

Statistical bulletin

Conceptions in England and Wales: 2015

Annual statistics on conceptions to residents of England and Wales; numbers and rates, by age group including women aged under 18 years.



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1 . Main points

- The under 18 conception rate in 2015 was 21.0 conceptions per thousand women aged 15 to 17; this is the lowest rate recorded since comparable statistics were first produced in 1969.
- The estimated number of conceptions to women aged under 18 fell to 20,351 in 2015, compared with 22,653 in 2014, a decrease of 10%.
- The estimated number of conceptions to women aged under 16 fell to 3,466 in 2015, compared with 4,160 in 2014, a decrease of 17%.
- In 2015 there were an estimated 876,934 conceptions to women of all ages, compared with 871,038 in 2014, an increase of 0.7%.
- Conception rates in 2015 increased for women aged 25 years and over, and decreased for women aged under 25 years.

2 . Statistician's comment

"Conception rates in England and Wales, for women aged under 18, declined by 8% in 2015. Similar decreases were recorded for both maternities and abortions in this age group. Under 18 conception rates have declined by 55% since 1998, whilst for women aged 30 and over conception rates have increased by 34%."

Nicola Haines, Vital Statistics Outputs Branch, Office for National Statistics.

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3 . Things you need to know about this release

Important information for interpreting these conception statistics:

- conception statistics bring together records of birth registrations and abortion notifications
- conception statistics include all pregnancies of women usually resident in England and Wales
- figures are compiled from maternities registered in England and Wales at which one or more live births or stillbirths occur, and pregnancies terminated by abortion under the Abortion Act (1967) in England and Wales
- conception statistics do not include conceptions resulting in miscarriages or illegal abortions

4 . The number of conceptions rose in 2015

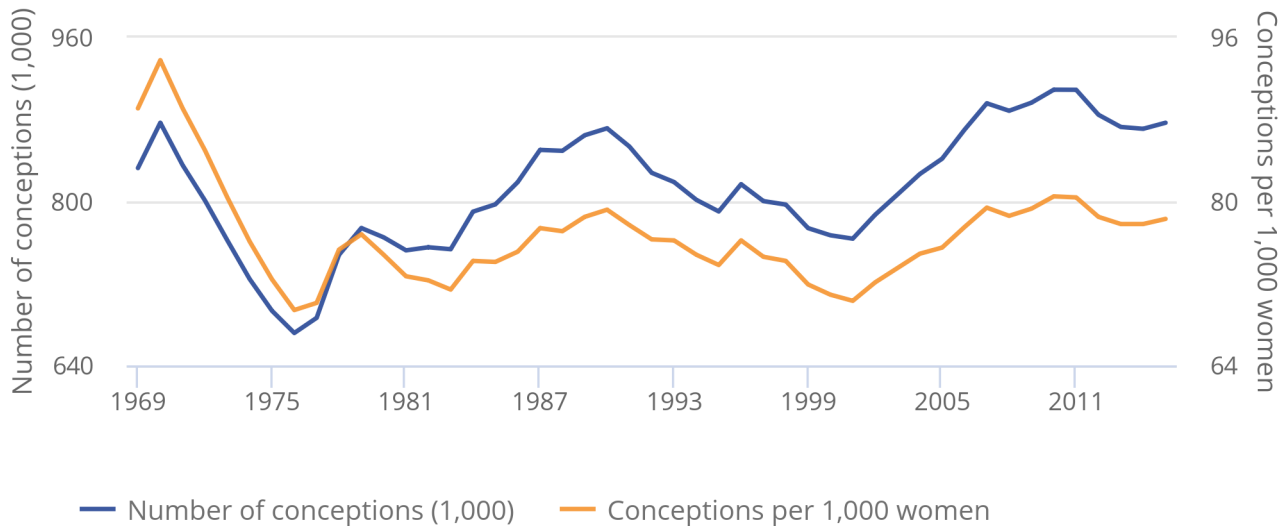
In 2015 the estimated number of conceptions in England and Wales rose by 0.7% to 876,934 from 871,038 in 2014.

