

Introduction to social sciences sociology essay



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The UK family has undergone considerable changes since 1945. Britain nowadays is a society mixed with different household types including cohabiting families with or without children; divorced or never-married lone parents; gay and lesbian couples (McRAE, 1999, p. 1). This essay will demonstrate that family as an example of continuity change, an explanation on the changes of household types. I will also discuss marriage and divorce rates, the rising in cohabitation and lone parents, and the sexuality of society and value changes. At the expense of traditions, this diversity has gained and there has been a downward trend particularly in the traditional nuclear family. This will compare the value changes of different family types using three social sciences disciplines of history, politics and sociology.

First of all, Patriarchy and Second World War are the main factors to family of the 'Golden Age'. According to German (1981), in early days, women must struggle for their rights as that is the time when both the households and society are men-dominated. The 'Golden Age' portrayed husband as 'breadwinner' of household and wife as 'home maker'. A social norm is marriage is for 'life' and a family was built up by a pair of heterosexual couple with dependent children. To explain further, conservative thinkers stated "family is a place of offspring reproduction, protection of children's safety, inculcation of proper values on children" (Hughes and Fergusson, 2004, p. 60). Also, "hierarchy and stability" are the two important elements to maintain a healthy family and society (ibid.). On the other hand, changes in family structure were related to rising needs for stability and people's thought of family as a unit after the World War II (WWII) and probably can help reordering of a 'healthy' society after a war. Later, the situation of only

men working out to earn money did not last long after WWII as the UK's economy was depraving and thus women need to work to keep it running ("Gender Role", 1980). Thus, conservatives argued "changes in the labour market,

rise in women's employment rate and the interventions of the welfare state" give threats to male's status and power in the society (Hughes and Fergusson, 2004, p. 61). It follows that as age at marriage, teenage motherhood and childless has risen and smaller families size. Cohabitation before and between marriages has become common (Rimmer, 1981). Consequently, there is a sharp jump in births outside marriages, such as in the 1990s the birth rate is over 30%, rating above European mean (Irwin, 2000) and rising divorce rates accompanied by numerous lone-parent families (Rimmer, 1981). As a result, the nuclear family is on the decline.

One argument is that marriage is still popular but there is steady two thirds fall in marriage rates since 1970s (The Centre For Social Justice, 2006). The number of marriages has dropped by 35% in England & Wales, following by a rapid fall of 3 to 4 % per annum later (The British Academy, 2010). Previous generations growing up in an environment with strict sexual morality, view marriage as a "life-long promise" and cohabitation outside marriage are prohibited; however, the youngsters are changing their attitude and accepted to them. Moreover, there is evidence showing that the close relationship between cohabitation and divorce. Surprisingly, UK is particularly having higher divorce rate when comparing to the other countries. Before 1867, divorce was unpopular because it costs a lot and heavily stigmatized. Alternatively, the establishment of "Divorce Reform Act <https://assignbuster.com/introduction-to-social-sciences-sociology-essay/>

(1969)" which introduced an irretrievable breakdown of relationship has contributed to rapidly rising divorce rates (The Social Issues Research Centre, 2008). Apart from women's higher income and ability to take care of themselves, changes in people's material livelihoods and unreasonable behaviour of partners are also the causes for divorce. Feminists John Stuart Mill protested that the penalty of self-defense by women due to domestic violence should not be that heavy than

a violent man (The British Academy, 2010). What is more, feminism focuses on the rights and freedom of women and rejects the idea of patriarchy which women are oppressed by men. In 1968, there was a women's movement which has raised the public awareness about domestic violence and sexual violence (ibid.). This has greatly provided refuges and support for women under oppressions.

On the other hand, cohabitation has become a common form of partnership in today society. People cohabitated as an alternative to marriage. The cohabitation rate wasn't high in the 1960, about 5 %, yet by the 1990s, it has risen to 70% (Haskey, 1995). Social scientists do not view cohabitation can be long lasting as it is fragile. On average, cohabitations usually last for less than two years before breaking up (Ermisch and Francesconi, 1998). Since the proportion of cohabitating unions' proportions are getting larger than the marriage rate, this composition will lead to breakdown of the traditional families. From the mid-1980s, the growth of this kind of families was possibly regarding to changing attitudes toward pre-marital sex of the young generations, shotgun weddings, and cohabitating is simpler than marriage (McRae, 1999). Lone parent families are more likely to suffer from

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poverty and imbalance between work and family as the only parent needs to bear the responsibility of child rearing and earn money by themselves at the same time. Also, UK has had the highest percentage of children living in these families in the European Union (15%) and doubled the EU average and just only followed by Denmark (Murphy and Wang, 1999). Nevertheless, “Teenage Mothers” is another “new family” form arise in the society, which has the fastest increase rate than the others from 1969 (Murphy and Wang, 1999). On the face of it, it seems the age of lone parent and family sizes in UK are tend to be smaller than the cases in the past which is definitely connected to the ideological and pragmatic separation of parenthood from marriage

(The Social Issues Research Centre, 2008).

After that, people’s changing attitudes towards sexuality have created diverse family arrangements and one of the most argumentative issue is gay and lesbian families. The term “gay” is often refers to “homosexual individuals, particularly men” while “lesbian” is described as “homosexual women” (Morrisey, 2010). The “Sexual Offences Act 1967” stated legal sex between consenting males aged above 21(The Law Commission, 2000). An ESRC report showed that there are approximately 1, 700 same sex couples in Brighton, the highest in the UK at 2. 67% of all couples (Duncan & Smith, 2004). What is more, a civil partnership is a legally binding agreement as in 2004, the parliament has passed the “Civil Partnership Act” which gives legal rights and responsibilities to same-sex couples as married heterosexual couples (The Social Issues Research Centre, 2008). Legal process is also set by the act on the dissolution of partnership (ibid.). Thus, these changes are

evidence illustrating that the society is becoming more liberalised and the move from conservatism to feminism. Both genders are having equal rights and social status. The situation of same sex couples being discriminated by others have altered since the society is more accepted to it and there are policies to protect them now.

Last but not least, changing attitudes of people is of paramount importance towards the increasingly diverse family life and structures in UK. Accounting for continuity in these changes, Scott and Brook suggested that, most individuals' held the same values with commitment to their family even in the post-war period, and results in complex attitudinal and behavioural choices. Besides, shifts within the social and economic trends did also contribute to the road of a more liberalized society of UK. In addition, another main factor is the

changing role of women in the family and society. Higher educational qualifications have

increased the participation of women in workforce which also gives them a higher social status.

To conclude, families have fluctuated over time from the traditional nuclear family to lone parent families, cohabitation, same sex couples and teenage motherhood. The tendency to blame for family break-up relates to social, economic and personal attitude and behaviour regarding the issues. There is no doubt that the traditional nuclear family is getting weaker but not the case what people have said about the fading out of the family as most of the

people still have a strong family ties in their heart and they have proved family as a demonstration of continuity change.