

Mapping British society

Many facts relevant to current debates on housing and society are locked up in databases of official statistics. Here, Daniel Dorling of Newcastle University reports some findings from an analysis of census data used to create *A New Social Atlas of Britain*:

- f** More families are sharing a home with another family in the 1990s than were doing so in the 1980s and 29,000 children live in housing shared between families.
- f** A third of children aged under five and a quarter of children aged 5 to 15 live in social housing, while only 17% of working age adults live in these tenures.
- f** Within all major British cities there are large areas where more than a third of children are growing up in families without two married parents.
- f** Most adults in London are single; including 80% of those aged under 30. In every other large city and county at least 55% of people aged 16 and over are married.
- f** In 96% of British wards the number of children living in households without earners has risen since 1981. One in ten children now live in households like this.
- f** The number of 'traditional' families, with two children and two adults, one in the workforce, has fallen by a third since 1981 from 1,200,000 to 800,000 in 1991 and is falling most quickly in the cities.
- f** Two-thirds of all children live in an area where attendance at the local school is likely to lead to qualifications of less than five GCSE passes at grade C or above.
- f** Two and a half million adults were recorded as unemployed and looking for work in the 1991 census. Over a quarter had never had a job (692,000): more than two-thirds of these were men and about a half were aged over 30. A quarter of those without work in their 20s had never had a job.

Introduction

In the year of the last census, 780,000 babies were born in Britain. The kinds of families and homes into which those babies were born depended, to a significant extent, on the places in which they were born. An analysis of various databases suggests that there are many dimensions along which Britain is geographically divided. Some of these divisions are growing.

Housing

The census of Britain is a census of housing as well as of population. It measures, for instance, the age and sex profiles of people living in housing of different tenures and confirms that furnished private renting is dominated by people under 30 while the vast majority of those owning a property outright are aged above 50. The census can also be used to identify areas of housing shortages, as indicated by how many are sharing a home with another family. More than a million people in Britain now live in families who share their home and this number is rising.

Building Society data can also be used to look at housing issues. More than a million households in Britain still had homes worth less than their mortgages in 1995 and some have been in this situation for over six years. This blight has not been evenly distributed but is concentrated in particular areas. About 10% of people live in areas where most recent buyers have negative equity, while nearly 30% live in wards where practically no home buyers are suffering from this problem.

Data on house prices and positive equity can also be used to estimate the extent of inequalities in personal wealth across Britain. Excluding life and pension funds, and even allowing for house price falls, half of all personal wealth is still held in the form of positive housing equity. In the wards containing the richest two percent of the population, the average person is at least one hundred times as rich by this measure of wealth, as is the average person living in the poorest two percent of areas in Britain. The divides are even more extreme for children.

The family

The make-up of families in Britain is changing rapidly. Small families are now the norm, with a quarter of all children in Britain being the only child in their household. A further 50% of all children live in a family with only one other child. Larger families, containing four or more children, are now quite rare in most parts of the country, although in 5% of wards more than a fifth of children live in such families.

The wide geographical variation in family structure is also seen in the distribution of families with one parent across the country. In communities housing 18% of people in Britain, more than a third of children are growing up in families without two married parents. At the other extreme, 10% of people in Britain live in wards where 90% of children are living in families with two married parents. People's future perceptions of what is normal will depend very much on the region of the country which they called home and the part of the town or village in which they now live.

Table 1 Housing Wealth in Britain by Children, 1991

Average housing wealth in ward (for all households)	Dependent children falling into each bracket %	'000s
under £1000	2 %	208
£1000 to £5000	6 %	678
£5000 to £10000	10 %	1178
£10000 to £15000	11 %	1309
£15000 to £20000	11 %	1288
£20000 to £27000	14 %	1599
£27000 to £35000	12 %	1365
£35000 to £45000	11 %	1299
£45000 to £60000	10 %	1174
£60000 to £75000	6 %	714
£75000 to £100000	5 %	582
£100000 to £125000	2 %	223
£125000 and above	1 %	103
Total	100 %	11719

The number of traditional families, with two children and two adults, one of whom is in work, has fallen by a third since 1981. Over the same period the number of households with two adults both working rose by 10% and the number with two adults, neither working, rose by 25%. This polarisation in access to employment between families has resulted in far more children growing up in households where there are no wage earners. Now one child in ten lives in a household where no adult is bringing home earnings (1,120,000 children recorded in the census). A fifth of the population of Britain live in wards where the rise in the number of children in households without earners has been greater than 10% since the start of the 1980s, while only 4% of people live in wards which have seen an improvement in this situation.

