

SF3.2. Family dissolution and children

Definitions and methodology

This indicator presents information on the nature and characteristics of family dissolution, divorce, and separation in terms of the duration of marriage prior to divorce and the number of children affected by divorce. Information is presented through three main measures:

- The *distribution of divorce by the duration of the marriage* in years, with the preceding marriages grouped into those that lasted: less than 1 year, 1 to 4 years, 5 to 9 years, 10 to 14 years, 15 to 19 years, and 20 or more years.
- The *distribution of divorce by the number of children involved*, with ‘children involved’ defined as children under the age of 18 who depend on either of the parties to a divorce at the time the petition for divorce is filed. Children of any previous partnership are also included.

Data for these two measures refer to the number of divorces and not to the number of persons divorcing, with data derived from civil registration statistics. ‘Divorce’ in these cases is defined as the final legal dissolutions of a marriage, which confer on the parties the right to remarry as defined by the laws of each country or area. Legal separations which do not allow remarriage are excluded from divorce statistics. All the persons living within the borders of a country are covered, unless otherwise specified.

Because family dissolution may not always involve couples that are legally married, a third measure is used to capture dissolution involving children in wider terms:

- The *proportion of adults (16+) that report they are either separated or divorced by parenthood status*, with on this particular measure ‘parents’ defined as any individuals that report they have ever had at least one child and ‘divorced or separated’ defined by the individual’s self-reported partnership status.

This information is taken from the World Values Survey, where respondents are asked about their marital and parenthood statuses at the time of the survey. The experience of partnership dissolution is only partially addressed through these surveys however, since a separation is not identified when parents have entered into a new partnership.

Key findings

The duration of marriages that end in divorce are fairly well distributed in all Asia/Pacific countries, though there are some cross-country differences (Table SF3.2.A). Early divorce is most common in Japan, where almost 32% of marriages that end in divorce last either less than one year or between one and four years, only. In other Asia/Pacific countries, marriages that end in divorce are likely to last a little longer. In New Zealand, for example, just over 31% of marriages that end in divorce have lasted 20 years or more. In Korea, this figure is as high as 33%.

<i>Other relevant indicators:</i> SF1.1 Family size and composition; SF2.4 Share of births outside of marriage; SF3.1 Marriage and divorce rate

Table SF3.2.A. **Distribution of divorce by duration of the marriage, 2017 or latest available year^a**

	Duration of marriage before divorce (%):						Not stated
	Less than 1 year	1 to 4 years	5 to 9 years	10 to 14 years	15 to 19 years	20+ years	
Australia	0.0	16.5	26.0	17.1	13.0	27.4	0.0
China	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Indonesia	5.3	23.7	19.4	14.8	8.8	20.5	7.6
Japan	6.1	25.2	19.9	13.3	10.8	18.0	5.3
Korea	3.5	17.9	18.5	14.3	12.5	33.4	0.0
Mongolia	1.7	8.4	11.2	14.1	64.6	..	..
New Zealand	..	11.1	23.7	18.6	15.2	31.5	0.0
Singapore (b)	20.1	..	29.9	17.3	11.9	20.8	..
Thailand	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Viet Nam	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
OECD-32 average (c)	0.8	16.2	22.8	17.7	13.5	28.3	1.3

a) Data for Indonesia refer to 2014, for Singapore to 2016, for Korea to 2018 and Mongolia to 2020.

b) For Singapore, the categories 'less than 1 year' and '1 to 4 years' are considered together.

c) The OECD-32 average refers to the unweighted average across the 32 OECD member countries with available and comparable data. See OECD Family Database Indicator SF3.2 (<http://www.oecd.org/els/family/database.htm>) for more detail.

Sources: [Japan: National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, Population Statistics](#); [Korea: Statistics Korea, Population Census](#); [OECD-27 average: OECD Family Database Indicator SF3.2](#); [all other countries: United Nations Demographic Yearbook](#)

Across Asia/Pacific countries with available data, roughly half of all divorces involve at least one child, albeit with some cross-country variation (Table SF3.2.B). The share of divorces involving children is highest at 90% in China and lowest at 42% in New Zealand. Among those divorces that involve any children, most involve either one or two children with very few involving three or more. The share of divorces involving only a single child is highest at 66% in China, and the share involving two children is highest at 22% in Japan. Japan also reports the highest share of divorces involving 3 or more children (9%).

Table SF3.2.B. **Distribution of divorce by number of children involved, 2017 or latest year available^a**

	Divorces not involving children	Proportion (%) of divorces involving children:				Unknown
		Total	Divorces involving children:			
			1 child	2 children	3 or more children	
Australia	52.9	47.1	18.8	20.1	8.2	..
China	10.3	89.7	66.2	19.3	4.1	..
Japan (b)	41.9	58.1	26.9	22.2	9.0	..
Korea (c)	53.0	47.0	24.8	17.2	3.4	1.6
New Zealand	57.8	42.2	17.4	18.4	6.4	..
Singapore	51.4	48.6	27.2	16.1	5.3	..
Thailand	..	..	..	..	..	..
Viet Nam	46.0	54.0	29.2	18.7	6.1	..
OECD-27 average (d)	44.4	55.6	27.1	21.3	6.6	..

a) Data for Vietnam refer to 2012, for Singapore to 2015, for New Zealand to 2016 and for China to 2019.

b) For Japan, data refer to Japanese nationals in Japan only.