Figure 1: The number of conceptions and the conception rate for all women, 1969 to 2015

England and Wales

Figure 1: The number of conceptions and the conception rate for all women, 1969 to 2015

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. The conception rate is the number of conceptions per 1,000 women aged 15 to 44.
2. Prior to 1969, the first full year for which abortions data are available, the number of conceptions was equivalent to the number of maternities.

Following the introduction of the Abortion Act (1967) the number of conceptions increased (Figure 1). The sudden decline in conceptions in the early to mid-1970s, despite a rise in the number of women in childbearing ages, can be explained by the [increased use of contraception](#).

There have been a number of scares about the [safety of the contraceptive pill](#) which may have led to a number of women using less reliable methods of contraception or no contraception at all. These pill scares correspond to increases in the number of conceptions and occurred in 1976 to 1977, 1983, 1986 and 1995 to 1996.

The size and age structure of the female population influences the number of conceptions, especially the relative sizes of the female population in the peak age groups for maternities (25 to 29 and 30 to 34) and abortions (20 to 24). Conception rates therefore provide a better measure of conceptions than simply looking at the numbers.

In 2015 the conception rate for all women increased slightly to 78.3 conceptions per thousand women aged 15 to 44, up from 77.8 in 2014. The percentage of all conceptions resulting in a maternity in 2015 was 79%. This proportion has remained fairly stable over the last 2 decades.

5 . Most conceptions occur outside marriage or civil partnership

There has been a long-term rise in the percentage of conceptions (and births) occurring outside marriage or civil partnership, reaching 57% in 2015 in England and Wales. This compares with 55% in 2005 and 47% in 1995. In 2015, 69% of conceptions outside marriage or civil partnership resulted in a maternity, compared with 92% of conceptions within marriage or civil partnership.

6 . Conception rates increased for women aged 25 and over

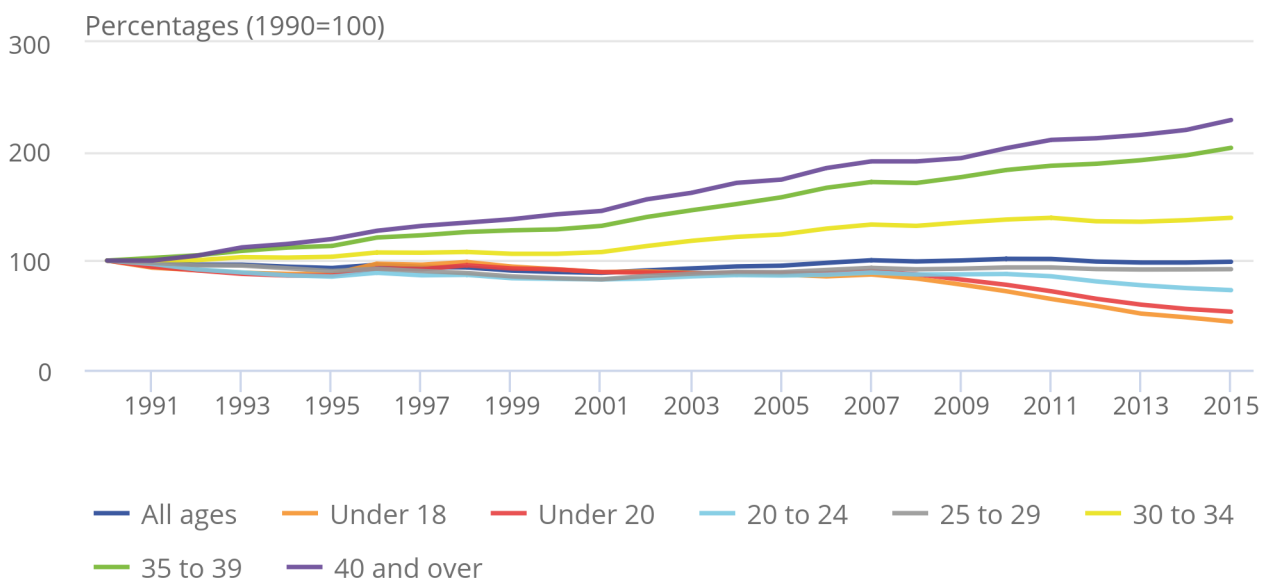
Between 2014 and 2015 conception rates increased for women aged 25 years and over, and decreased for women aged under 25 years. The largest percentage increase in conception rates occurred among women aged 40 and over (4.1%) while the largest decrease was for women aged under 16 (14%).

