

Embargoed until 10:45am – 3 May 2007

Marriages, Civil Unions and Divorces Year ended December 2006

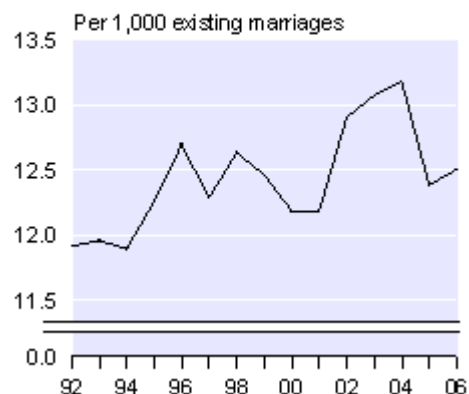
Highlights

- There were **21,500 resident marriages registered** in New Zealand during the December 2006 year.
- There were **2,000 marriages registered to overseas residents** in 2006.
- The **general marriage rate was 13.5 marriages per 1,000** not-married population aged 16 years and over in 2006.
- There were **397 resident civil unions registered in 2006**, of which 80 percent were same-sex unions.
- There were **10,100 orders for dissolution of marriage** granted in New Zealand during the December 2006 year.
- The **divorce rate in 2006 was 12.5 divorces per 1,000** estimated existing marriages.

General Marriage Rate
1992–2006



Divorce Rate
1992–2006



Dallas Welch
Acting Government Statistician

3 May 2007
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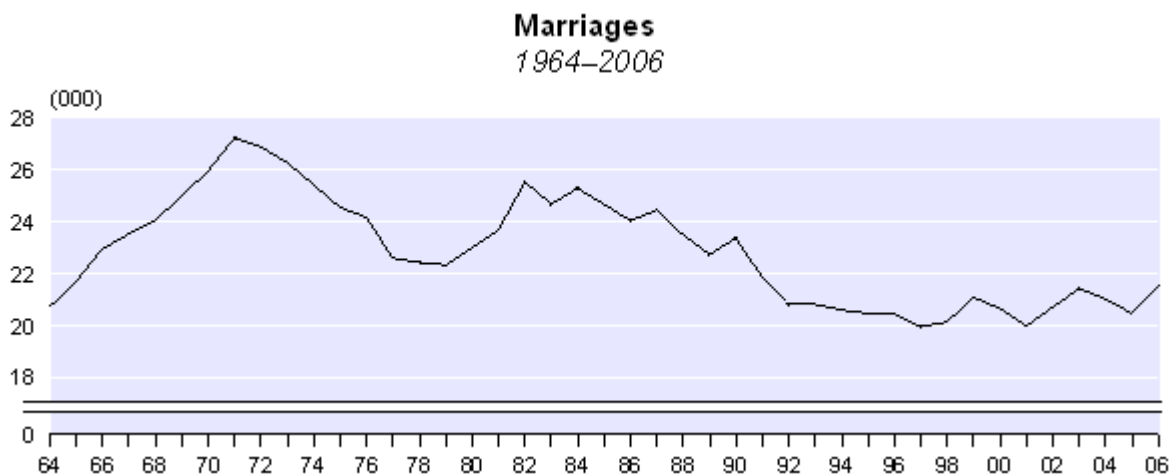
There is a companion Media Release published – [Marriages, Civil Unions and Divorces: Year ended December 2006](#).

Commentary

Total marriages

There were 21,500 marriages registered to New Zealand residents in the December 2006 year, compared with 20,500 in 2005 and 21,000 in 2004. In addition, there were 2,000 marriages registered to overseas residents in 2006 and 2005, and 2,200 in 2004. The increase in resident marriages between 2005 and 2006 was due to an increase in first marriages (up from 13,200 to 14,100).

Over the last decade the annual average number of resident marriages has been around 20,700. This compares with an annual average of 25,300 during the period 1967–1976.



While the number of marriages has been relatively stable over the last decade, the marriage rate has dropped. The general marriage rate (number of marriages per 1,000 not-married population aged 16 years and over) declined from 16.5 per 1,000 in 1996 to 13.5 per 1,000 in 2006. The current rate is less than a third of the peak of 45.5 per 1,000 recorded in 1971. Many factors have contributed to the fall in the marriage rate, including the growth in de facto unions, a general trend towards delayed marriage, and increasing numbers of New Zealanders remaining single.

