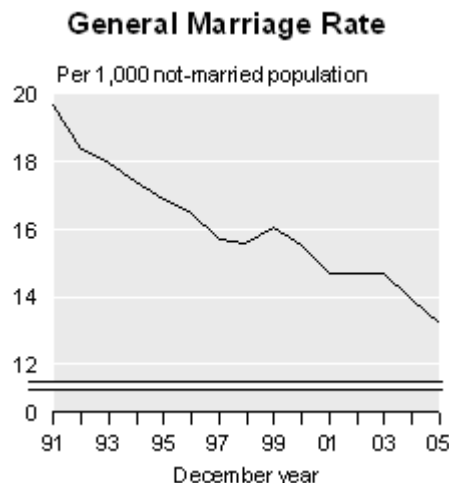
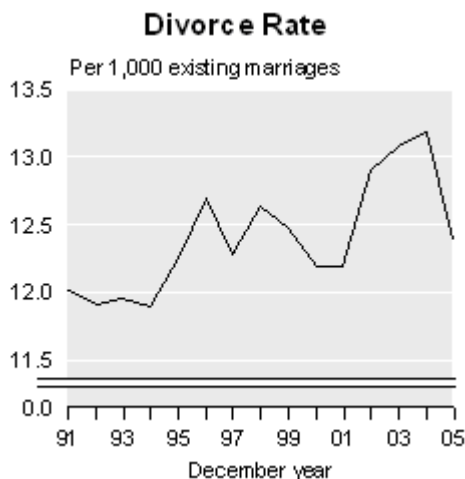


Embargoed until 10:45AM – 22 May 2006

## Marriages Civil Unions and Divorces: Year ended December 2005

### Highlights

- There were **20,500 legal marriages** registered in New Zealand during the December 2005 year.
- The **general marriage rate** was **13.2 marriages per 1,000** not-married population aged 16 years and over in 2005.
- The **median ages of men and women marrying for the first time** were **30.1 and 28.1 years**, respectively, in 2005.
- **Just over one-third of all marriages registered in 2005 (7,300) were remarriages** of one or both partners.
- There were **10,000 orders for dissolution of marriage** granted in New Zealand during the December 2005 year.
- The **divorce rate in 2005** was **12.4 divorces per 1,000** estimated existing marriages.
- **Half of marriages dissolved in 2005 had lasted 13.3 years or more.**



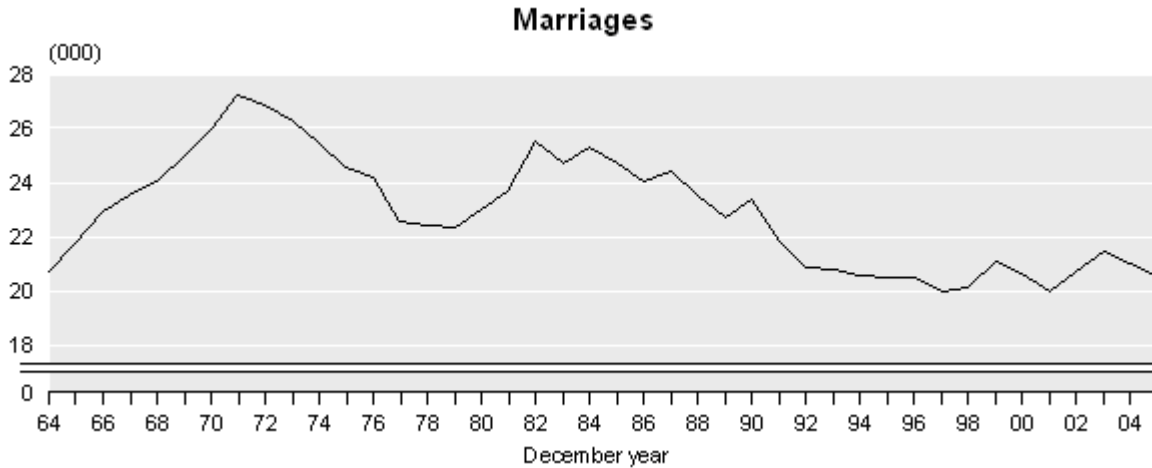
Brian Pink  
Government Statistician

22 May 2006  
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# Commentary

## Total marriages

There were 20,500 marriages registered in New Zealand in the year ended December 2005. Over the last decade the annual average number of marriages has been around 20,600. This compares with an annual average of 25,200 during the period 1966–1975.