Although the standard of living of many children in Britain has fallen over the last decade and a half, the worst poverty is found in families made up of older people and in households where a single elderly person lives alone. Indicators of this are shown in Figure 1 in which the length of the bar is the proportion of households with no central heating and the figure at the end of the bar is the proportion without access to a car. Those households least likely to have central heating in Britain are made up of two or more ill residents living together, at least one of whom is aged over 85. There are 300,000 ill women aged over 84 living in the community, with two-thirds of them living alone.

Education and employment

Perennial geographical divides separate the 'haves' and 'have-nots' of Britain as deeply as any social differences. There are huge variations in the educational qualifications children can expect to attain, according to where they live and what school they attend. Two-thirds of all children live in areas where they can expect to pass less than five GCSE exams at grades A to C if they attend a local school.

The nine percent of children living in the worst served wards have only a 20% chance of attaining these basic qualifications whereas the nine percent of children living in the most advantaged areas each have a 60% chance of passing these grades before they look for work or a place in further education.

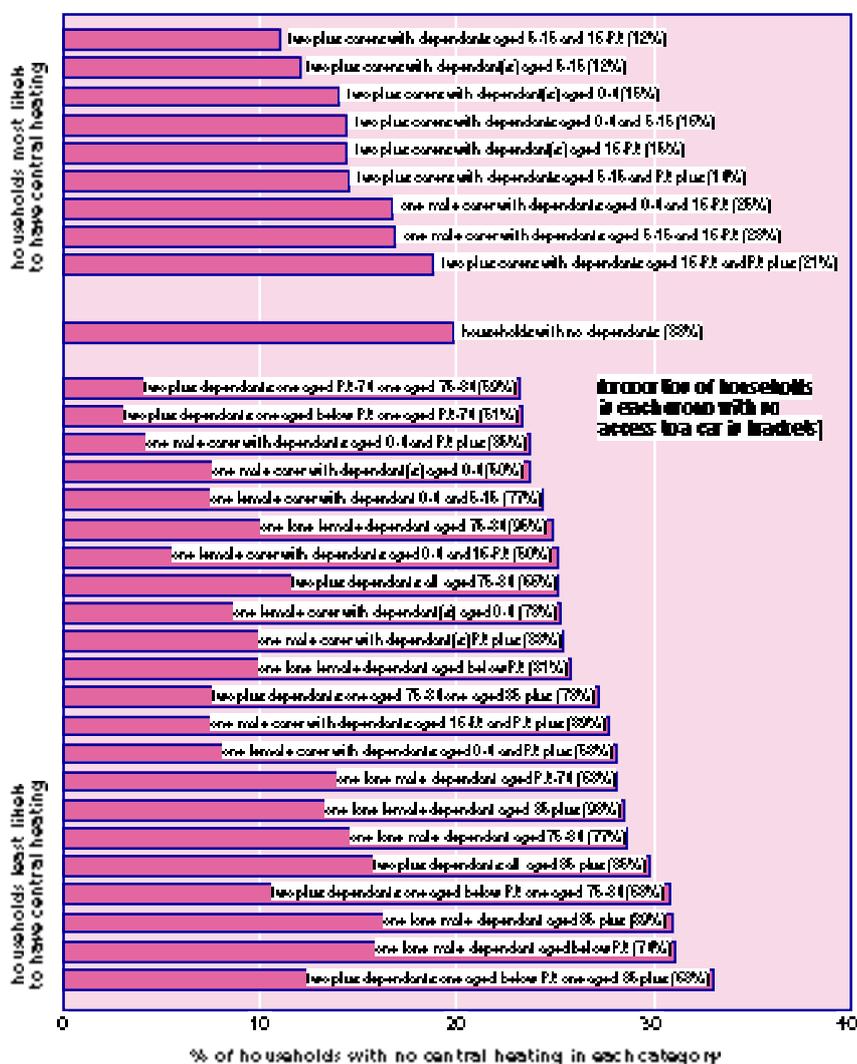
Nearly 700,000 working age adults were recorded by the census as saying they were unemployed and had never had a job and half of these people are now aged over 30 years in age (and a third over 40). Most of these people live near city centres where often over ten percent of the potential workforce (looking for work) has never had a job.