Month of marriage

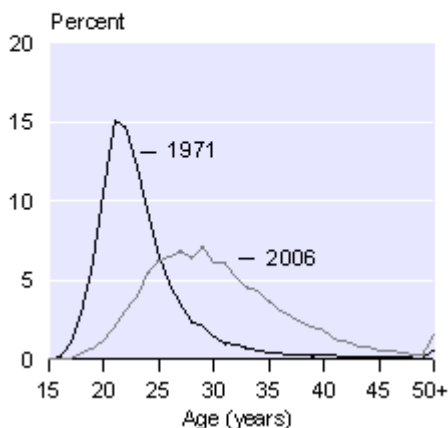
The warmer months of January, February and March are still the most popular months for marriages. In the December 2006 year, 40 percent of marriages were celebrated in the first three months of the year. In contrast, only 12 percent of marriages registered in 2006 took place in June, July and August.

Age at first marriage

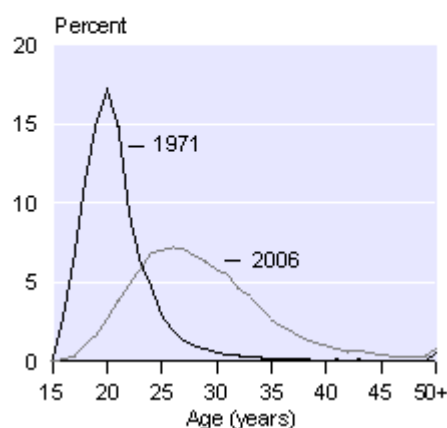
The trend towards later marriage is continuing. Increasingly, legal marriages are being postponed and fewer New Zealanders are marrying in their teens or early twenties. In 2006, there were 520 teenage girls who married, compared with 8,700 in 1971. Teenagers comprised 32 percent of all women who married in 1971, but only 2 percent in 2006. Among partnered women aged 15–19 years, nine out of 10 were living in a de facto union at the time of the 2006 Census.

Women still tend to marry men older than themselves, but the gap between their median ages at first marriage has narrowed. In 1966, this gap was 2.7 years, but by 2006 it had narrowed to 1.8 years. In 2006, the median age at first marriage was 30.0 and 28.2 years for men and women, respectively – up from 28.1 and 26.1 years in 1996.

Age Distribution of First Marriages: Men
1971 and 2006



Age Distribution of First Marriages: Women
1971 and 2006



Age at marriage

Among all marriages (first marriages and remarriages), the median age at marriage has been rising steadily since the early 1970s, and is now higher than at any time in the last 80 years. Median age at marriage reached historic lows of 23.5 years for men and 21.2 years for women in 1971, before rising to 32.6 years for men and 30.4 years for women in 2006.

New Zealand men and women are now marrying, on average, nine years later than in 1971, and 2.6 years later than in 1996. The trend towards older age at marriage has also occurred in a number of other countries. In Australia, the median age at marriage for men rose from 27 years in 1985 to 32 years in 2005 and from 24 to 30 years for women. In England and Wales, the median age for men increased from 28 years in 1991 to 34 years in 2005 and from 26 to 31 years for women.

Remarriages

The number of New Zealand resident marriages where one or both partners had previously been married was 7,300 in both 2005 and 2006. The proportion of remarriages remained stable at around 36 percent between 1995 and 2005, but dropped slightly to 34 percent in 2006 due to an increase in first marriages. In 1971, just 16 percent of marriages involved the remarriage of one or both partners. Twenty-three percent of men and 22 percent of women who married in 2006 were previously divorced.

About 90 percent of those remarrying in 2006 were divorced, up from 67 percent in 1971. This rise can be partly attributed to the increase in the number of people who are divorced. In 1971, only 4 percent of not-married people were divorced; in 2006, the corresponding figure was 15 percent. About half of divorced people who remarry marry another divorced person.

In 2006, the median ages of divorced and widowed men remarrying were 46.0 and 62.3 years respectively, while the median ages of divorced and widowed women remarrying were 42.5 and 54.9 years respectively.

