

# FAMILY

# Study Guide

# YEAR III



# THE FAMILY

A family is best described as a group of people most often consisting of adults and their offspring, living with or near each other. The adults in the relationship are typically closely related in some way either through marriage or cohabitation.

**The main types of family structure are:**

- ❖ **The nuclear family** consist of parents and children only
- ❖ **The extended family** consist of three or more generations in close contact
- ❖ **The single-parent family** consists of only one parent living with the children
- ❖ **The reconstituted family** is a family with at least one step-parent

## The Family and the Industrial Revolution

- ⊙ The Industrial Revolution (roughly from 1750 to 1850) was the big turning point in the history of work and other aspects of life.
- ⊙ During the Industrial Revolution, society became based more upon factories and commerce, rather than on agriculture).

**Some sociologists believe that the extended family was normal before the Industrial Revolution.**

- ⊙ The argument was that people needed to have lots of relatives with them to share the family's work (i.e. running the farm) and to support them in sickness and old age.
- ⊙ These sociologists believe that the nuclear family became the norm as industrialisation was occurring.
- ⊙ They believe that during and after industrialisation, people had less need to stay with their extended families.
- ⊙ People could now move out of their homes, find employment, and start families of their own.



# Sociological Approaches to the Family

Theory	The importance of the family
<p><b>Functionalist</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⊙ The function of the family is to socialise children, which in turn benefits both children and society.</li> <li>⊙ <b>Parsons</b> argues that the family is the means of primary socialisation and that the nuclear family is the preferred type as it provides emotional stability for adult personalities.</li> <li>⊙ <b>Murdock</b> argues that the family provides 4 functions:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⊕ <b>Sexual</b> – controls sexuality, provides stability for adults</li> <li>⊕ <b>Reproductive</b> – provides new members of society.</li> <li>⊕ <b>Economic</b> – family provides for its members.</li> <li>⊕ <b>Educational</b> – family socialises the young into societies norms and values.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>Marxist</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⊙ The function of the family is to serve Capitalism.</li> <li>⊙ This theory criticise Functionalism as they argue that the family does not serve the needs of its members, but only the needs of capitalism.</li> <li>⊙ The monogamous nuclear family was created to ensure inheritance to the legitimate heirs.</li> <li>⊙ <b>Economic</b> the family are also a consumer unit that feed the need of capitalism as they work for capitalist bosses and then they buy back the goods they create at highly inflated prices.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Feminist</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⊙ The purpose of the family is to reinforce the dominant position of men within a patriarchal society.</li> <li>⊙ •They argue that the nuclear family is oppressive and they welcome the increase in divorce and cohabitation as these family types provide more freedom for women.</li> </ul>
<p><b>New Right</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⊙ The role of the family is to teach children the difference between right and wrong, and to provide a sense of morality more widely known as 'family values.'</li> <li>⊙ •The role of the family is to teach children the difference between right and wrong, and to provide a sense of morality more widely known as 'family values.'</li> <li>⊙ •They value the nuclear family, and criticise family diversity. They especially criticise single parent families arguing that they are the biggest social problem of our time.</li> </ul>

# Functions of the Family

- ⊙ Functionalist sociologists argue society works in harmony, just like the human body with every organ working to make the whole body work. So does each institute in society work in harmony to create a whole functioning society.
- ⊙ For example, the family socialises children and if they fail to do this then the crime levels may rise.

The traditional nuclear family is ideal for modern day living as it makes best use of men and women's different natural abilities. The family also provides:

## The Functionalist View of the Family

- ⊙ Primary socialization
- ⊙ Comfort and support for adults and children- referred to as the 'warm bath', family life washes away the cares of the outside world.

