

Cambridge AS & A Level · Sociology 9699 · Notes

Diversity and social change

AS

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Read first: [Perspectives on the role of the family](#)

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What you need to know

By the end of this topic you should be able to:

1. **Explain the causes and consequences of changing patterns** of marriage, cohabitation, divorce and separation: why fewer people marry, why they marry later, why more cohabit, why divorce rose, and what these changes do to families and children.
2. **Describe the different family and household forms**: nuclear, extended, lone-parent, reconstituted, same-sex, families of choice and single-person households.
3. **Explain the dimensions of family diversity**, including organisational, cultural and class diversity (and the others the Rapoports added).
4. **Weigh up the debate** about how much family diversity there really is, and whether the nuclear family is still dominant.
5. **Explain the New Right and postmodernist views** of family diversity, with their strengths and limitations.
6. **Explain how the state and social policy influence the family**, for good and for ill.

Changing parenthood (motherhood, fatherhood, the role of parents) also appears in this topic's questions, so it is covered here. The perspectives on the family's role (functionalism, Marxism, feminism) are in the note on perspectives on the role of the family; conjugal roles and power are in the note on gender equality and experiences of family life.

Understand it

Family or household?

A **household** is one person living alone, or a group of people sharing a home and its daily life (meals, bills, a living room). A **family** is a group linked by **kinship**: blood, marriage, civil partnership or adoption. Most families are households, but not all households are families: students sharing a flat, or a person living alone, form a household with no family in it. Keeping the two words apart stops many muddled answers.

The family and household forms

- **Nuclear family**: two adults (traditionally a married man and woman) and their dependent children in one home. Chester's **neo-conventional family** is the modern version, in which both partners go out to work.
- **Extended family**: the nuclear family plus other relatives, such as grandparents, aunts or cousins. A **vertically extended** family spans three or more generations; a **horizontally extended** one adds relatives of the same generation (a brother's family). A **modified extended family** lives apart but keeps close contact and support by phone, visits and money.
- **Beanpole family** (Brannen): long and thin, with several generations alive at once (people live longer) but few relatives in each (people have fewer children).
- **Lone-parent family**: one parent, most often the mother, living with dependent children. It forms through divorce or separation, death of a partner, or a parent who never lived with the other parent.
- **Reconstituted (blended) family**: at least one partner has children from an earlier relationship, so the family includes step-parents, step-children and half-siblings.
- **Same-sex family**: a couple of the same sex, with or without children, now able to marry or form civil partnerships in many societies.
- **Families of choice**: networks of close friends and ex-partners who give the care and support usually expected of kin. **Weeks** found these among gay men and lesbians whose birth families had rejected them; the idea is also called **fictive kin**.
- **Single-person household** (a "singleton"): someone living alone, for example a young professional, a divorced adult or a widowed older person.
- Other household forms you can use: **cohabiting couples** (living together unmarried), **child-headed households**, **boomerang** households (adult children returning home) and **transnational families** spread across countries by migration.

A cohabiting or reconstituted couple with children can still be **nuclear in form**: two adults and their children in one home. Examiners note that candidates often forget this.

Changing patterns of marriage, cohabitation, divorce and separation

In many societies, especially the Global North, the main trends since the 1970s are:

- **Fewer first marriages** and a smaller share of adults who are married.
- **Later first marriage**, as people finish education and build careers first.
- **More cohabitation**, both as a trial before marriage and as a long-term alternative.
- **More remarriage**, giving **serial monogamy** (a series of partners, one at a time).
- **More divorce and separation**, though in some countries rates have levelled off.
- **More births outside marriage**, and more **same-sex marriages** where they are legal.

These trends are **not universal**. In many societies marriage remains near-universal, often **arranged**, and divorce rare or strongly discouraged.

Why fewer people marry, and why later

- **Secularisation:** religion has less hold over people's lives, so the duty to marry and the sin of living together carry less weight.
- **Less stigma** for alternatives: cohabiting, lone parenthood and having children outside marriage are now widely accepted.
- **Women's economic independence:** with education and careers, women no longer need a husband for financial security. **Sharpe** found that girls' priorities shifted between the 1970s and 1990s from love and marriage to careers and independence. **Wilkinson** called this change in women's values a **genderquake**.
- **Individualisation (Beck, Giddens):** people are freed from fixed traditions and choose relationships that suit them; marriage is one option among many. Giddens' **confluent love** lasts only while both partners are satisfied.
- **Feminist critiques:** some women reject marriage as a patriarchal institution (**Smart and Stevens** found cohabiting mothers who chose not to marry, partly to keep their independence).
- **Fear of divorce** in a **risk society** (Beck): seeing so many marriages fail, people avoid the commitment or delay it.
- **Cost:** lavish weddings are expensive, so couples cohabit while they save, or skip the wedding altogether.
- **Gubernskaya** found that attitudes to marriage had become less favourable over time in many countries.

Later marriage has its own reasons: longer education, establishing a career first, wanting to find "the right one", and cohabiting first to test the relationship.

Why cohabitation has grown

The same forces apply (secularisation, less stigma, women's independence, individualisation), plus: cohabitation as a **trial marriage** (a test of compatibility), fewer legal ties if the relationship ends, laws in some countries giving cohabiting couples rights close to married ones, and the cost of a wedding. Cohabitation for some is a **precursor** to marriage and for others an **alternative**; this matters in the debate about whether marriage is declining.

