

The structure of british families has changed significantly essay

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The structure of the British family has shifted significantly over the last couple of years, and this looks set to continue. A relaxation of societal attitudes towards marriage means it is no longer seen as unusual to be involved in a 'complicated' family structure. Families are no longer just made up of married parents living with their children.

Although seven in ten households are still headed up by married couples, this proportion has been declining for some time. Families are now a mix of cohabiting parents, stepfamilies, single parent families etc. The structure of British families has changed significantly. The last 100 years have seen changes in legislation, technology, attitudes and expectations that have led to three main points: • An increase in divorces; • Growing number of new types of family; • Feminisation of the workforce. First, changes in the law have made it easier to be able to get a divorce and Britain now has one of the highest divorce rates in Europe and the largest percentage of people in any European nation who have been divorced (around one in six adults).

Data indicates that the number of couples getting a divorce dropped to the lowest rate for 26 years in 2007, which has been linked to the pattern of men and women waiting longer to get married, or indicates that couples are cohabiting without ever getting married. Which brings me to my second point. The changes in marriage, divorce and cohabitation (which means that couples of the same or of different gender are living together without being married) have contributed to the growing number of new types of family.

Two in five of all marriages are now remarriages, which makes stepfamilies one of the fastest growing family forms in Britain, currently making up one in ten of all families.

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In the decade to 2006, the number of single parent families also increased to 2.3 million, making up 14% of all families. Consequently more and more children are now growing up in single parent families, and in stepfamilies. A growing number of couples are also now living apart together, often following failed marriages or cohabitations. Third, better access to education, birth control and increasing access to careers, means that women are choosing to have children later once their careers are established, and also choosing to have fewer children, in order that they can return to their career. Because women still face substantial penalties, in terms of pay and progression, for taking time out of the labour market or reducing their working hours to care for their children. Despite this, more women than ever are now able to combine both a family and a career.

Conclusion/Impacts of these changes As a result of these changes, families are now less stable than in previous generations. Children often grow up with different parents - in stepfamilies, or with one parent figure missing. These children are more likely to experience poverty or poor health and are more often involved in antisocial behaviour.