### Functionalist 7 functions of the family

- ⊙ The regulation of sex
- ⊙ Reproduction
- ⊙ Physical care
- ⊙ Socialisation and social control
- ⊙ Emotional support
- ⊙ Economic support
- ⊙ A place in society

### Criticisms of family functions

#### Feminists

- ⊙ Feminists argue the family benefits men more than women
- ⊙ Even if women are in paid work as well they still provide most of the physical care and emotional support for the family
- ⊙ Men benefit from being married - for example - it increases their life expectancy and improves their health
- ⊙ These gender inequalities are passed on to the next generation through socialisation

#### Marxists

- ⊙ Marxists argue that the family benefits the ruling class
- ⊙ The family provides a new generation of workers

- ⊙ Families also provide workers with emotional and physical support to keep them able to go out and make money for the ruling classes

### **Other viewpoints**

- ⊙ Others point out that family is not functioning as well as it used to
- ⊙ Many women are remaining childless
- ⊙ 12,500 children were on the child protection register in 2007 (*suggesting a lack of physical care*)
- ⊙ In the Mental Health Survey 2004 10% of 5-16 year olds had a mental disorder (*suggesting a lack of emotional care*)

# Changes in the functions of the Family

### **Changes include:**

#### **Fewer and more specialised functions**

- ⊙ Family members often work outside the home so do not always have time to contribute to family life
- ⊙ Families have become smaller and more isolated and so may not have so much contact with other family members

#### **Less division of labour in the performance of functions**

- ⊙ Each family member had specific duties and chores and knew their place in the family hierarchy
- ⊙ Male and female roles used to be more clearly defined so there was less conflict within the group

#### **More sharing functions with other institutions**

- ⊙ The provision of childcare by non-family agencies, such as playgroups, nurseries and eventually school
- ⊙ The role of caring for elderly relatives is often the responsibility of hospitals and the social welfare services

### **One of the big debates in Sociology is the fact that traditional family life in Britain is changing.**

#### **The main reasons for this change is:**

- ⊙ The changes made to the Divorce Act in 1971.
- ⊙ The subsequent increase in divorce.
- ⊙ Religion having less of an influence on people (secular society)



- ⊙ Couples cohabiting rather than marrying.
- ⊙ Children being born outside of marriage

### Is the nuclear family dying?

	1971	1991	2007
<b>% of households that are nuclear families</b>	35	25	21
<b>% of people who live in nuclear families</b>	52	41	36

This table shows a decline but not a death of the nuclear family. Many people will live in a nuclear family in their lifetime.

## Some Important Trends:

### In the past 30 or 40 years, there have been some major changes in family and household patterns. For examples:

- ⊙ The number of traditional nuclear family households has fallen
- ⊙ Divorce rates have increased
- ⊙ There are fewer first time marriages, but more re-marriages. People are marrying later in life
- ⊙ More couples are cohabiting
- ⊙ Same-sex relationships can be legally recognised through civil partnerships
- ⊙ Women are having fewer children and having them later
- ⊙ There are more births outside marriage
- ⊙ There are more lone-parent families
- ⊙ More people live alone
- ⊙ There are more stepfamilies, and more couples without children
- ⊙ All of these upset the **New Right**

### Alternatives to family life include single-person households, communes and living in a kibbutz

- ⊙ For the examination, you will need to describe the different types of family, understand their significance and consider their pros and cons.

# The Nuclear Family

⊙ For example the nuclear family consists of a married couple with children. It is the most common type of family, although sociologists argue that it is under threat. As with all types of family, there are both positives and negatives to consider. **The traditional nuclear**

## family consisted of:

- ⊙ Married parents
- ⊙ They had not cohabited before marriage and the white dress of the bride symbolised her virginity
- ⊙ In the marriage ceremony they vowed to be together until death parted them.
- ⊙ Husband and wife have different roles; the man is the breadwinner and the wife the housewife/homemaker.

## Feminists criticise the traditional nuclear family because:

- Men dominated over women
- The role of the mother/housewife was unfulfilling
- The 'happy family' image hid a 'dark side' of domestic violence and abuse
- Women had few choices, other options such as staying single or being a single parent were considered deviant

POSITIVES	NEGATIVES
<p>The New Right argues that the nuclear family is ideally suited to teaching a child moral decency.</p>	<p>Feminists argue that the wife is exploited in a nuclear family. By staying at home she becomes little more than an unpaid servant and carer</p>
<p>Functionalists believe that the nuclear family is the one best suited to the needs of society (i.e. one person goes out to work, the other stays at home and looks after the children).</p>	<p>As with all types of family, the nuclear family can consist of emotional blackmail and verbal / sexual abuse. This is sometimes called the 'dark side of the family.'</p>