Why divorce has risen

- **Changes in the law:** divorce has been made easier, cheaper and quicker. England and Wales' **Divorce Reform Act** (1969) allowed divorce for "irretrievable breakdown" without proving fault; Egypt's **khul** reform (2000) let women divorce without their husband's consent. Legal aid and welfare support made divorce affordable for women.
- **Secularisation and less stigma:** divorce is no longer seen as shameful or sinful in many societies.
- **Women's improved position:** paid work means women can afford to leave; they are less willing to accept the **dual burden** of paid work plus most housework (**Hochschild's** second shift); and feminism raised awareness of inequality and abuse in marriage. **Thornes and Collard** found women expected more from marriage than men did and were more often dissatisfied; most divorces are started by women.

- **Higher expectations of marriage** in general: **Fletcher** argued that people now marry for love and want emotional fulfilment, so they end marriages that would once have been tolerated. This means divorce shows how much people **value** marriage, not that they reject it.
- **Individualisation**: people put their own happiness first (Beck, Giddens' **pure relationship**).
- **Longer life expectancy**: marriages last longer, so there is more time for things to go wrong.
- **The privatised nuclear family**: cut off from wider kin, couples face pressure with less support, and there is no extended family to keep them together.

Why people stay in unhappy marriages (an **empty shell marriage**): financial dependence, the children, religious or family pressure and fear of bringing shame, the stigma of divorce in their society, or laws that make divorce hard.

Consequences of these changes

- **More family diversity**: lone-parent families, reconstituted families, single-person households and cohabiting couples all grow.
- **Serial monogamy** and children who move between households; **Stacey** described the **divorce-extended family**, kin linked through former marriages (a former mother-in-law who stays close).
- **New Right** writers see harm: children of lone parents, especially boys without a father, are said to be poorly socialised, and welfare costs rise.
- **Feminists** see benefits: divorce lets women escape violent or unequal marriages.
- **Functionalists** such as Fletcher see remarriage as evidence that marriage and the nuclear family remain popular.

Dimensions of family diversity

Rapoport and Rapoport argued that diversity is now the norm, and that there are five kinds of it:

<i>dimension</i>	<i>what differs between families</i>
Organisational	→ who does what: dual earners or separate roles
Cultural	→ ethnic and religious family patterns
Class	→ income and class shape family form
Life-stage	→ families change as members age
Cohort	→ the era you grew up in shapes choices

- **Organisational diversity**: differences in how families are structured and run: who earns, who does the housework and childcare, joint or segregated conjugal roles, dual-earner families, one partner at home.
- **Cultural diversity**: different ethnic and religious groups have different family patterns. **Ballard** found that South Asian families in Britain kept strong extended family ties, which gave support against racism and hardship. **Berthoud** found high marriage rates among Pakistani and Bangladeshi families, while African

Caribbean families had lower marriage rates and more mother-headed (matrifocal) lone-parent families, which he linked to individualism. Migration brings these patterns into new societies (**transnational families**).

- **Class diversity:** differences in family life by social class. Middle-class families are more often geographically mobile nuclear families; working-class families have relied more on a **modified extended family** for help with childcare and money (**Willmott and Young**); upper-class families keep extended links to protect inheritance; poorer families may form extended households out of economic need. The New Right link lone parenthood to an **underclass** (Murray).
- **Life-stage diversity:** family life changes as members age: young couples, families with young children, an **empty nest** once children leave, older people living alone.
- **Cohort diversity:** the historical period a group lived through shapes its family life (for example, those who grew up after divorce became easy, or during unemployment that kept young adults at home).

Others add **regional diversity** (families differ between areas, such as cities and the countryside) and **sexual diversity** (same-sex families).

The debate: how much diversity, and is the nuclear family still dominant?

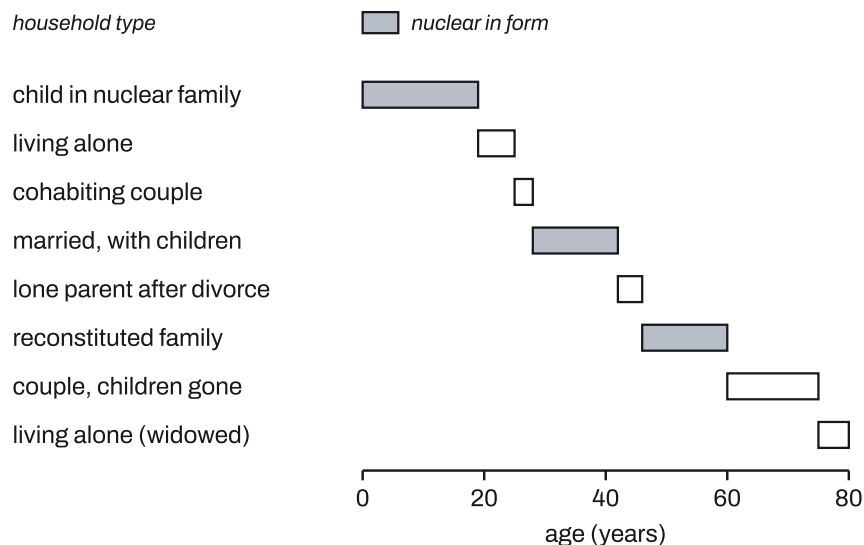
For diversity (the nuclear family is no longer dominant):

