

## Single men outnumber women

**Good news ladies - figures show there are more single men in England and Wales than the total number who are married, divorced or widowed for the first time since comparable records began in 2002.**

**Single** men outnumber **unmarried** women in every age group apart from the over-75s, according to the official statistics on marriage, published yesterday. These belie the myth that women have to marry in their twenties or face a lifetime on the shelf.

While the exact causes of the shift are not known, an increase in the proportion of boys born may be a factor.

The average age at **marriage** has risen to **36.5 for men** and **33.8 for women**. For first marriages the average age is just over 32 for men and nudging 30 (29.9) for women. This means that the age at which both sexes marry for the first time has risen by three years in only a decade.

While many may hope that by not rushing into **marriage** it will become a **lifetime commitment**, the figures suggest that for some this is misplaced optimism. At more than one in six **weddings** in 2008, both partners had been married before, the Office for National Statistics data shows, and it was a repeat performance for either the bride or groom at a further one in five **weddings**.

The actual number of marriages, 233,000, is the lowest since 1895 and the lowest rate per population since records began in 1862. Civil weddings accounted for more than two thirds of marriages, with the number of religious ceremonies falling to 76,200, an annual decline of 3.1 per cent and a decrease of more than a quarter in ten years.

Resolution, an organisation representing 5,500 family lawyers, said that the figures highlighted the urgent need to give legal rights to **cohabiting couples**. David Allison, the vice chairman, said: 'The majority of people do not understand that living together does not give them any financial protection, which leaves countless people vulnerable to financial hardship if their relationship breaks down.'

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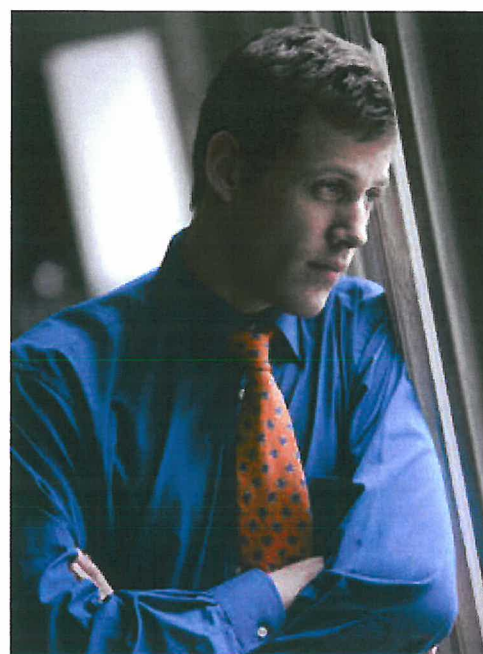
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