# Single Parent families

**A quarter of all families in Britain are lone parent families**

**Some argue the negative effects of not being brought up by two parents are:**

- ⊙ Underachieving in school

- ⊙ More likely to be unemployed
- ⊙ Become dependent on benefits
- ⊙ More likely to be delinquent, commit crime and use drugs

### **Some argue that a lone parent may:**

- ⊙ Be supported by other members of the family
- ⊙ Be able to support themselves economically and provide love and warm environment for children
- ⊙ Be able to protect children from an unhappy childhood by leaving relationship or marriage and living alone
- ⊙ Not bring up children who take drugs and do not achieve academically. Maybe these effects are due to other reasons such as living on a low income not be a lone parent.

**Feminists** see single parenthood as a positive choice, but do recognise that some lone parents may experience problems.

**The New Right** are critical of lone parent families stating that boys suffer due to not having a role model to copy during socialisation.

### **Many families today are not nuclear:**

- ⊙ Men are deciding to stay at home and women are the main 'breadwinner'.
- ⊙ Afro-Caribbean families are generally matrifocal-headed by the mother- this is inherited tradition from the slave trade.
- ⊙ Asian families are greatly influenced by the extended family- sometimes with many generations living together in one household
- ⊙ There are alternatives to the traditional family such as:
  - ❖ Cared for children who do not live with their natural parents but are fostered or live in children's homes.
  - ❖ Communes where many people live together and agree to share common goals and property; a good example of this is Kibbutzim in Israel.
  - ❖ Shared households, which is becoming more common- for example students sharing a house during university or in cities where it is too expensive to live alone.
  - ❖ Singlehood where people make a choice to live alone and not be in a relationship or have children. In 1971 people living alone was 6% and now it is 12%, some are elderly, some divorced and middle aged and some young people who can afford to live alone.





# What are the roles within the family?

## Conjugal roles

### Domestic division of labour

## Segregated conjugal roles

**MALE**

**FEMALE**

### Male Role

- ⊙ Responsible for bringing in the money and doing the heavier jobs around the home -repairing household equipment and some house repairs
- ⊙ He will have his own male friends and different leisure activities from his female partner
- ⊙ He will be responsible for the major decisions affecting the family

### Female Role

- ⊙ • Housewife with responsibility for:
  - • Housework
  - • Shopping
  - • Cooking
  - • Childcare
- ⊙ She is unlikely to have a paid job

## Integrated conjugal roles

- ⊙ Both partners are likely to be either in paid work or looking for a job
- ⊙ Partners share common friends, leisure activities and decision- making
- ⊙ Household jobs are shared with men doing some of the more traditional women's tasks such as cooking and cleaning while the women take on some of the traditionally male tasks e.g. household repairs

# Conjugal Roles

These are the roles that men and women in the family have.

**Elizabeth Bott** was the first sociologist who came up with the term. She said that there were two types of roles: separated (unequal) and joint (equal) **conjugal roles**.

## **Wilmott and Young** **The symmetrical Family**

(1973), introduces the concept of symmetry. They argue that

**nuclear family conjugal relationships** were becoming **symmetrical**. They believe that a symmetrical arrangement will become more common.

## **Domestic division of labour**

The amount of housework carried out by men and women is referred to as the domestic division of labour. Traditionally women were responsible of the housework and childcare and the man was the 'breadwinner' who went to work and provided for his family. This is called **SEGREGATED CONJUGAL ROLES**, however it is argued that times have changed and the division of labour has become **SYMMETRICAL**.

**Young and Willmott (1973)** argued that men and women are now sharing the housework and childcare more equally. The symmetrical family according to Young and Willmott is:

- ⊙ Nuclear
- ⊙ Privatised- cut off from other relatives and neighbours
- ⊙ Symmetrical- husband and wives had similar roles

They interviewed 2000 adults in London and 400 of them filled in 'time budget diaries'. They found that men and women's roles were similar but not identical. Women had paid work and the men spent more time at home.