- The share of households that are a married couple with children has fallen, while lone-parent, single-person, cohabiting and reconstituted households have grown.
- The Rapoports show diversity of many kinds, not just of structure.
- **Postmodernists (Stacey, Cheal)** argue there is no longer one family type: people **choose** their relationships, and family forms have multiplied.
- **Smart's** idea of **personal life** says that people's close relationships (friends, ex-partners, pets, families of choice) go beyond the old idea of "family".
- Secularisation, individualisation, women's independence, migration and same-sex marriage laws all add new forms.
- Questions have been raised about whether one form was **ever** dominant across all societies (Anderson found extended households in industrial Preston; many cultures favour the extended family).

Against (diversity is exaggerated; the nuclear family is still dominant):

- **Chester:** statistics on households are a **snapshot** of one moment. Over the **life course** most people still spend much of their lives in a nuclear family (as a child and as a parent), and the main change is to the **neo-conventional** dual-earner family, not away from the nuclear family.
- Most children are still raised by both their natural parents, and most adults still marry or cohabit at some point; **Somerville** argued that only a small minority never marry.
- Many "new" forms are **based on** the nuclear family: a lone-parent family is often a nuclear family after divorce, and a reconstituted family rebuilds one.
- **Murdock:** the nuclear family is **universal**.
- **Parsons' fit thesis:** industrialising societies need a mobile workforce, which suits the nuclear family.

- **Marxists** argue that capitalism needs the nuclear family (to reproduce and maintain the workforce cheaply, and as a unit of consumption); since capitalism shows no sign of ending, the nuclear family must still be dominant and important.
- The nuclear family is still the ideal in **familial ideology** and the media's **cereal packet family** (Leach); many governments promote it.
- In many traditional and religious societies diversity is limited, so the debate is **ethnocentric** if it only looks at the Global North.



The diagram shows Chester's point. A survey on any one day would find this person in a nuclear-type family only if it fell in a shaded stretch, yet over a lifetime they spend 47 of 80 years in one.

New Right views of family diversity

The **New Right (Murray, Patricia Morgan)** see the married, two-parent nuclear family with a male breadwinner as natural and best. They see diversity as **harmful**:

- Lone-parent families, especially when supported by welfare, create **welfare dependency** and an **underclass** with weak work and family values (Murray).
- Boys growing up without a father lack a male **role model** and discipline, which is linked to crime and educational failure.
- Cohabiting couples split up more often than married ones, so their children face more instability (Morgan).
- Diversity weakens **primary socialisation** and **social cohesion**, and costs taxpayers money.

They support policies that favour marriage (tax breaks for married couples) and oppose benefits that make lone parenthood easier.

Strengths: highlights possible harm from family breakdown; draws attention to the role of welfare and law in family change; has influenced governments.

Limitations: ignores the **dark side** of the nuclear family (domestic violence, abuse), which divorce lets people escape; it is **deterministic**, since many children of lone parents do well; it blames family forms for problems caused by **poverty**; it overstates the number of lone parents living on benefits; and feminists see its ideal as **patriarchal**.

Postmodernist views of family diversity

Postmodernists argue that society is now fragmented and fast-changing, so no single theory (**meta-narrative**) can explain "the family".

- **Stacey:** women especially have **chosen** new family forms to escape traditional roles, such as the divorce-extended family. There is no longer a typical family.
- **Cheal:** there is now no single family type to study; family life is a matter of choice.
- **Beck and Beck-Gernsheim:** **individualisation** frees people from tradition, so relationships are negotiated and can end at any time.
- **Giddens:** the **pure relationship**, kept going only for the satisfaction it brings.
- **Weeks:** **families of choice**.

Strengths:

- It does **not judge** any family form as right or wrong, unlike the New Right and functionalism, so it is open to the full range of families people live in.
- It fits today's **diverse** societies better than theories built around one family type.
- It recognises **individual choice** and **agency** in creating family life.
- It notices the influence of the **media** and **consumer** culture on how families are made.

Limitations:

- It **exaggerates choice**: poverty, class, gender, laws and religion limit what people can choose, and many forms (lone parenthood after a death or divorce, migration) are not chosen.
- It **exaggerates diversity**: most people still live in or pass through a nuclear family (Chester).
- It overstates how many abandon marriage (**Somerville**).
- It ignores **structures** such as class and **patriarchy** (radical feminists say women are still oppressed in families).
- It describes a pattern found mainly in **affluent Western** societies, so it is ethnocentric.

The state and social policy

Social policies are laws and programmes made by governments. They are not the same as socialisation or social norms; examiners report this confusion every year. Policies shape families in many ways:

- **Divorce law:** making divorce easier (Divorce Reform Act) or harder (China's 30-day **cooling-off period** before a divorce, introduced in 2021).