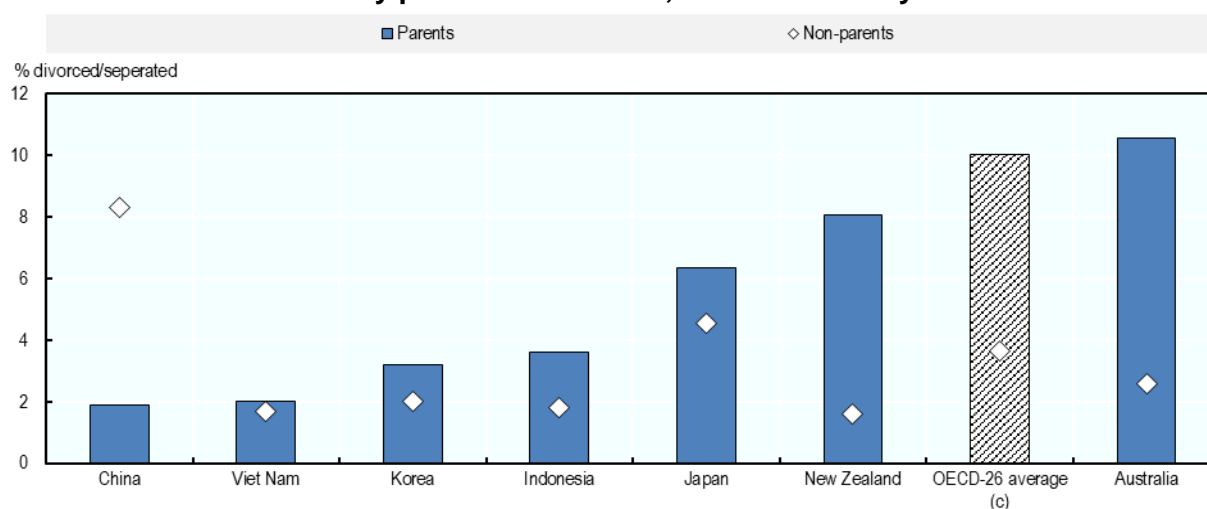
c) For Korea, dependent children are children under 20 years of age. Data exclude foreign armed forces personnel, foreign civilians employed by foreign armed forces, and foreign diplomatic personnel and their dependants

d) The OECD-27 average refers to the unweighted average across the 27 OECD member countries with available and comparable data. See OECD Family Database Indicator SF3.2 (<http://www.oecd.org/els/family/database.htm>) for more detail.

Sources: [Australia and New Zealand: United Nations Demographic Yearbook](#); [OECD-27 average: OECD Family Database Indicator SF3.2](#); [Singapore: Singapore Department of Statistics, Statistics on Marriages and Divorces, 2015](#); [Viet Nam: Statistics on Marriages & Divorces, 2012](#).

The share of parents that report being separated or divorced differs considerably across Asia/Pacific countries (Chart SF3.2.A). In Australia, for example, 10.6% of parents report their current partnership status as 'separated or divorced', whereas in Korea this is only 3.2%, and in China it is as low as 1.9%. In most Asia/Pacific countries with available data, parents are more likely to report being separated or divorced than adults that do not have children (Chart SF3.2.A). This is especially the case in Australia and New Zealand, where parents are about four or five times more likely to report being separated or divorced than non-parents. However, in China, parents are actually much less likely to say they are separated or divorced than adults without children – about 1.9% of adults report that they are separated or divorced, compared to 8.3% of non-parents.

Chart SF3.2.A. **Proportion of adults (16+) that report they are either separated or divorced by parenthood status^a, latest available year^b**



a) 'Parents' are those who report at least one child when asked the question 'Have you had any children?'. Those who report that they have not had any children are classified as 'non-parents'.

b) Data for Japan and Korea refer to 2010, for China and New Zealand to 2011, for Australia to 2012, and for Indonesia and Viet Nam to 2019. The OECD-26 average refers to 2010-2014.

c) The OECD-26 average refers to the unweighted average across the 26 OECD member countries with available and comparable data. See OECD Family Database Indicator SF3.2 (<http://www.oecd.org/els/family/database.htm>) for more detail.

Sources: China: China Social Survey (CSS), 2015; Indonesia: Estimated from the 2019 National Socio-Economic Surveys; Vietnam: Population and Housing Census 2019, self-reported status, both gender; [all other countries: World Values Survey, various waves](#)

Comparability and data issues

The data on divorce used in Tables SF3.2.A and SF3.2.B are based on statistics derived from civil registers. Divorce, like marriage, is a legal event, and this has implications for international comparability of data. Divorce is possible in all covered Asia/Pacific countries, but divorce laws do vary from country to country. These variations influence the ease, length and nature of the divorce process, and should be borne in mind when comparing across countries the distribution of divorces by the number of children involved and in particular by the duration of the preceding marriage.

Most of the data used in Chart SF3.2.A come from the World Values Survey (WVS), a worldwide network of representative national surveys carried out in 97 societies covering almost 90 percent of the world's population. Six waves of surveys have been released from 1981 to 2014, with the last wave carried out over the 2010-2014 period. Sample sizes do vary across countries, from approximately 1000 individuals in e.g. Korea and New Zealand

to about 2500 in Japan. Estimates based on smaller samples may be less reliable than those based on larger samples.

Sources and further reading: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2017), *World Marriage Data 2017*, <https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/theme/marriage-unions/WMD2017.asp>; Eurostat (2019) *Statistics Explained: Marriage and birth statistics - new ways of living together in the EU*, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Fertility_statistics.