De facto unions

A growing proportion of New Zealanders, like their counterparts in Australia, Northern America and Europe, live together without legalising or formalising their union. The five-yearly Census of Population and Dwellings is the primary source of information on de facto unions. Marriage statistics provide information on legally registered marriages only. In 1996, about three in every 20 men and women aged 15 years and over who were in partnerships were not legally married. By 2006, this figure had increased to around four in 20. The proportion of partnered people who are not legally married decreases with age. Among partnered people aged 15–44 years, 35 percent were not legally married in 2006. This compares with 10 percent for partnered men and women aged 45 years and over.

Civil unions

The Civil Union Act 2004 came into force on 26 April 2005 and the first ceremonies were celebrated on 29 April 2005. This Act introduced a new form of legal relationship. Two people aged 18 years and over, whether of opposite or the same sex, can enter into a civil union provided they are not currently married to, or in a civil union with, someone else. As with marriages, people aged 16 and 17 years must have their guardian's consent to enter a civil union. A couple who are currently married can transfer their relationship to a civil union. An opposite-sex couple in a civil union can transfer their relationship to a marriage. As in the past, a same-sex couple cannot enter into a marriage.

In 2006, there were 397 civil unions registered to New Zealand residents. These comprised 319 same-sex unions (131 male and 188 female) and 78 opposite-sex unions. There were no transfers to a civil union from marriage. In addition, there were 33 civil unions registered to overseas residents, making a total of 430 registrations.

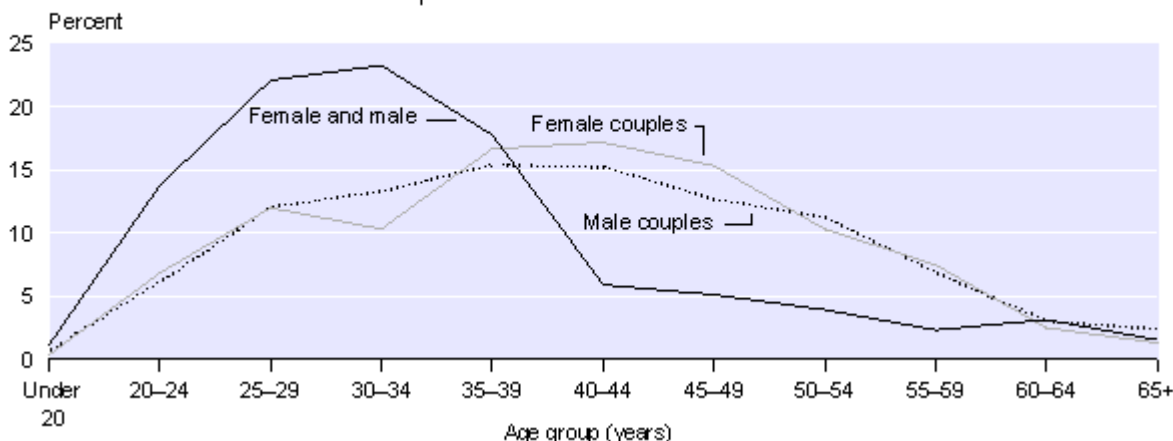
Same-sex relationships have been legally recognised in Scandinavian countries for some years. Denmark introduced 'registered partnerships' in October 1989, with Norway and Sweden following suit in the mid-1990s and Finland in 2002. Since New Zealand introduced civil unions in April 2005, a number of other countries, for example, the United Kingdom, have adopted this approach. Some countries, such as Spain and Canada, have extended the right to marry to same-sex couples. Although some countries have legal registration of same-sex unions, legal rights and requirements vary across countries.

Demographic characteristics of civil unions

Same-sex couples registering civil unions are, on average, roughly eight years older than opposite-sex couples. The median age of both men and women who registered a same-sex civil union in 2005 and 2006 was 41 years. The median ages for opposite-sex civil unions were 34 years for men and 32 years for women – slightly older than the median age for marriage (33 and 30 years, respectively). The older age profile of same-sex civil unions probably reflects the fact that they have only recently been able to register their relationships, while opposite-sex couples could marry.

Age Distribution of Civil Unions

April 2005 – December 2006



Opposite-sex civil unions tend to be concentrated in the younger age groups; 45 percent were aged between 25–34 years and only 22 percent were aged 40 years and over. Same-sex civil unions had a broader age range. The 35–39 year and 40–44 year age groups were the most common, but these represented just 32 percent of those registering a same-sex civil union. Over half (53 percent) of men and women in same-sex civil unions were aged 40 years and over.