**Ann Oakley (1974)** a feminist sociologist argued Young and Willmott's findings were exaggerated. She conducted 40 in-depth interviews with mothers of young children and found that women felt the household responsibilities were theirs despite the fact that they too may work. In middle class families the man was more involved in housework and childcare.

### **Why have conjugal roles become more similar?**

- ⊙ Privatised families- no extended families available to help
- ⊙ Changing attitudes- marriage is seen more as a partnership
- ⊙ Changing laws- women's legal rights make them more equal partners
- ⊙ Comfortable homes- men have become more home-centred
- ⊙ Fewer children- women's lives are no longer dominated by childbearing and childcare
- ⊙ The feminisation of the workforce- more women have paid employment

### **Earning money- many women now work outside the home this is because:**

- ⊙ The service sector and part time work has increased
- ⊙ Laws have changed to give equal rights to women in the work force
- ⊙ High achievement and changing priorities of girls in education
- ⊙ Dissatisfaction with the housewife-mother role
- ⊙ Reliable contraception, limiting family size
- ⊙ The growth of consumerism
- ⊙ Longer life expectancy

### **20% of women earn more than men however, there is still not equality in the workforce for example many women work part time.**

Conjugal roles can vary depending on age, health, ethnic group, social class, occupation and the stage of life.

For example, conjugal roles may well have been equal when the couple were childless but become more segregated when a child is born.

With an increase in single parent families (mainly headed by women) the woman has all responsibilities for housework, paid work, emotional work, decision-making, money management and childcare.

### **Conclusions into research into conjugal roles are:**

- ⊙ They are more equal today
- ⊙ BUT inequalities remain

- ⊙ The inequalities vary between families

## Domestic Violence

Violence includes both physical and mental assault.

The full extent of domestic violence is unknown. So, much violence of all types goes unreported. The best sources tend to be police records but these are notoriously unreliable, especially in the case of private crimes.

However, there does seem to be agreement between a number of different sources which suggest that assault of wives by their husbands is by far the most common form of family violence.

**Dobash and Dobash** found that violence between unrelated males was the most common form of violence.

The second most common is wife assault.

However, the Dobash's concluded that merely 2% of such assaults are reported to the police.

## The family: the positive view

**The nuclear family plays an important role in society:**

- ⊙ **Reproduction** – society needs new members in order to continue
- ⊙ **Primary socialisation** – children need to learn how to function in society
- ⊙ **Emotional security** – the family provides people with emotional support
- ⊙ **Economic provision** – the family provides people financial support, food, water, shelter, etc.



## The family: the negative view

Some sociologists argue that the family is not such a safe haven. These sociologists point to the emotional conflict that can exist between family members, leading to stress, frustration and even mental health problems. This shows the dysfunctional or **dark side of family** life.

A high proportion of violent offences and murders take place within the family. Violence can be physical, emotional, or sexual. Women and children are more likely to be the victims, and men are more likely to be the aggressors.

Some sociologists point out how family life leads to the exploitation of women. The nuclear family is, they say, designed to suit the men's interests. When they marry, men get a domestic servant and sexual slave for nothing. Women are expected by men to carry out a whole range of domestic tasks – cooking, cleaning, washing up, the laundry,

