

The reasons for
changes in the
patterns of marriage,
cohabitation and
divorce in ...



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Britain today is a much more complex society than in past times, with great diversity in terms of households within which people live. Much of this diversity has been gained at the expense of tradition and there has been a downward trend in the certain types of families. Despite some improvements in recent years in incomes in gender opportunities, equality was neglected much more during post war times. Sociologists argue that the changes to more lenient and less traditional attitudes are responsible for the recent changes in marital behaviour.

In recent decades, marriage rates have fallen, divorce rates have risen, and the defining characteristics of marriage have changed. Over the last 30 years, one of the most profound social changes in industrial societies has been the decline in marriage, cohabitation and divorce rates. Families have changed in the last several decades. Instead of getting married, many people are living together or cohabiting. Some of these cohabiting couples eventually get married. Many of them break up. Very few stay together as cohabitants for long.

The decline in marriage has been parallel with the rise in non marital cohabitation. In the mid-1960s, only five per cent of single women lived with a man before getting married, by the 1990s, about 70 per cent did. Some people think that living together will lead automatically to marriage, but that is not often the case. For many other couples, cohabitation is viewed as an alternative to marriage rather than a preparation for it. However, this alternative is less likely than marriage to lead to a long-term stable commitment. Cohabiting relationships are fragile.

They are always more likely to break up than marriages. Whether a couple married for 10 years is more or less likely to divorce than a couple who cohabited for three years and have been married for seven years. In line with the increase in the age at which men and women marry, the age at which men and women divorce also increased. Divorce rates have also influenced the number of mixed families. The number of single-parent families, too, is rising considerably. Giddens noted that in order to understand families it is necessary to look beyond changes in household work to the relationships within which families live.

However, we should not think of compositional changes or changes in family living arrangements. Divorce is more common today than in the past.

Reasons for this include legal changes that make it easier to obtain divorce.

There are also greater opportunities for women to be economically independent, they are now finding higher and better paid jobs than most men. Single parent households are also more common today, this results of increases in divorce and births before marriage. In the nineteenth century religion prevented many from divorcing.

Many feared that they would be condemned for all eternity to hell but the twentieth century saw that religion was no longer regarded with importance.

This meant that remarriage was possible as people no longer saw it as important to marry in church and civil marriages occurred more frequently.

In more recent times family size has decreased which has meant that there is a greater ability to divorce both financially and socially, as couples no longer have large families to be responsible for.

It is easier to bring up one or two children as a single parent whereas it is harder to bring up eight or nine. As the Age of Marriage increases people are less likely to divorce, as they are more aware of what a relationship involves. Changing attitudes has meant that people are no longer prepared to stay in a bad marriage if they are not getting what they want from the marriage they have no hesitation in divorce. Previous generations have frowned upon divorce but now the majority of the population are more accepting of the reasons for divorce if not divorce itself.

Whilst divorce is acceptable amongst that majority there is a minority that still finds it abhorrent. Certain races and religions especially those where arranged marriages are prevalent do not approve of divorce as it detracts from the purity of marriages and causes problems between the families. The functionalist perspective is very traditional, everyone has a certain position and certain functions, which are necessary for the maintenance of the social structure.

It focuses on men's and women's different but balancing roles in society. When related to the family, it focuses on the functions of the family within society, as well as concentrating on the functions or roles within the family. Parsons states the functionalist view theorises that the family also has basic functions. The regulation of sexual behaviour is under the influence of marriage and family institutions. Feminist Perspective focuses on the problem of the domination of women by men.

It states that the gender differences in the roles of women and men are of cultural origin and have been socially constructed. Today there are a growing

number of gay men and women who live together as couples, the movement to legally recognize these unions as marriages is gaining strength across the country. Many of these households now include children. In some cases the parent was previously involved in a heterosexual relationship, but in other cases the couple decides to adopt or conceive a child.