- **Family size:** China's **one-child policy** (from 1980) limited births; it later moved to two and then three children.
- **Who may marry:** minimum marriage ages protect children; **same-sex marriage** laws give same-sex couples equal legal status.
- **Welfare:** benefits, pensions and housing help families avoid extreme poverty, and let lone parents raise children alone.
- **Gender equality:** equal pay laws (such as the UK's **Equal Pay Act** 1970) and anti-discrimination laws increase women's earnings and dual-earner families.
- **Parental leave:** maternity and paternity pay give parents time to bond with a new baby; **childcare subsidies** let parents stay in work.
- **Protection:** child protection laws, laws against domestic violence and marital rape make the family safer.
- **Childhood:** compulsory schooling and child labour laws change children's role, so they are dependants, not earners.
- **Fertility:** laws on contraception and abortion shape when and whether families form.
- **Tax:** incentives for married couples encourage marriage.

Perspectives on policy:

- **Functionalists** (Fletcher) see policy as **supporting** the family: health, education and welfare help it carry out its functions better.
- The **New Right** argue that some policies **undermine** the nuclear family (generous welfare, easy divorce) and that policy should promote marriage.
- **Feminists** argue that many policies assume and reinforce the patriarchal nuclear family (**familial ideology**): for example, longer maternity than paternity leave keeps mothers as the main carers.
- **Marxists** see policy as keeping a cheap, healthy workforce for capitalism.
- **Donzelot** argued the state uses professionals (social workers, health visitors) to **police** families, especially poor ones.

Changing parenthood

- **Motherhood:** mothers have children later and have fewer of them; most now combine motherhood with paid work; more raise children alone, sometimes by choice, because they are financially independent; but mothers still do most of the childcare (the dual burden).
- **Fatherhood:** fathers are more involved in childcare and their children's emotional life (the "**new man**", **Dermott's intimate fatherhood**); paternity leave and some stay-at-home fathers; more non-resident fathers after divorce. Critics note fathers often do the enjoyable tasks while mothers stay responsible: **Ferri and Smith** found fathers rarely took the main role in childcare even when mothers worked.
- **Parents' role overall:** families are more **child-centred**; the state takes a bigger part (schooling, child protection, parental leave); lone, same-sex and step-parents add variety.

Key facts and formulas

There is no formula list in Sociology. "Learn it" means you must remember it.

Key term	Status
Household (people sharing a home) versus family (linked by kinship: blood, marriage or adoption)	Learn it
Family forms: nuclear, neo-conventional (Chester), extended (vertical, horizontal, modified), beanpole (Brannen), lone-parent, reconstituted, same-sex, families of choice (Weeks), single-person	Learn it
Trends: fewer and later first marriages, more cohabitation, remarriage and serial monogamy, more divorce; not universal	Learn it
Causes of fewer or later marriages and more cohabitation: secularisation, less stigma, women's independence (Sharpe, Wilkinson's genderquake), individualisation (Beck, Giddens), fear of divorce, cost, feminist rejection (Smart and Stevens), Gubernskaya	Learn it
Causes of rising divorce: law (Divorce Reform Act 1969, khul), secularisation, less stigma, women's position (Hochschild, Thornes and Collard), higher expectations (Fletcher), individualisation, life expectancy, privatised nuclear family	Learn it
Rapoport and Rapoport: organisational, cultural, class, life-stage and cohort diversity (others add regional and sexual)	Learn it
Cultural diversity: Ballard (South Asian extended families), Berthoud (high marriage among Pakistani and Bangladeshi families; matrifocal African Caribbean families); class: Willmott and Young	Learn it
Diversity exaggerated: Chester (snapshot, life course, neo-conventional family), Somerville, Murdock (universality), Parsons (fit thesis), cereal packet family (Leach), familial ideology	Learn it
New Right (Murray, Morgan): diversity harmful, welfare dependency, underclass, no male role model	Learn it
Postmodernism (Stacey, Cheal, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, Giddens): choice, no single family type; divorce-extended family (Stacey); personal life (Smart)	Learn it
Social policy examples: divorce law, one-child policy, cooling-off period, same-sex marriage, welfare, Equal Pay Act, parental leave, child protection, compulsory schooling; Donzelot (policing families)	Learn it
Question 1: $2 \times 2 = 4$; Question 2(a): $2 \times 4 = 8$; Question 2(b): $2 \times 3 = 6$; Question 3: $10 + 6 = 16$; essays AO1 8, AO2 8, AO3 10	Learn it

How to do it

We have tagged 61 questions for this topic (2021–2026, Papers 21–23, plus one old-syllabus Paper 14 essay in 2021), 52 different (Papers 21 and 23 of a November session share questions). 19 of them mix two types (every Question 3 has parts (a) and (b), and six Questions 2 ask for reasons and postmodernism), so the counts add up to 80.

Question type	Questions
Explain a view on diversity, marriage or divorce	13
Give one argument against the view	13
Describe two ways, reasons or features	11
Evaluate whether the nuclear family is still dominant or important	11
Explain two reasons for a change in marriage, cohabitation, divorce or diversity	7
Evaluate the main cause of family diversity	6
Explain strengths or limitations of postmodernist views of family diversity	6
Evaluate whether marriage has lost its importance	4
Evaluate the main reason for the rise in divorce	4
Evaluate the impact of social policy on the family	3
Evaluate whether the role of parents has changed	2

Every essay (26 marks) is marked **AO1** knowledge and understanding 8, **AO2** interpretation and application 8 and **AO3** analysis and evaluation 10, so $8 + 8 + 10 = 26$. The essay plan is under type 4; types 6 and 8–11 use the same plan with their own material.