Figure 2: Relative changes in age-specific conception rates, 1990 to 2015

England and Wales

Figure 2: Relative changes in age-specific conception rates, 1990 to 2015

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

The conception rate for women aged 40 and over has more than doubled since 1990 (Figure 2) from 6.6 to 15.1 conceptions per thousand women. Women aged 35 to 39 have seen similar increases, with the conception rate also more than doubling since 1990 to now stand at 68.3. The 30 to 34 age group is the youngest for which conception rates have risen almost continuously since 1990, rising by over a third to 124.9.

Reasons for an increased number of women conceiving at ages 30 and above include [increased participation in higher education](#); increased [female participation in the labour force](#), the increasing importance of a career, the rising opportunity costs of childbearing, labour market uncertainty and housing factors.

The conception rate for women aged under 20 fell by 4.5% to 36.2 conceptions per thousand women aged 15 to 19 in 2015 (from 37.9 in 2014); this continues the overall downward trend since 2007. Women aged under 18 accounted for 34% of all conceptions to women aged under 20 in 2015, decreasing from 36% in 2014.

7 . The under 18 conception rate in 2015 is the lowest recorded since comparable statistics were first produced

In 2015 there were 20,351 conceptions to women aged under 18 in England and Wales, a 10% decrease compared with 22,653 in 2014. The under 18 conception rate was 21.0 in 2015, an 8.3% decrease from 22.9 in 2014. This is the lowest number of conceptions and the lowest conception rate for women aged under 18 since comparable statistics were first produced in 1969. In 1969 there were 45,495 conceptions to women aged under 18, resulting in a rate of 47.1.

The fall in the under 18 conception rate in 2015, compared to 2014, consists of falls in both the conception rate leading to a maternity (8.5% down) and the conception rate leading to abortion (8.8% down). The under 18 conception rate has now declined by 55% since 1998 and by 50% since 2007 (Figure 3).

There are a number of factors which could explain recent reductions in under 18 conceptions, including:

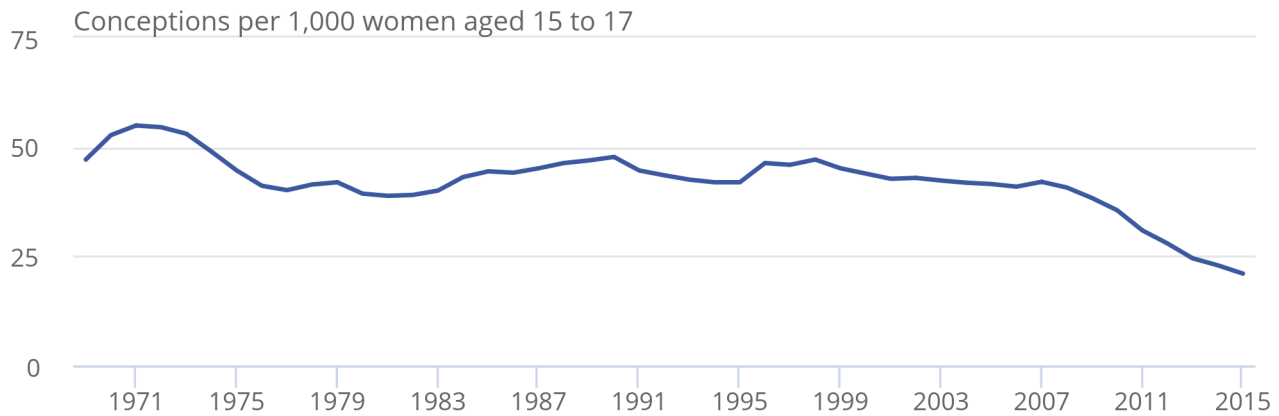
- the programs invested in by successive governments (for example sex and relationship education, improved access to contraceptives and contraceptive publicity)
- a shift in aspirations of [young women towards education](#)
- the perception of [stigma](#) associated with being a teenage mother