# Is the Family in Decline?

Arguments that the family is in decline	Arguments that the family isn't in decline
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⊙ Around 40% of marriages in the early 2000's will end in divorce</li> <li>⊙ About one in four children will experience a parental divorce by their sixteenth birthday</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⊙ The rising divorce rate is caused by               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ easier divorce laws</li> <li>❖ reduced social stigma</li> <li>❖ more sympathetic public attitudes</li> </ul> </li> <li>⊙ rather than more marriage breakdowns. In the past, many couples may have been condemned to suffer 'empty shell' marriages.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⊙ In Britain today, about a quarter of families with dependent children have just one parent</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⊙ Lone parenthood arises from a variety of reasons and lone parents are as able to provide care and security for children as two-parent families</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⊙ About 40% of births are outside marriage, and the proportion is growing every year</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⊙ Despite the record number of children being born outside of marriage,               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Nearly 80% if those births are registered jointly by parents with the same address.</li> <li>❖ Most dependent children still live in families with married or cohabitating couples</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⊙ There are well over a million cohabitating couples who have refused to get married – one in twelve of all couples.</li> <li>⊙ This is expected to rise to 1.7 million by 2020</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⊙ Many of those who cohabit eventually marry –               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ About 60% of first time cohabitations turn into marriages</li> <li>○ About 54% if the population over age 16 consists of married people</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⊙ • Rising rates of               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ divorce</li> <li>❖ cohabitation</li> <li>❖ lone parenthood</li> <li>❖ reconstituted families</li> </ul> </li> <li>⊙ Show a picture that the family is in decline. This has been blamed for a wide range of social problems such as social disorder, crime etc</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⊙ The causes of these social problems all too often blamed on the family are many and complicated</li> <li>⊙ Those who blame the family are often looking for a simple solution.</li> </ul>

**USE THESE ARGUMENTS TO HELP TO ANSWER THE QUESTIONS ABOUT THE FAMILY STILL BEING IMPORTANT**



# Marriage, Divorce and Cohabitation

## Recent trends

**The decline of marriage:** The number of first marriages, which is between people who have never been married before, has been declining fairly steadily since 1971.

**In 1996 there were 185000 first marriages – less than half the number in 1970!**

Some argue that first marriage rates have dropped because cohabitation (living together without getting married) has become more acceptable.

**In 1979, just 3% of adults were cohabitating. Today, just under 10% of British adults are cohabitating.**

As a result of the higher rates of cohabitation, there has also been an increase in the number of births outside of marriage.

Men and women are also deciding to get married later in life. In 1971 men, on average, married at 24 years of age. Women, on average, married at 22 years of age. In 1993, men's average was 28, and women's average was 25.8.

**Divorce:** In 1999 there were about 170,000 divorces! This is about three times the number just before the Divorce Act of 1971 made it easier to get divorced. Britain has one of the highest divorce rates in Europe.

## The Reasons for the Increase:

**Legal changes** – Before 1971, people could not get divorced simply because they felt that their marriage had failed. The partner who wanted to divorce had to provide evidence of grounds for divorce, such as, cruelty, desertion, or adultery. After the Divorce Act of 1971, it became possible to divorce because of “irretrievable breakdown” of the marriage.

**Changing values** – There has been a big change in attitudes to divorce. Divorce was regarded as wrong and divorcees were seen as failures. Now it is seen as acceptable, and sometimes it is even seen as the best thing for the children.



**The attitudes of women** – Women today are more likely to be able to support themselves after a divorce. This gives them an escape from empty marriages.

**In 1946, 63% of divorces were initiated by the husband.**

**In 1989, 73% of divorces were initiated by the wife**



## Marriage

- ⊙ The number of **first marriages** has significantly declined since the 1970s: from 480,000 in 1972 to 306,000 in 2000
- ⊙ **Remarriages** increased from 57,000 in 1961 to 126,000 (46% of all marriages) in 2000. Most remarriages involve divorced persons rather than widows and widowers. The largest increase occurred between 1971 and 1972 following the introduction of **the Divorce Reform Act of 1969**.
- ⊙ People are marrying later: the average age of first marriage rose by seven years between 1971 and 2005 when it was 32 years for men and 30 for women

## Reasons for Changing Patterns of Marriage

Changing attitudes to marriage	Evaluation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⊙ There is less pressure to marry and more freedom for individuals to choose the type of relationship they want.</li> <li>⊙ This greater choice over the type of family we create has led to an increase in family diversity.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⊙ However, some sociologists point out that greater freedom of choice in relationships means a greater risk of instability,</li> <li>⊙ It is more likely that these relationships will break up</li> </ul>
The decline of religious influence	Evaluation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⊙ The decline in influence of the Church means that people no longer feel they should get married for religious reasons.</li> <li>⊙ People are freer to choose what type of relationship they enter into.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⊙ However, the majority of first-time marriages take place within a religious context for example in a church</li> <li>⊙ This suggests that religion still has some influence over the decision to get married.</li> </ul>

