

Assess the view that the nuclear family is no longer the norm

Family



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The nuclear family was commonly seen in many countries of the world due to its practicality and replaced the extended family in most societies. The nuclear family is defined by George Peter Murdock as a married male and female couple raising one or more children in one household.

This structure became the norm in modern society as it fulfils Murdock's 4 functions of the family: Sexual; helps maintain a healthy and stable relationship between the parents, Reproductive; to continue the population and produce workers for society, Economic; to support the family by working in society and sharing roles between the man and woman, Education; to serve as a source of primary socialisation for children so that they may function properly in society. Sociobiologists believe that our behaviour is due to biological instincts.

The nuclear family proved that it worked so was continued to be used as it was seen crucial to the survival of our species and zoologist, Desmond Morris mentioned that 'Most successful cultures use the nuclear family'. The 'cereal packet family' is a term given by Edmund Leech in 1967 when he recognised the power of the image of the nuclear family. It's a socially constructed model laden with assumptions of how families ought to be. Such an image creates a normalised social construction of what a family should look like. However, many other family structures are being used which suggests that the nuclear family is not the norm.

For example, the Kibbutz lived in an extended family structure, meaning that their entire family lived together and not just their immediate family. The Nayar tribe are an example of people who used the extended family due to

living in poverty. The wives would get support from family members and work together to raise the children whilst the men would go out and provide for the family. Felicity Edholm critiqued Murdock's idea of the nuclear family by saying, 'the family is socially constructed.' This means that it has varied from culture and is also not biological for humans.

Therefore, Murdock defined the nuclear family from his cultural perspective and completely ignored others. Edholm referred to this as 'The Unnatural Family'. In the UK today, many other family structures are in place due to a number of things. Since the early 1990s, divorce rates have increased by a fair amount, creating lone-parent families. This also led to a lot of people remarrying, creating reconstituted (step) families. These go against Murdock's nuclear family due to having both parents living separately or having children from different relationships.

In fact, these family structures have become more common than the nuclear family itself. Recently, same sex marriages have been approved in many places around the world, allowing gay couples to start families of their own. This also goes against Murdock's idea of the nuclear family which involved a couple each of a different sex. In conclusion, the nuclear family is no longer considered the norm due to mass increase of lone-parent and reconstituted families because of a divorce being extremely to get. Although the nuclear family may well work and be very practical in society, it just isn't easily accessed by many people.