1. Explain a view on diversity, marriage or divorce (13 questions)

Always Question 3(a), 10 marks. Views asked: the nuclear family's dominance or the extent of diversity (4), marriage losing importance, social pressure to marry or cohabitation replacing marriage (5), causes of divorce (2) and causes of diversity (2).

1. Write **two** clear, developed points that **agree** with the view. Do not evaluate: that is part (b).
2. Make each point a paragraph: the point, how it supports the view, then **sociological material** (a sociologist, theory, concept or named policy) and how it backs the point.
3. Stay on the **exact** claim. If it names a cause ("social policy is the main reason for diversity"), every point must be about that cause: divorce law, welfare for lone parents, same-sex marriage laws, China's child policies, equal pay laws. Secularisation or less stigma belong in part (b), not here.
4. Two developed, supported points reach the top level (8–10); one developed and one thin point gets 4–7.

Good material by view: **no dominant type** (Rapoports, Stacey, Cheal, Smart's personal life, secularisation, women's independence, migration); **diversity exaggerated or the nuclear family dominant** (Chester, Somerville, Murdock, Parsons, cereal packet family, remarriage); **nuclear family lost its social importance** (see type 4's functions material: loss of functions, Fletcher, Parsons); **marriage less important** (secularisation, Wilkinson, Beck, Gubernskaya, less stigma for cohabitation, welfare for lone parents); **divorce** (as under "Why divorce has risen").

2. Give one argument against the view (13 questions)

Always Question 3(b), 6 marks.

1. Give **one** argument only; a second earns nothing.
2. Name the argument, develop it with material, and say clearly **why it contradicts** the view (5–6 marks).
3. Typical arguments:
 - Against "no dominant type" or "diversity is growing": Chester's snapshot and life course; Murdock's universality; most children raised by both natural parents; the fit thesis; cultural examples where the extended or nuclear family dominates.
 - Against "diversity is exaggerated": growth of lone-parent, single-person and same-sex households; the Rapoports' five dimensions; migration and globalisation; Stacey's divorce-extended family.
 - Against "marriage has lost importance" or "no pressure to marry": high remarriage; cohabitation as a precursor; only a minority never marry (Somerville); same-sex couples choosing marriage; arranged marriage and religious duties; China's **"leftover women"** stigmatised for staying single; tax breaks for married couples.
 - Against "X is the main cause" (policy, class, women's position): another cause that matters more, such as secularisation, individualisation, women's independence, migration or longer life expectancy, shown with material.

Don't argue **why the view is true** (that was part (a)), and don't drift to whether marriage is good or bad.

3. Describe two ways, reasons or features (11 questions)

Question 1, 4 marks: two bullet points, each **identified** (1) and **described** (1). No introduction, no theorist needed. Asked as: ways social policy affects the family (3), marriage (why people stay in unhappy marriages, why women marry later, why fewer marry: 3), family and household forms (features of a nuclear family, households not based on marriage: 3) and changing parenthood (motherhood, fatherhood: 2).

- **Social policy**: pick two separate policies and their effect on families (equal pay laws → more dual-earner families; child protection laws → safer, more child-centred families). Don't describe how families socialise children.
- **Marriage reasons**: answer the exact question. "Later" marriage is not "fewer" marriages, and "staying in" an unhappy marriage is not "why marriages become unhappy".
- **Forms**: features of a nuclear family (two generations, adults usually married or cohabiting, living together, sharing finances, often geographically mobile); households not based on marriage (cohabiting couple, single-person household, lone-parent family, shared house, child-headed household).

- **Parenthood:** describe **how** motherhood or fatherhood has **changed**, not why; keep each point on mothers or fathers, not men and women in general.

Two **different** points: repeating the same idea in new words scores only half.

4. Evaluate whether the nuclear family is still dominant or important (11 questions)

Worded as: the nuclear family is (still) the dominant type, structure or form; is no longer dominant; there is no dominant type; family structure is now characterised by diversity; the nuclear family is still important, or has lost its social importance.

1. **Introduction:** define the nuclear family and family diversity in two sentences, and say which perspectives hold the view.
2. **For the view** (4–5 developed paragraphs), then **against** it (4–5 paragraphs), each with a sociologist or concept and tied to the question's key word (dominant, important).
3. **Evaluate as you go:** after each point say **how far** it supports the view, and why. Use rival views as criticisms, not as separate blocks.
4. **Conclude** with a judgement: dominant in which societies, for which groups, at which life stage?

Material: for dominance, Chester, Somerville, Murdock, Parsons, Fletcher, the New Right, Marxism (capitalism needs it), familial ideology and the cereal packet family, government policies favouring marriage; against, the Rapoport, Stacey, Cheal, Beck and Giddens, Smart, secularisation, women's independence, feminist rejection, migration, beanpole families, same-sex marriage laws.

"Lost its social importance" brings in functions as well: for, the loss of functions to schools, hospitals and the welfare state, and alternatives now widely accepted; against, Fletcher (functions done in more detail), Parsons' irreducible functions, the New Right and religious groups who promote it, and the dual-earner family as an **adaptation**, not a decline. Keep the focus on the **nuclear family**, not on marriage: being married doesn't make a family nuclear (a childless couple isn't), and a cohabiting or reconstituted family can be.