The proportion of civil unions where one or both partners had previously been married is higher for same-sex female couples than same-sex male couples. In 45 percent of same-sex female civil unions, one or both partners had previously been married. In 26 percent of same-sex male civil unions, one or both partners had previously been married. The proportion for opposite-sex couples (36 percent) is similar to the proportion of remarriages.

Because civil union registrations are relatively new, the current age and previous marital status characteristics may not reflect long-term trends.

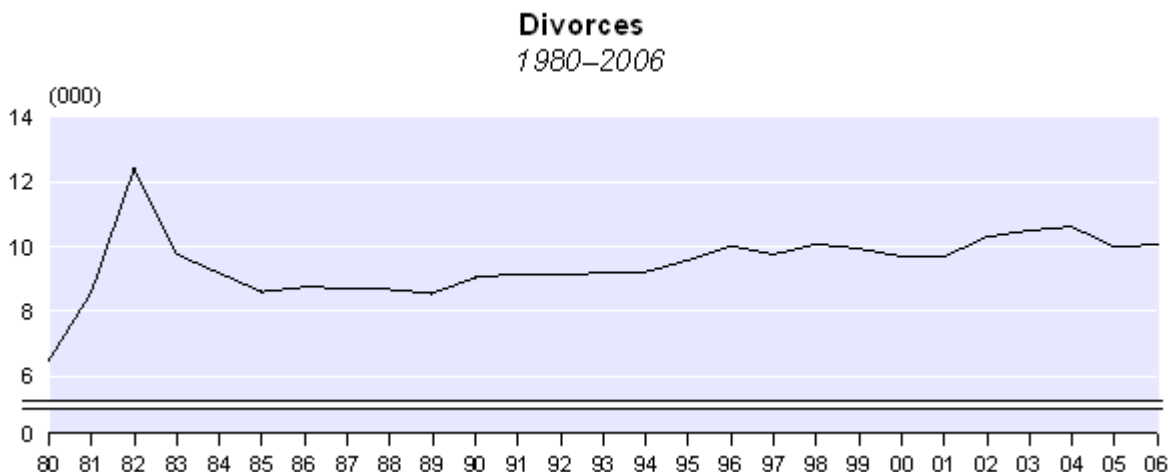
Provisional quarterly civil unions and marriages

There have been 842 civil unions registered between April 2005 and March 2007. These comprised 678 same-sex unions (304 male and 374 female), 162 opposite-sex unions and two transfers from marriage. These registrations include New Zealand residents and overseas visitors. Figures for January 2007–March 2007 are provisional.

Provisional quarterly civil unions and marriages are available on the Statistics New Zealand website: www.stats.govt.nz. This data will be updated within 5 weeks of the end of the quarter.

Total divorces

In 1981, the number of divorces rose sharply following the passing of the Family Proceedings Act 1980, which allowed for the dissolution of marriage on the grounds of irreconcilable differences. Divorces recorded a temporary high of 12,400 in 1982. Subsequently, the number fell to a low of 8,600 in 1989. In 2006, there were 10,100 divorces granted by the Family Court, consistent with the annual average for the last decade.



Divorce rate

The divorce rate (number of divorces per 1,000 estimated existing marriages) was 12.5 in 2006, similar to the 2005 rate of 12.4 per 1,000. New Zealand's divorce rate is comparable with Australia (13.1 in 2001) and England and Wales (13.0 in 2005).

Duration of marriage of those divorcing

Couples who had been married for 5–9 years accounted for 23 percent of all divorces in 2006. The next most common marriage duration before divorce was 10–14 years (18 percent), followed by less than five years (15 percent) and 15–19 years (14 percent).

Half of marriages dissolved in 2006 had lasted 13.3 years or more, compared with the median duration of 12.6 years for marriages dissolved in 1996.

Age of divorcees

The trend in age at divorce is still upward. This partly reflects the marked trend toward later marriages, which started in the early 1970s. The median age at divorce in 2006 was 44.0 years for men and 41.4 years for women. Divorcees in 2006 were, on average, about three years older than those whose marriages dissolved in 1996. The median ages then were 40.6 years for men and 37.8 years for women.

