

29% in 1969 to 34% in 1970 and 38% in 1971. Separation was cited in 57% of cases in 1969, 51% in 1970 and in about 47% in 1971. Desertion is given as the reason for divorce in a steadily decreasing proportion of cases. On the other hand, there has been a sharp increase in the number of divorces because of cruelty.

The relative frequency of grounds for divorce varies with the petitioner. Adultery or separation are listed more frequently when the husband is the petitioner. On the other hand, women more frequently petition for divorce on grounds of cruelty or alcoholism.

**Ages of divorced persons.** The most striking finding, as shown in Table 5.57, relates to the sharp drop in the average age of persons being divorced. Men over 40 accounted for more than 50% of divorces in 1969, but this proportion dropped to 43% in 1971. The trend is the same for women, where the proportions were 43% and 34%, respectively. The average age of men being divorced (which was 42 in 1969), was only 40 in 1970 and just over 39 in 1971. For women, the average age went from 39 in 1969 to just over 36 in 1971.

Legislative changes are at the root of this decrease in age. Marriages dissolved first were usually those which took place 20 or 30 years earlier and which could not be dissolved under previous legislation. This distorting effect will gradually level off but it is by no means certain that it has yet completely disappeared. Consequently, increasingly earlier age at divorce cannot be validly assumed.

Although there has been rapid change in the average age at the time of divorce, the gap in the average age between divorced persons has remained remarkably constant. It is generally the same as the average age-gap at the time of marriage. This does not necessarily mean that the average age-gap at the time of marriage has no influence on divorce. When people marry young, the average age-gap is slight but it is precisely this group of marriages that is most divorce-prone, and there is some reason to expect that there would be a lesser average age-gap at divorce. This is offset by a higher frequency of divorce in cases where there is a wide average age-gap between partners in the marriage.

The average age-gap between petitioners is very wide. The average age of husbands requesting a divorce is considerably higher than that of all husbands. The grounds given for divorce offer a possible explanation. Husbands petition for divorce more frequently on grounds of separation or desertion where there is a waiting period of three or five years before an action can be filed.

**Number of children.** Referred to here are children living with the parents at the time of the divorce and not all children born of the marriage. Included are all children of 16 years and younger as well as still-dependent children over 16. The total number of children involved was 20,099 in 1969, 32,417 in 1970 and 34,526 in 1971, or 0.92 children per divorce in 1969, 1.11 in 1970 and 1.17 in 1971 (Table 5.56). The change in number of children per divorce is closely related to the average age of parents at the time of divorce. The higher the average age of parents, as was the case in 1969 for example, the lower the probability of there being children at home. However, given the same age at divorce, the average number of children born of divorced parents is lower than the average for all families.

Nearly 55% of divorced persons in 1969 had no children at the time of the divorce. In 1970, this proportion was 47% and in 1971, 45%. The high proportion of divorces not involving children in 1969 relates to their higher average age. Divorced couples without children include not only those married for 20 or 25 years where the children have reached the age of majority and are no longer living with their parents, but also recently married couples where the proportion without children is very high. Almost half of all couples divorced after five years of marriage were still childless as against less than 20% for the total population married for the same length of time. Among couples divorced after ten years of marriage, the proportion without children was 25% as against almost 10% for the population as a whole. Among divorced couples with children, more than 70% had one or two children only; couples having three children made up most of the remainder.

**Custody of children.** Wives petition for divorce more often than do their husbands; they do so more often when they have children, and more frequently still as the number of children involved increases. The wife files for divorce in a little over 63% of all cases, and this proportion has remained the same over the three-year period studied. However, in cases where children are involved, women request the divorce in nearly 70% of the cases and this