5. Explain two reasons for a change in marriage, cohabitation, divorce or diversity (7 questions)

Question 2(a), 8 marks. Asked about more cohabitation (3), fewer marriages (1), later first marriage (1), more divorce (1) and more family diversity (1). Each reason earns up to 4:

1. **Make the point** (1): name the reason.
2. **Explain it** (1): how it causes this change.
3. **Select sociological material** (1): Beck's individualisation, Sharpe, Wilkinson, Gubernskaya, Fletcher, secularisation, a named law.
4. **Show how the material supports the point** (1).

Use the lists in "Understand it". Answer the change asked: reasons for **later** marriage are not reasons for **not** marrying or for divorce. Two good reasons without material score at most half.

6. Evaluate the main cause of family diversity (6 questions)

The named cause is **culture** (3), **social class** (2) or **social policy** (1).

- **Culture, for:** the Rapoport's cultural diversity; Ballard, Berthoud; religion limiting divorce and same-sex families; migration and multiculturalism; cultures that value the elderly keep extended families; wider cultural change (less stigma for lone parents and same-sex couples).
- **Class, for:** Willmott and Young; middle-class nuclear and mobile, working-class modified extended; economic hardship leads to extended households; Murray's underclass and lone parents.
- **Policy, for:** divorce law, welfare for lone parents, same-sex marriage, China's child policies, equal pay laws.
- **Against any one cause:** weigh it against the others above, plus individualisation (Beck), women's independence, secularisation, life-stage diversity and demographic change (longer lives, beanpole families). Overlap is a strong evaluation point: culture and class interact (a poorer migrant group's family form has both causes).

7. Explain strengths or limitations of postmodernist views of family diversity (6 questions)

Question 2(b), 6 marks. Asked as one strength and one limitation (2), two limitations (2) or two strengths (2). Each point earns up to 3:

1. **Identify** it (1): "A strength of postmodernism is that it does not judge any family form."
2. **Why postmodernism has it** (1): what the theory focuses on or assumes ("because postmodernists see family forms as chosen to meet individual needs").
3. **Why it is a strength or limitation** (1): what it lets us see or what it misses.

Use the lists under "Postmodernist views". Give strengths and limitations of the **theory**, not of diverse families, lone parents or same-sex couples.

8. Evaluate whether marriage has lost its importance (4 questions)

- **For:** fewer first marriages; more cohabitation and births outside marriage; secularisation; less stigma; women's independence (Wilkinson); individualisation (Beck, Gubernskaya); high divorce; welfare and laws recognising cohabitation; contraception; feminist rejection.
- **Against:** high remarriage; cohabitation as a precursor; only a minority never marry (Somerville); same-sex couples fighting for and choosing marriage; arranged marriage and religious duties; China's leftover women; tax breaks; the New Right and functionalist ideal; weddings still celebrated as a key milestone.
- **Trap:** some "for" points really support the other side. Divorce because a marriage fell short of high hopes, or cohabiting to make sure a partner is "the one", shows marriage is **valued**. Use them as evaluation. Discuss its **importance**, not just the number of marriages.
- One version names a cause ("the improved position of women is the main reason for the decline in marriage"): weigh women's position against secularisation, individualisation and policy.

9. Evaluate the main reason for the rise in divorce (4 questions)

The named cause is always **women's position**: their improved social position, increased opportunities or changing expectations.

- **For**: economic independence; less tolerance of the dual burden (Hochschild); higher expectations (Thornes and Collard); career before marriage (Sharpe); control over fertility; liberal and radical feminism; most divorces started by women.
- **Against**: changes in the law (Divorce Reform Act, khul); secularisation and less stigma; everyone's higher expectations (Fletcher); individualisation and confluent love (Giddens, Beck); longer life expectancy; the privatised nuclear family; welfare support.
- **Evaluate**: many causes link to women's position (a law allowing women to divorce only matters once women can afford it), and in societies where divorce is legally or religiously blocked, women's position alone does not raise divorce.

10. Evaluate the impact of social policy on the family (3 questions)

Asked as "social policies have had a positive impact on the family" and "social policies have led to a decline in the nuclear family" (twice).

- **Positive impacts**: welfare against poverty, child protection, parental leave, equal pay, protection from violence, free schooling, same-sex marriage rights.
- **Negative or limiting**: China's one-child policy (pressure, sex-selective births); welfare dependency (Murray); policies built on familial ideology that keep women as carers (feminists); state surveillance (Donzelot).
- **Decline of the nuclear family, for**: easier divorce, welfare for lone parents, same-sex marriage, equal pay.
Against: many policies still favour the nuclear family (tax breaks, marriage promotion); other causes matter more (secularisation, individualisation, women's choices); Chester says the nuclear family has adapted, not declined.

11. Evaluate whether the role of parents has changed (2 questions)

- **For change**: mothers in paid work and dual earners; more involved fathers (Dermott); more child-centred families; the state shares the role (schooling, child protection, parental leave); lone, same-sex and step-parents.
- **Against**: mothers still do most childcare (Ferri and Smith; the dual burden); fathers' involvement is often in enjoyable tasks; in many societies traditional roles remain; class and culture shape how much has changed.