Figure 3: Under 18 conception rate, 1969 to 2015

England and Wales

Figure 3: Under 18 conception rate, 1969 to 2015

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. The conception rate is the number of conceptions to women aged under 18 per 1,000 women aged 15 to 17.
2. Methodology for estimating age at conception changed from 1997. Rates for 1987 to 1996 were revised to provide a comparable time series from 1987 onwards. The conception rates for 1969 to 1986 are not directly comparable as they have been calculated using the previous methodology.

The number of conceptions to women aged under 16 decreased by 17% to 3,466 in 2015, from 4,160 in 2014. In 2015 there were 3.8 conceptions per thousand women aged 13 to 15 compared with 4.4 in 2014, a decrease of 14%. This fall in the conception rate consists of a 21% fall in the rate of conceptions leading to abortion and a 9.9% fall in the rate of conceptions leading to a maternity.

The under 16 conception rate has continually decreased since 2007 from 8.1 conceptions per thousand women aged 13 to 15 to 3.8 in 2015. The under 16 conception rate is the also the lowest recorded since the time series of comparable data began in 1969, when the rate was 6.9. Nearly three-quarters (72%) of under 16 conceptions in 2015 were to women aged 15.

8 . The percentage of conceptions leading to abortions varies by age group

Women aged 30 to 34 had the lowest percentage of conceptions leading to legal abortion (14%) in 2015, whereas women aged under 16 had the highest percentage (60%).

Compared with 2014, the percentage of conceptions leading to a legal abortion in 2015 decreased for women aged under 16 and remained unchanged for women aged under 18 and 40 and over. The percentage increased for all other age groups.

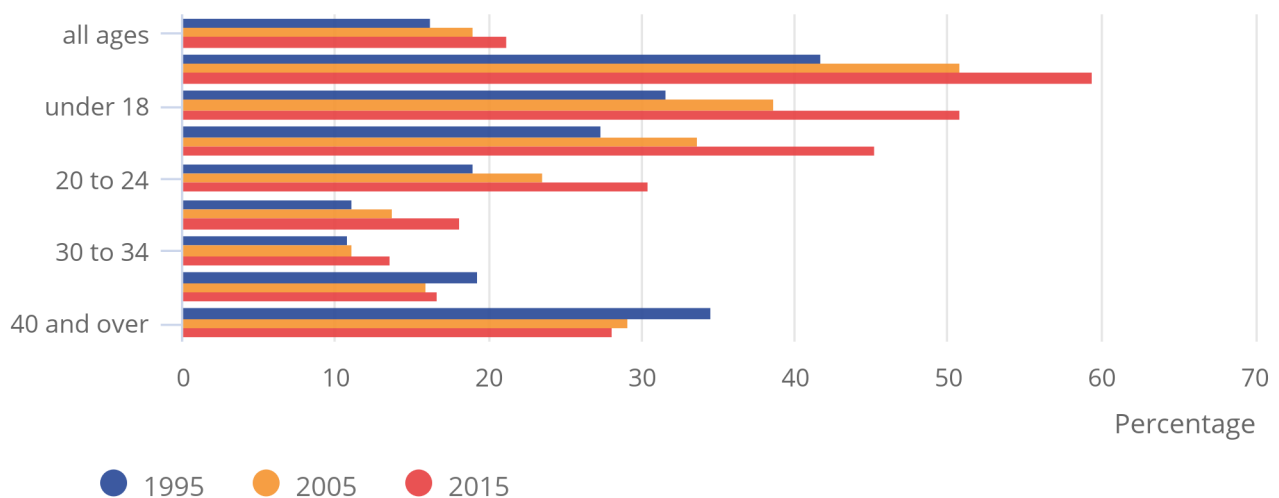
Over the last 2 decades the percentage of conceptions leading to a legal abortion has generally increased for women aged under 35 but decreased for women aged 35 and over (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Percentage of conceptions leading to legal abortion by age of woman at conception, 1995, 2005 and 2015