Marriages ending in divorce

Annual divorce statistics do not give a complete picture of the number of marriages ending in divorce. Analysis of divorce statistics by year of marriage shows that about one-third of New Zealanders who married in 1981 had divorced before their silver wedding anniversary (25 years). For those married in 1976 and 1971, the corresponding figures were 30 and 29 percent respectively.

Divorces involving people with children

Less than half of all marriages dissolved in 2006 involved people with children (under 17 years). The proportion of divorces involving children fell from 50 percent in 1996 to 44 percent in 2006. The number of divorces involving children was 5,000 in 1996 and 4,400 in 2006. Fewer children were involved in 2006 (8,075) than in 1996 (9,445).

Of those divorces involving children in 2006, there was an average of 1.8 children per divorce. There has been little change in this figure during the past decade. Less than half (45 percent) of children involved were under 10 years of age in 2006.

Additional tables

Additional tables for marriages, divorces and civil unions can be found on Statistics New Zealand site. For marriages and civil unions see www.stats.govt.nz/people/population/marriages.htm. For divorces see www.stats.govt.nz/people/population/divorces.htm.

Final figures

The numbers of civil unions, marriages and divorces quoted above, and contained in the appended tables, are final. Marriage and divorce rates for the December 2006 year are provisional.

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Technical notes

Civil union statistics

Civil union statistics are based on the number of civil unions registered in New Zealand. A civil union involves the act, ceremony or process by which the legal relationship of two people is constituted. A civil union may be entered into by couples of the same sex or by couples of different sexes. In New Zealand, a civil union may be solemnised either by a civil union celebrant or before a registrar of civil unions. A licence must be obtained from a registrar before a civil union can be solemnised, and notice must be given by one of the parties to a registrar.

Divorce statistics

Divorce statistics provide information on orders for dissolution of marriage granted in New Zealand. An application for marriage dissolution can be made by either the husband or wife on the grounds that the marriage has broken down irreconcilably, provided a two-year separation requirement is satisfied. Orders for dissolution of marriage cannot be granted if both marriage partners live outside New Zealand.

De facto union (consensual union)

Two people usually living in the same dwelling, but not in a registered marriage or civil union to each other, who: (a) share mutual concern for each other, (b) have a degree of economic, social and emotional interdependence, and (c) consider their relationship to be akin to marriage.

Marriage statistics

Marriage statistics are based on the number of marriages registered in New Zealand. A marriage involves the act, ceremony or process by which the legal relationship of husband and wife is constituted. In New Zealand, marriage may be solemnised either by a celebrant or before a registrar of marriages. A licence must be obtained from a registrar before a marriage by a celebrant can be solemnised, and notice must be given by one of the parties to a registrar.

Resident population concept

This release refers to vital events (marriages, civil unions and divorces) registered in New Zealand by date of registration. It excludes events to people who normally reside overseas. Demographic rates are calculated using the mean estimated resident population.

Rounding

Marriage, civil union and divorce figures contained in the tables attached to this release are unrounded. All other figures have been rounded. Derived figures (for example, percentage annual increase and marriage rates) have been calculated using unrounded data.

More information

For more information on [marriages](#) or [divorces](#), follow the links from the Technical notes of this release on the [Statistics New Zealand website](#).

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Timing

Timed statistical releases are delivered using postal and electronic services provided by third parties. Delivery of these releases may be delayed by circumstances outside the control of Statistics NZ. Statistics NZ accepts no responsibility for any such delays.

Next release ...

Marriages, Civil Unions and Divorces: Year ending December 2007 will be released on 6 May 2008.

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Tables

The following tables can be downloaded from the Statistics New Zealand website in Excel 97 format. If you do not have access to Excel 97 or higher, you may use the [Excel file viewer](#) to view, print and export the contents of the file.

List of tables

1. Marriages and marriage rates, 1971–2006
2. Median age at marriage, by previous marital status, 1971–2006
3. Divorces and divorce rates, 1971–2006
4. Median duration of marriages and median age at divorce, 1987–2006
5. Divorces involving people with children aged under 17 years, 1987–2006
6. Civil unions, by relationship type, 2005–2006
7. Civil unions by age group, 2005 and 2006