<b>The declining stigma attached to alternatives to marriage</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⊙ Cohabitation, remaining single and having children outside marriage are all now regarded as acceptable</li> <li>⊙ In 1989 70% of respondents to the <b>British Social Attitudes Survey</b> believed that couples who wanted children should get married</li> <li>⊙ By 2000 this had dropped to 54%</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⊙ However, despite this, most couples who cohabit do tend to get married</li> <li>⊙ It is just that the average age of getting married has risen</li> </ul>
<b>Changes in the position of women</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⊙ Many women are now financially independent from men because of better education and better career prospects.</li> <li>⊙ This gives them greater freedom not to marry.</li> <li>⊙ The growing impact of the feminist view that marriage is an oppressive patriarchal institution may also dissuade women from marriage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⊙ However, changes to the position of women in society does not necessarily mean that they don't get married, they merely put off marriage until their careers are established</li> <li>⊙ Many feminists also argue that the fact that women are now wage earners as well as homemakers has itself created a new source of conflict between husbands and wives and this is leading to more divorces</li> <li>⊙ Feminists argue that marriage remains patriarchal, with men benefitting from their wives <b>'triple shifts'</b> of <b>paid work</b>, <b>domestic work</b> and <b>emotional work</b></li> </ul>

# Divorce

## Changing patterns of divorce

- ⊙ Since the 1960s, there has been a great increase in the number of divorces in the United Kingdom.
- ⊙ The number of divorces doubled between 1961 and 1969, and doubled again by 1972. The upward trend continued, peaking in 1993 at 180,000. Since then, numbers have fallen somewhat, but still stood at 157,000 in 2001 — about six times higher than in 1961. This rate means that about 40% of all marriages will end in divorce.
- ⊙ About 7 out of every 10 petitions (applications) for divorce now come from women. This is in sharp contrast to the situation in the past. For example, in 1946, only 37% of petitions came from women — barely half today's figure.
- ⊙ Some couples are more likely than others to divorce. Couples, whose marriages are at greatest risk include those who marry young, have a child before they marry or cohabit before marriage, and those where one or both partners have been married before.



## Effects of Divorce

Divorce is not just a legal process. It is emotionally stressful, usually accompanied by arguments and tension. Husband and wife will have to decide on:

- ❖ How to divide possessions
- ❖ New living arrangements
- ❖ Custody of children
- ❖ • Visitation arrangements for the person who does not have custody of the children

**Research has shown that children from divorced families are more likely to:**

- ❖ Live in poverty
- ❖ As children, behave in anti-social ways
- ❖ Do less well at school
- ❖ As adults have low paid jobs
- ❖ Become a parent at a young age
- ❖ Use drugs, smoke, and drink excessively



- ⊙ At first sight this seems to show that divorce is bad for the children.
- ⊙ Most children from divorced families do not suffer from any disadvantage. It is not simply a matter of coming from a divorced family.
- ⊙ What seems to matter is how well off the family is after the divorce.

**Single-parent family:** As a result of higher divorce rates and the decline of marriage there has been a steady growth in the number of single-parent families. There are about 1.6 million lone-parent families in Britain. About 20% of children live in single-parent families; this has increased from about 10% in 1972.

**Fertility:** In the UK there is a trend towards women having fewer children. They tend to have children at a later age and an increasing number of women choose not to have children.

# Theoretical Approaches to Divorce

## **Sociologists disagree as to what today's high divorce rate tells us about the state of marriage and the family:**

- ⊙ **The New Right** see a high divorce rate as undesirable because it undermines the traditional nuclear family. Divorce creates an underclass of welfare-dependent lone mothers and leaves boys without the adult role model they need.
- ⊙ **Feminists disagree.** They see a high divorce rate as desirable because it shows that women are breaking from the oppression of the patriarchal nuclear family.
- ⊙ **Postmodernists** see a high divorce rate as giving individuals the freedom to choose to end a relationship when it no longer meets their needs. They see it as a cause of greater family diversity.
- ⊙ **Functionalists** argue that a high divorce rate does not necessarily prove that marriage as a social institution is under threat. It is simply the result of people's higher expectations of marriage today. The high rate of re-marriage demonstrates people's continuing commitment to the idea of marriage.

