group. The oldest LS members have larger differences because the likelihood of having been ever married, divorced or widowed increases with age. For example, there are larger differences for those in their 30s compared with those in their 20s.

We have derived a dataset including core number for each LS member, housefam0 and housefam09. If you are interested in using this dataset for your research or have further questions about this derivation, please contact Harriet Young (harriet.young@lshtm.ac.uk).

APPENDIX

This appendix includes further more detailed points of interest.

1. We were not able to trace the household and family circumstance of 378 individuals in the sample. The variable we derived housefam from, 'mhucom0', also had this missing category.

2. The definition of a family includes grandparent(s) with a grandchild with no-one in the middle generation. We did not account for these families when making the new housefam variable. There were only approximately 40 such households who had an ever-married child in the same family, and so a decision was made to leave these families in their original categories.

3. We found that there were approximately 900 never-married children not in the same family as the LS member. We left these as they were and will assume that they are likely to be never-married children with children of their own, who are therefore part of a separate family. These will stay as they are, in a separate family.

4. We have also derived housefam0 and housefam09 taking into account imputations. For further information on this and on general derivation of these variables, please contact me.