Worked examples

Example 1

Describe two reasons for the growth of single-person households. [4]

- **People live longer (1)**: as life expectancy rises, more older people outlive their partner and go on living alone, often for many years (1).
- **More divorce and separation (1)**: when a couple splits up, at least one partner (often the man, if the children stay with the mother) usually moves into a home of their own (1).

Two reasons, each identified and described: **4 marks**.

Example 2

(a) Explain two reasons for the increase in lone-parent families. [8]

(b) Explain two limitations of New Right views of family diversity. [6]

(a) Reason 1. The first reason is the **rise in divorce (1)**. When a marriage with children ends, the children usually stay with one parent, most often the mother, so each divorce can create a lone-parent family (1). The **Divorce Reform Act** in England and Wales made divorce possible for irretrievable breakdown without proving fault (1), which made it much easier and cheaper for unhappy couples to separate, so the number of lone-parent households grew (1).

Reason 2. The second reason is **women's economic independence (1)**. Women with their own income no longer need a husband to support their children, so they can raise children alone or leave an unhappy relationship (1). **Wilkinson's** idea of a **genderquake** describes how young women came to value independence and careers (1): women with these values are more willing and able to bring up children without a partner, which adds to lone-parent families (1).

Two reasons, each made, explained, supported and linked back: **8 marks**.

(b) Limitation 1. The New Right **ignore the dark side of the nuclear family (1)**. They see the married two-parent family as natural and best, so they treat every other form as a problem (1). This is a limitation because divorce and lone parenthood can be an escape from domestic violence and abuse, so for some women and children a lone-parent family is safer (1).

Limitation 2. The New Right are **deterministic** about children of lone parents (1). They assume that a missing father leads to poor socialisation and crime (1). This is a limitation because many children of lone parents do well, and the problems that do occur are often caused by **poverty** rather than the family form (1).

6 marks.

Example 3

"Family diversity is mainly the result of individual choice."

(a) Explain this view. [10]

(b) Using sociological material, give one argument against this view. [6]

(a) Point 1. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim argue that late modern society has gone through **individualisation**: people are no longer bound by tradition, religion or fixed gender roles, so they design their own lives. Choosing whether to marry, cohabit, live alone or have children becomes a personal decision, and because different people choose differently, many family forms result. The growth of single-person households and childless couples shows people choosing lifestyles that suit their own goals.

Point 2. Postmodernists such as **Stacey** argue that people, especially women, have actively created new family forms to suit their needs. She found women who had left traditional marriages building **divorce-extended families**, keeping ties with former in-laws. Weeks' **families of choice** show the same thing: people choose who counts as family, rather than accepting the ties of blood and marriage. Diversity is the outcome of these choices.

Two clear, developed points, each supported by a sociologist and concept and focused on choice: **Level 3 (8–10 marks)**.

(b) The Rapoport's **cultural** and **class** diversity show that much diversity is shaped by social structures, not free choice. Ballard found South Asian families in Britain kept extended family ties because of their cultural and religious values and as support against racism, and working-class families have relied on the modified extended family out of economic need. Many family forms are also not chosen at all: a lone-parent family can result from a partner's death or desertion. So diversity reflects culture, class and circumstance more than individual choice.

One clear, developed argument against, with focused material: **Level 3 (5–6 marks)**.

Example 4

Evaluate the view that family diversity is harmful to society. [26]

Introduction. This is the New Right view: the married two-parent nuclear family is the best basis for society, and the growth of other forms weakens it.

For the view (AO1/AO2).

- **Socialisation:** Murray argues that boys raised by lone mothers lack a male role model and discipline, which he links to crime and the growth of an **underclass**.
- **Welfare dependency:** benefits that support lone parents cost taxpayers and, the New Right say, reward family breakdown.
- **Instability:** Morgan argues cohabiting couples split up more often than married ones, so children experience more disruption.

- **Social cohesion:** functionalists argue the nuclear family is best at primary socialisation into shared norms and values, so a decline in it threatens value consensus.

Against the view (AO3).

- **However**, feminists argue the view ignores the dark side of the nuclear family: divorce and lone parenthood can be an escape from violence, so diversity can be **good** for many women and children. This weakens the claim because it shows the nuclear family itself can harm, so the problem is not diversity as such.
- Postmodernists argue diversity reflects **choice** and lets people form families that meet their needs (Stacey, Weeks), which is more likely to make them happy and stable than forcing one model on everyone. This is only partly convincing, because not every form is chosen; but where it is, Murray's claim that diversity damages socialisation is hard to sustain.
- The link between lone parenthood and poor outcomes is largely explained by **poverty**, not family form. This undermines the New Right's evidence: if poverty is the cause, the harm comes from low income, and better welfare, not marriage, is the answer.
- The view is **ethnocentric** and assumes one ideal; many societies have long had extended or matrifocal families as normal patterns (Berthoud's African Caribbean families). So the claim rests on a Western model and cannot be applied to every society.
- Chester argues diversity is exaggerated anyway: most people still pass through a nuclear family. This cuts both ways: it weakens the claim that diversity threatens society, but it also suggests the New Right's alarm is about a smaller change than they think.