The general marriage rate (number of marriages per 1,000 not-married population aged 16 years and over) remained stable at 14.7 per 1,000 during 2001–2003, dropping to 13.9 in 2004, and 13.2 in 2005. 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.

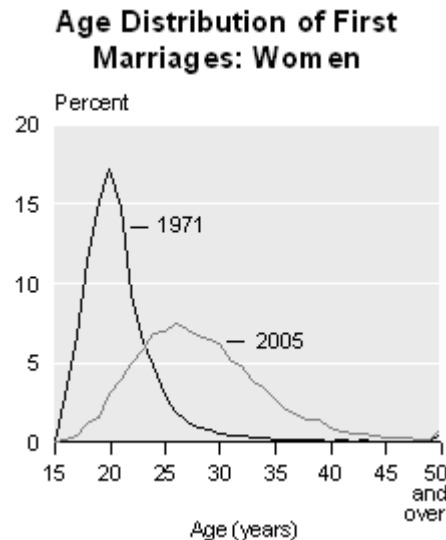
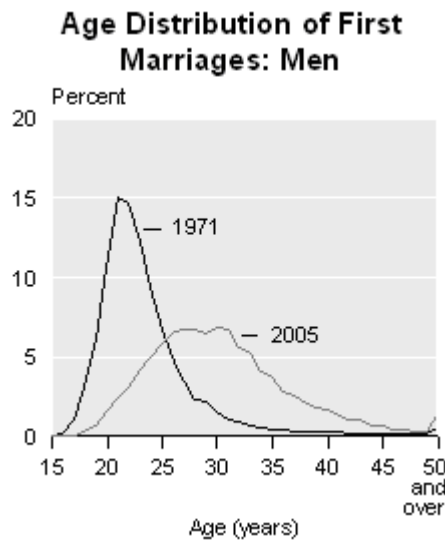
## Month of marriage

The summer months of January, February and March are still the most popular months for marriages. In the December 2005 year, 40.9 percent of marriages were registered in the first three months of the year. In contrast, only 12.2 percent of marriages registered in 2005 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 2005, teenage girls who married numbered 480, compared with 8,700 in 1971. Teenagers comprised 32 percent of all women who married in 1971, but only 2 percent in 2005. Among partnered women aged 15–19 years, nine out of 10 were living in a de facto union at the time of the 2001 Census.

Women still tend to marry men older than themselves, but the gap between their median ages at first marriage has narrowed. In 1965, this gap was 2.7 years, but by 2005 it had narrowed to 1.9 years. Eighty years ago, in 1925, the gap between age at first marriage for men and women was 3.0 years. At that time, the median age at first marriage was 26.9 and 23.9 years for men and women, respectively.



## 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 32.5 years for men and 30.4 years for women in 2005.

New Zealand men and women are now marrying, on average, nine years later than in 1971, and 2.6 years later than in 1995. The trend towards older age at marriage has also occurred in a number of other countries. In Australia the median age at marriage rose from 27 years in 1984 to 32 years in 2004 for men, and from 24 to 29 years for women. In England and Wales, the median age increased from 28 years in 1991 to 33 years in 2003 for men, and from 26 to 31 years for women.

## Remarriages

The proportion of marriages where one or both partners had previously been married has remained stable at around 36 percent over the last decade. In 2005, the number of remarriages was 7,300. By comparison, 4,400 marriages (16 percent) in 1971 involved the remarriage of one or both partners. Twenty-four percent of men and 23 percent of women who married in 2005 were previously divorced.

About 90 percent of those remarrying in 2005 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 2001, the corresponding figure was 14 percent. About half of divorced people who remarry marry another divorced person.

In 2005, the median ages of divorced and widowed men remarrying were 45.7 and 61.7 years respectively, while the median ages of divorced and widowed women remarrying were 42.2 and 55.4 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 one in four men and women aged 15–44 years who were in partnerships were not legally married. By 2001, this figure had increased to around one in three. De facto unions were more common than formal marriage among younger New Zealanders. Men and women under 25 years of age, who were living in a de facto relationship in 2001 outnumbered those who were legally married.