expectation

expectations of

attitudes of

CAUSES OF THE RISING DIVORCE RATE

People have more to break down, as they live longer and are more independent. The Legal Aid and Advice Act 1949 - Gave financial help to cover costs for solicitors and court costs. The Divorce Law Reform Act 1969 - made "irretrievable breakdown of marriage" the ground for divorce. The Divorce (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1984 - Allowed couples to file for divorce after 1 year separation. The Divorce Act 1976 - Introduced "no-fault" divorce.

marriage

People demand more of their marriage today

women are

Women no longer think marriage is the only option open to them. Their growing independence

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# Explanations for the increase in Divorce

Changes in the law	Evaluation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⊙ Divorce was very difficult to obtain in 19th-century Britain, especially for women. Gradually, changes in the law have made divorce easier. There have been three kinds of change in the law               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Equalising the grounds (the legal reasons) for divorce between the sexes</li> <li>❖ Widening the grounds for divorce</li> <li>❖ Making divorce cheaper</li> </ul> </li> <li>⊙ The widening of the grounds in 1971 to 'irretrievable breakdown' made divorce easier to obtain and produced a doubling of the divorce rate almost overnight</li> <li>⊙ The introduction of legal aid for divorce cases in 1949 lowered the cost of divorcing</li> <li>⊙ Divorce rates have risen with each change in the law</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⊙ Yet although changes in the law have given people the freedom to divorce more easily, this does not in itself explain why more people should choose to take advantage of this freedom.</li> <li>⊙ To explain the rise in divorce rates we must therefore look at other changes too. These include changes in public attitudes towards divorce.</li> </ul>
Declining stigma and changing attitudes	Evaluation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⊙ <b>Juliet Mitchell and Jack Goody</b> (1997) note that an important change since the 1960s has been the rapid decline in the stigma attached to divorce.</li> <li>⊙ As stigma declines and divorce becomes more socially acceptable, couples become more willing to resort to divorce as a means of solving their marital problems.</li> <li>⊙ In turn, the fact that divorce is now more common begins to 'normalise' it and reduces the stigma attached to it.</li> <li>⊙ Rather than being seen as shameful, today it is more likely to be regarded simply as a misfortune.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⊙ However, despite these changing attitudes, family patterns tend to be fairly traditional.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Most people still live in a family</li> <li>❖ Most children are brought up by couples;</li> <li>❖ Most couples marry</li> <li>❖ Many divorcees re-marry</li> </ul> </li> <li>⊙ Some sociologists have suggested that these changes have led to a 'crisis of masculinity' in which some men experience anxiety about their role.</li> <li>⊙ The result of this could be an increase in domestic violence in an attempt to re-assert their traditional masculinity.</li> </ul>

<b>Secularisation</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⊙ Secularisation refers to the decline in the influence of religion in society</li> <li>⊙ As a result of secularisation, the traditional opposition of the churches to divorce carries less weight in society and people are less likely to be influenced by religious teachings when making decisions.</li> <li>⊙ For example, according to 2001 Census data, 43% of young people with no religion were cohabiting, as against only 34% of Christians, 17% of Muslims, 11% of Hindus and 10% of Sikhs</li> <li>⊙ At the same time, many churches have also begun to soften their views on divorce and divorcees, perhaps because they fear losing credibility with large sections of the public and with their own members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⊙ However, some sociologists challenge whether secularisation is occurring</li> <li>⊙ They point to the number of first-time marriages taking place in a religious context (church) and the changes made by the Church of England to allow divorced people to remarry in Church.</li> <li>⊙ This suggests that there is still a demand for religious weddings, even amongst those who have been divorced before</li> </ul>
<b>Rising expectations of marriage</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⊙ Functionalist sociologists argue that the higher expectations people place on marriage today are a major cause of rising divorce rates</li> <li>⊙ Higher expectations make couples nowadays less willing to tolerate an unhappy marriage.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⊙ However, despite today's high divorce rates, functionalists take an optimistic view. They point to the continuing popularity of marriage.</li> <li>⊙ Most adults marry, and the high rate of re-marriage after divorce shows that although divorcees may have become dissatisfied with a particular partner, they have not rejected marriage as an institution.</li> <li>⊙ Feminists argue that the oppression of women within the family is the main cause of marital conflict and divorce, but functionalists ignore this.</li> <li>⊙ Although functionalists offer an explanation of rising divorce rates, they fail to explain why it is mainly women rather than men who seek divorce.</li> </ul>