England and Wales

Figure 4: Percentage of conceptions leading to legal abortion by age of woman at conception, 1995, 2005 and 2015

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

9 . Conception rates vary by area of usual residence

For women usually resident in England the overall conception rate was 78.6 conceptions per thousand women aged 15 to 44 in 2015, an increase of 0.8% from 78.0 in 2014. For women usually resident in Wales, the overall conception rate decreased by 0.7% from 72.9 in 2014 to 72.4 in 2015.

A comparison across regions in England for all ages shows that the North East had the lowest conception rate in 2015, with 72.0 conceptions per thousand women aged 15 to 44. London had the highest conception rate at 84.4.

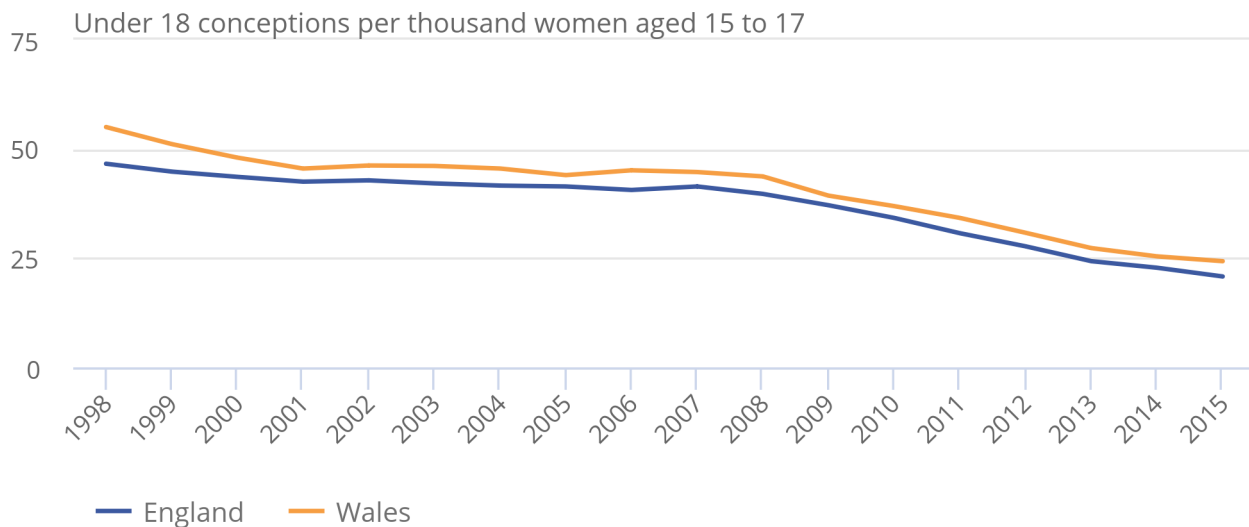
For women usually resident in England the under 18 conception rate fell by 8.8% to 20.8 in 2015 compared with 2014; a decrease of 4.3% was recorded for women usually resident in Wales to 24.3 in 2015. Since 1998, the under 18 conception rate for England has fallen by 55% while for Wales the rate has fallen by 56% (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Under 18 conception rates 1998 to 2015

England and Wales

Figure 5: Under 18 conception rates 1998 to 2015

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

Across the regions in England, the North East had the highest under 18 conception rate in 2015 (28.0). The South West had the lowest rate (16.8).

Figure 6: Under 18 conception rates by local authority, 2015

England and Wales

Notes:

1. To preserve confidentiality, counts for City of London and Isles of Scilly have been combined with those for Hackney and Cornwall respectively.

As can be seen from the map (Figure 6) there is significant variation in conception rates at the local level. When analysing figures for areas with small populations, for example Rutland, it is important to also take into account the numbers involved, as a slight change when numbers are small can lead to large changes in the rate. Other population characteristics can also have an impact, for example, the ethnic composition of an area, the level of deprivation and educational attainment levels.