Unemployment underlies many geographical divides in Britain. Figure 2 shows two maps. Both show 459 local authority districts with each district

drawn as a circle with its area in proportion to the population of that district. This is a more socially just form of mapping than the traditional map as it gives all individuals equal representation in the image by making the insides of cities visible. The first map shows the years in which unemployment was the highest in each district. The north/south divide to the latest recession is clear. The second map shows what that highest rate of unemployment was. In the second map the urban/rural divide is most apparent, with the worst annual rates of unemployment found in many shire districts only being between five and nine percent of the workforce as compared with over twenty percent in large metropolitan cities.

The increasing division of employment between families and areas means that even though the total

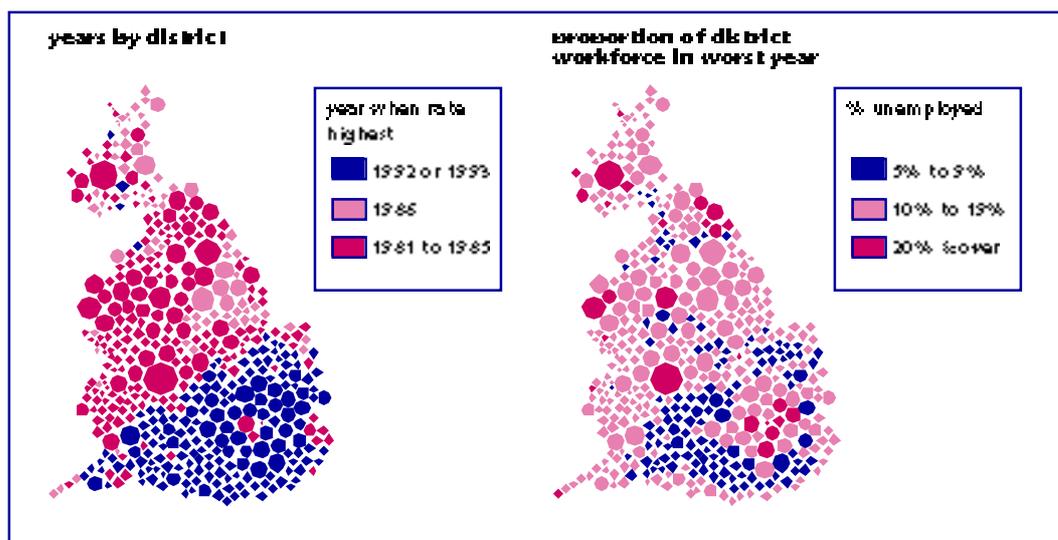
Figure 1: The availability of central heating and access to a car in 1991



Note: A dependant is either a child aged under 16 or aged 16-18 never married in full-time education or a person who has a mental or physical disability and whose economic position is either permanently sick or retired. A 33-year non-dependant person in a household with 36-year one dependant.

P2 = pensionable + 30+

Figure 2: Year and rate of highest unemployment levels in Britain 1979-1993



amount of work being done in Britain has increased (and those in work are tending to work longer hours), more and more people are not benefiting from that increase. In more than one household in three, no one now earns a salary or a wage. In many small areas this figure rises to a majority of all households being dependent on state benefits or pensions.

Even for those in work there are wide spatial as well as social divides. Within many northern cities average wages tend to be 30% lower than are found in much of the South of England. But then in much of the South, people have brought homes with those higher wages which they can only now sell at a loss.

About the study

The material presented here stems from an analysis of a variety of databases undertaken by Daniel Dorling while he was a JRF, and, later, British Academy, fellow at Newcastle University. Data from the Censuses of Population is Crown Copyright and is reproduced by permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office and was accessed through the ESRC/JISC purchase. The research these findings are based on was also funded by the British Academy, the Economic and Social Research Council, and HM Treasury.

Further information

The *New Social Atlas of Britain* is available from John Wiley and Sons Ltd, Baffins Lane, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 1UD (Tel 0800 243407). The atlas also deals with subjects not dealt with here such as migration, demography, health, politics and the economy. Many maps in the atlas are very detailed, showing data at ward level.

Related Findings

The following *Social Policy Findings* look at related issues:

- 49 UK income distribution during the 1980s (Jun 94)
- 50 UK income distribution 1961-1991 (Jun 94)
- 55 The geography of poverty and wealth, 1981-1991 (Sep 94)
- 61 More work in fewer households (Oct 94)

For further information on these and other *Findings*, contact Sally Corrie on 01904 654328 (direct line/answerphone for publications queries only).