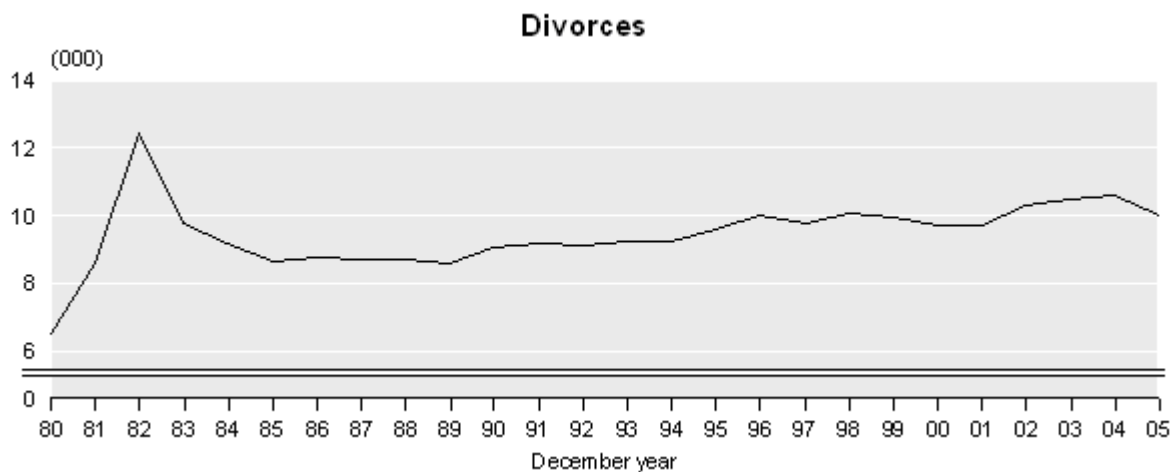
## Civil unions

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. 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.

At 31 December 2005, civil union registrations totalled 278. These comprised 227 same-sex unions (113 male and 114 female), 49 opposite-sex unions and 2 transfers from marriage.

## 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 difference. Divorces recorded a temporary high of 12,400 in 1982. Subsequently, the number fell to a low of 8,600 in 1989. In 2005 there were 10,000 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 12.4 in 2005, slightly down from the 2004 rate of 13.2, and similar to the 1995 rate of 12.3 per 1,000. New Zealand's divorce rate is comparable with Australia (13.1 in 2001) and England and Wales (14.0 in 2003).

## **Duration of marriage of those divorcing**

Couples who had been married for 5–9 years accounted for 23 percent of all divorces in 2005. The next most common marriage duration before divorce was 10–14 years (19 percent), followed by 15–19 years (15 percent) and less than five years (14 percent).

Half of marriages dissolved in 2005 had lasted 13.3 years or more, compared with the median duration of 12.3 years for marriages dissolved in 1995.

## **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 2005 was 43.3 years for men and 40.8 years for women. Divorcees in 2005 were, on average, about three years older than those whose marriages dissolved in 1995. The median ages then were 40.0 years for men and 37.2 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 1980 had divorced before their silver wedding anniversary (25 years). For those married in 1975 and 1970, the corresponding figures were 30 and 28 percent respectively.

## **Divorces involving people with children**

Less than half of all marriages dissolved in 2005 involved people with children (under 17 years). The proportion of divorces involving children fell from 51 percent in 1995 to 45 percent in 2005. The number of divorces involving children was 4,800 in 1995 and 4,500 in 2005. Fewer children were involved in 2005 (8,300) than in 1995 (9,200).

Of those divorces involving children in 2005, 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 2005.

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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 and divorce figures contained in the tables attached to this release are unrounded. Civil union figures are unrounded. All other figures have been rounded. Derived figures (for example, percentage annual increase) 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 New Zealand. Statistics New Zealand accepts no responsibility for any such delays.

## **Next release ...**

*Marriages, Civil Unions and Divorces: December 2006* will be released on 21 May 2007.

## 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, 1971–2005
2. Median age at marriage, by previous marital status, 1971–2005
3. Divorces and divorce rates, 1971–2005
4. Median duration of marriages and median age at divorce, 1987–2005
5. Divorces involving people with children aged under 17 years, 1987–2005