Changes in the position of women	Evaluation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⊙ One reason for women's increased willingness to seek divorce is that improvements in their economic position have made them less financially dependent on their husband and therefore freer to end an unsatisfactory marriage.</li> <li>⊙ The availability of welfare benefits means that women no longer have to remain financially dependent on their husbands.</li> <li>⊙ These developments mean that women are more likely to be able to support themselves in the event of divorce</li> </ul>	<p>However, many feminists also argue that the fact that women are now wage earners as well as homemakers has itself created a new source of conflict between husbands and wives and this is leading to more divorces.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⊙ Feminists argue that marriage remains patriarchal, with men benefiting from their wives' 'triple-shifts' of paid work, domestic work and emotion work.</li> </ul>

## The effects of divorce are:

- ⊙ Husband and wife have to:
  - ❖ Divide possessions
  - ❖ Decide who will live where
  - ❖ Decide about custody of the children,
  - ❖ Decide about rights of the parent who does not have custody of the children.
- ⊙ Children of divorced parents are more likely to:
  - ❖ Live in poverty
  - ❖ Become anti social
  - ❖ Do less well at school
  - ❖ As adults have lower paid jobs
  - ❖ Become parents at a young age
  - ❖ Use drugs and smoke and drink a lot
- ⊙ Many people re- marry after divorce which implies that it is not the values of marriage that are being rejected but a bad choice of partner the first time around.
- ⊙ Re-marriage creates reconstituted and blended families.
- ⊙ The effects of divorce on children are- Rogers and Pryor (1998) looked at 200 previous studies and concluded that:
  - ❖ Short-term distress is common
- ⊙ There was also a risk of longer term problems such as
  - ❖ Poorer health

- ❖ Lack of educational achievement,
- ❖ Bad behaviour,
- ⊙ However this doesn't apply to all children
- ⊙ The child's age and gender do not affect the outcome of divorce.
- ⊙ Parent's ability to come, the amount of family conflict and the quality of contact with the absent parent do affect the outcome.

**Sue Sharpe (2001) concludes that an awareness of divorce is leading young people to view marriage as a choice rather than a necessity**

## **Glossary: words you should know**

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|---------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------------|
| ⊙ Monogamy                | ⊙ Social control          | ⊙ • Child-                       |
| ⊙ Serial monogamy         | ⊙ Social stability        | centeredness                     |
| ⊙ Polygyny                | ⊙ Industrialisation       | ⊙ Commune                        |
| ⊙ Polyandry               | ⊙ Matriarchy              | ⊙ Conjugal roles                 |
| ⊙ Polygamy                | ⊙ Patriarchy              | ⊙ Integrated conjugal<br>roles   |
| ⊙ Nuclear family          | ⊙ Marriage                | ⊙ Segregated                     |
| ⊙ Extended family         | ⊙ Divorce                 | conjugal roles                   |
| ⊙ Reconstituted<br>family | ⊙ Empty-shell<br>marriage | ⊙ Secularisation                 |
| ⊙ Single-parent<br>family | ⊙ Divorce rate            | ⊙ Cohabitation                   |
| ⊙ Symmetrical family      | ⊙ Domestic violence       | ⊙ Domestic division<br>of labour |
| ⊙ Family Functions        | ⊙ Arranged marriage       | ⊙ Feminist                       |
| ⊙ Dysfunctional<br>family | ⊙ Cereal packet<br>family | ⊙ Kibbutz                        |
|                           |                           | ⊙ Kinship                        |