Conclusion. The view rightly points to real difficulties some lone-parent families face, but it confuses the effects of poverty with the effects of family form and ignores the harm some nuclear families do. Diversity seems harmful only when families lack support; the evidence favours better welfare and less stigma over a return to one family type.

How it would be marked. A range of detailed points with sociologists and concepts (AO1 7–8), consistently applied to "harmful to society" (AO2 7–8), with each counter-argument explicitly weighed and a justified conclusion (AO3 9–10). In the exam, make each bullet a full paragraph.

Common mistakes

- **Mixing up social policy with socialisation or social norms.** "Social policy" means laws and government programmes. Examiners report answers about parents' sanctions or "less stigma" when the question asks about policy.
- **Answering a neighbouring question.** Reasons for **later** marriage are not reasons for fewer marriages; why people **stay** in unhappy marriages is not why marriages become unhappy; reasons for **an increase** in divorce are not reasons why one couple divorces ("they fell out of love").
- **Confusing diversity with a shift from one type to another.** "The extended family was replaced by the nuclear family" describes one dominant type replacing another, not diversity.

- **Drifting from the nuclear family to marriage** (or the other way round). A married couple without children is not a nuclear family, and cohabiting, reconstituted or mixed-race families can be nuclear in form.
- **Using a "for" point that really supports the other side.** Cohabiting to test whether a partner is "the one", or divorcing because marriage didn't meet high hopes, shows marriage is still valued.
- **Strengths of diverse families instead of strengths of postmodernism.** Question 2(b) wants points about the **theory**.
- **Evaluating in Question 3(a)**, or giving more than one argument in 3(b). Neither earns marks and both waste time; in 3(b) only the best argument is credited.
- **In 3(b), restating part (a):** a "main cause" view needs a **different** cause as the argument against, not more examples of the named one.
- **Common sense instead of sociology.** "There are other types now, like lone parents" with no study or concept stays in the low levels.
- **Juxtaposition in essays.** A block for and a block against, with no weighing, caps AO3 at the middle bands.
- **Introductions and definitions in Question 1**, and a third reason "just in case".

How to get the marks

- **"Describe two..." (4 marks):** two bullet points, each identified then described in one sentence.
- **"Explain two reasons..." (8 marks):** two paragraphs, "The first..." and "The second...", each with the point, its explanation, sociological material and how that material supports the point.
- **"Explain one strength and one limitation..." (6 marks):** "A strength of X is... X has this strength because... This is a strength because...", then the same for the limitation.
- **"Explain this view" (10 marks):** two developed points that agree, each supported with material; no evaluation.
- **"Give one argument against" (6 marks):** one developed argument with material, clearly contradicting the view.
- **"Evaluate..." (26 marks):** AO1 8 for a range of detailed points with concepts and theory; AO2 8 for applying them to the exact question; AO3 10 for evaluation that is clear, explicit and sustained.
- **Sociological material** here means a sociologist (the Rapoport, Chester, Stacey, Beck, Giddens, Murray, Fletcher, Sharpe, Wilkinson, Somerville), a theory (postmodernism, New Right, feminism, functionalism) or a concept or named policy (individualisation, secularisation, neo-conventional family, divorce-extended family, Divorce Reform Act, one-child policy).
- **Use examples from more than one society:** arranged marriage, China's policies and leftover women, khul in Egypt. Cross-cultural points are some of the strongest evaluation.
- **Answer the essay first** if time is tight: it carries 26 of the 60 marks.

Quick check

1. Name the Rapoport's five types of family diversity.

2. What is the difference between a family and a household? Give one household that is not a family.
3. Which sociologist is linked with each idea? (a) The neo-conventional family. (b) Individualisation and the risk society. (c) Families of choice. (d) The genderquake.
4. A student answers "Explain two reasons for the increase in divorce" with "couples argue about money and stop loving each other." Why does this score poorly, and what would be better?
5. Give one argument that the extent of family diversity has been exaggerated, with sociological material.

Answers

1. **Organisational, cultural, class, life-stage** and **cohort** diversity.
2. A **family** is linked by kinship (blood, marriage or adoption); a **household** is anyone sharing a home. A person living alone, or students sharing a flat, form a household that is not a family.
3. (a) Chester. (b) Beck. (c) Weeks. (d) Wilkinson.
4. It explains why **one couple** might divorce, not why divorce has **increased** across society. Better: changes in the law, such as the Divorce Reform Act, made divorce easier and cheaper, so more unhappy couples could end their marriages; or secularisation reduced the stigma of divorce.
5. Chester argues that household statistics are a **snapshot**: at any moment many people are not in a nuclear family, but over the **life course** most people live in one as a child and as a parent, so the nuclear family remains the typical experience, now in its neo-conventional dual-earner form.

Past questions to try

- 9699/22/M/J/24 Q3: (a) explain the view that family diversity has been exaggerated; (b) one argument against.
- 9699/22/F/M/24 Q2: (a) two reasons for more cohabitation; (b) two limitations of postmodernist views.
- 9699/22/M/J/24 Q4: essay on whether women's changing expectations of marriage are the main reason for more divorce.
- 9699/23/O/N/22 Q5: essay on whether social class is the most important influence on family diversity.