There has been widespread variation in the success of local authorities in reducing teenage conception rates since 1998, as can be seen in [Table 6](#) of the dataset.

Table 1: The 10 areas with the highest under 18 conception rate in 2015 England and Wales

England and Wales

Rank	Local Authority	Number of conceptions 2015	Conception rate per thousand women aged 15 to 17		
			2015	2014	1998
1	Blackpool	108	43.8	37.3	64.8
2	Burnley	60	41.0	34.2	82.3
3	Kingston upon Hull, City of	150	38.4	39.3	84.6
4	North East Lincolnshire	101	37.6	40.8	69.8
5	Wrexham	83	37.1	26.7	54.2
6	Denbighshire	59	36.9	30.6	48.7
7	Halton	81	36.6	31.5	47.1
8	Hartlepool	62	35.8	28.9	75.6
9	Thanet	89	35.7	30.6	59.2
10	Newcastle-under-Lyme	70	34.7	31.1	51.3

Source: Office for National Statistics

10 . Links to related statistics

More statistics on [annual conceptions, in England and Wales](#) for 2015 are available on our website.

[Quarterly Conceptions to Women aged under 18](#) provides provisional quarterly statistics on the number of conceptions to women aged under 18 by regions and other local authority areas within England and Wales. See the [GOV.UK release calendar](#) for information on planned publication dates.

[Abortion statistics](#) are available from the Department of Health.

Further statistics on [Births for England and Wales](#) are available on our website.

Special extracts and tabulations of conceptions data for England and Wales are available to order (subject to legal frameworks, disclosure control, resources and the [ONS charging policy](#), where appropriate). Enquiries should be made to Vital Statistics Outputs Branch (vsob@ons.gsi.gov.uk or telephone: +44 (0)1329 444110). User requested data will be published onto [our website](#).

11 . Quality and methodology

1. This is the first time that final annual statistics on conceptions in England and Wales have been published for 2015. Provisional [Quarterly Conceptions to Women aged under 18](#) provide more timely figures on conceptions to women aged under 18 and were last published for July to Sept 2015 (Quarter 3 of 2015) on 29 November 2016.
2. The date of conception is estimated using recorded gestation for abortions and stillbirths, assuming 38 weeks gestation for live births.
3. Conception statistics are used for planning maternity services and anticipating the demand of antenatal services. Conception statistics are also used to inform and monitor policies on the access to contraception, allowing the analysis of social and demographic trends.
4. The [Conceptions Quality and Methodology Information](#) document contains important information on:
 - the strengths and limitations of the data
 - the quality of the output: including the accuracy of the data and how it compares with related data
 - uses and users
 - how the output was created
5. Our [User guide to conception statistics](#) provides further information on data quality, legislation and procedures relating to conceptions and includes a glossary of terms.
6. There is a large degree of comparability in conception statistics between England and Wales and Scotland. In Northern Ireland it is lawful to perform an operation for the termination of a pregnancy where it is necessary to preserve the life of the woman or there is a risk of real and serious effect on her physical or mental health, which is either long or permanent. In any other circumstance it would be unlawful to perform such an operation. These differences are outlined in our [Quality and Methodology Information](#).
7. The [Revisions policy for population statistics \(including conception statistics\)](#) is available on our website.
8. Due to small numbers, conceptions registered to a same sex couple in a marriage or civil partnership (922 in 2015) are included with marital births while conceptions registered to a same sex couple outside a marriage or civil partnership (320 in 2015) are included with births outside marriage. Same sex female couples have been able to register the birth of a child as mother and second parent since 1 September 2009.
9. Conception figures are covered by the disclosure control protocol for abortion statistics. The requirement to suppress counts and rates is determined by the number of women in the underlying population. Full details can be found in the [Disclosure control protocol for abortion statistics](#). Occasionally it is necessary to apply secondary suppression to avoid the possibility of disclosure by differencing.