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We can clearly say that the changes in law have increased the divorce rate by a substantial amount. We have to assess how much the change in law is to blame for this increase and other factors, which also may affect this.

There are many alternatives to marriage and these have been more and more recognised and less and less stigmatised throughout many years.

These alternatives have also been very tempting option compared to marriage and those in marriage have been attracted. Giddens (1993) and Goode (1963) say how marriage has become a matter of choice and not necessity and not the reason behind people getting married have also changed. The main reason for getting married at first was financial stability, whereas now it's based on falling in love. This is proved by the decline in arranged marriages and an increase in love marriages.

Virginity is also not praised anymore. Coleman ; Salt (1992) claim that another reason for this trend is because people's beliefs are being changed by new ideas. Cohabitation is one form of family diversity, which has increased, a lot in the last few years. As cohabitation has increased so has illegitimate children.

Reasons why this has happened could be because of secularisation, costs of marriage or people are just simply looking for an alternative to marriage.

Here are the views of different sociologists: Functionalists- they claim that that a cohabiting family is a form of nuclear family in disguise but are just not legitimised by the wedlock. The New Right- they suggest that this is due to the breakdown or traditional family values. Feminists- reason is because of the lack of satisfaction, which the patriarchal family provide for women.

Chester (1985) argues that cohabitation is a temporary phase where this changes to marriage, so we could really call cohabitation a “ trial marriage” where if the couple are satisfied this leads to marriage or separation. However, we could then argue, if more and more people are taking up this option and are trying out cohabitation and getting married, why is the divorce rate still so high? Cohabiting couples are 4 times as likely to separate then marriages are, so does this mean that if cohabitation was not discovered then our divorce rate would be higher then it is now? Single parent families are also another type of family and are seen as an alternative to marriage. This is seen as a result of divorce separation a break-up of the death of a partner. This can also be by choice as more and more people choose to live this way. Bernardes (1997) states that lone parents are stigmatised and society still feels that the best way to live is married.

Communes are another alternative which was defined by McCulloch (1982) as ‘ experimental house group which practice as ideology of sharing.’ These are families, which live collectively but not in isolated nuclear families.

Unsatisfied women made 75% of divorce petitions. Bernard (1976) claims that when a couple get married, each have different expectations, to which he claims that there are 2 marriages.

One that is EXPECTED by the husband and the other by the wife. This difference in expectations does often cause divorce; therefore we cannot blame the change in laws for being the only culprit. Fletcher outlines the economic changes and how they have affected women as they are now able to leave empty shell marriages whereas if they were not financially stable, this would not be a possibility. Although women and men are said to be “

equal” in the world or work, womens average earnings are still 75% less then men’s earnings. As women still have to work at home, take care of children, they usually take up part time of shorter hours.

Women are also changing their atitudes towarde family, and do tend to question themselves before doing anything, whereas usually they used to see this as a duty. Hart (1976) claims that the clash between household duties and outside work causes conflict between the spouses and if the situation is not handled with care, could end in divorce. Before the Divorce Legislation Act of 1971, for a divorce it had to be proved that one of the partners was wrong and then there was a possibility of a divorce. This is known as matrimonial offence.

After the Act, it was no longer necessary to do this, and it just had to be proved that the marriage had broken down and it could not recover. If both partners didn’t object then the divorce could be done within 2 years time, and if one partner wanted the divorce then within 5 years. However, there has been a large increase in divorce and these increases have been accompanied by, but not necessarily caused by, changes in the law which have made divorce easier. The divorce in England and Wales more than doubles 1971-1985 following the Divorce Reform Act of 1971. Gibson claims, “ If present trends continue it is estimated than four in every ten marriages will end in divorce” at present the divorce rate is estimated at 1/3.

The stigma, which was attached with divorce no longer exists in many communities. Goode said this is due to secularisation (decline in religious beliefs). Gibson agrees with this and adds that the decline in shared set of

values is also another cause of marital breakdown. He agrees with Giddens who is a post-modernist. Another reason behind divorce could be the change in expectations from marriage and family life.

Fletcher agrees with this and says that now divorce is available due to the reform act, people don't put up with it anymore and like to move on with life. More than half the people who divorce, remarry within a year. Therefore we can say that people are happy with marrying but just have higher expectations. Dennis (1984) has New Right views and suggests that marriages are fragile and are held together emotionally. The demographic changes can also show us why people get divorced and this has nothing to do with the divorce reform act. In the past, marriage was delayed and the life expectancy was short so marriage life was of a short period.

Nowadays, people are getting married earlier than before and the life expectancy is longer so they are being married for the same period of time as before. Anderson (1983) outlined this. Remarriage after the death of the spouse was common so maybe the longer time, which the marriage lasts, is the reason why people get married. Many people see cohabitation as a trial marriage and if things work, they later get married, however the General Households Survey 1993 would disagree with this as they claim that those who have been in cohabiting relationships are more likely to get divorced. These did have many younger couples and these young couples have been blamed for the high divorce rates. The family is now becoming more privatised and help from the wider kin is less common.

Family members only rely on the people in their respective family. This can lead to the intensity within the family to increase. When trouble arises in the family, the people then are reluctant to go to their wider kin for help and men do generally hesitate to get professional help so the situation worsens and may lead to divorce. This tends to agree with Young and Willmott's theory (stage 3) We have now seen many reasons why couple divorce and could be because of the changes in law but we can't ignore the fact that there are many other reasons involved.