



GSOC.FA4 Changing Patterns of Marriage, Divorce and Cohabitation

AQA 8192 · Calculators not allowed · about 75 minutes

Total Marks

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Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / ____

Answer ALL questions. Show your understanding by using sociological vocabulary and, where asked, your own examples.

- 1** Which term describes the idea that people increasingly build their lives, including relationships, around personal choice rather than fixed traditions?

- ☐ A) Functional fit
- ☐ B) Individualisation
- ☐ C) The symmetrical family
- ☐ D) The neo-conventional family

(Total for Question 1 is 1 mark)

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- 2** Define the term 'cohabitation'.

(Total for Question 2 is 2 marks)

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- 3** The sociologists Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim (1995) developed the 'individualisation thesis'.

(a) Explain the main claim of the individualisation thesis. (2)

(b) Explain one way the individualisation thesis can help explain the rise in cohabitation. (2)

(Total for Question 3 is 4 marks)

4 Divorce law in England and Wales has changed significantly over time.

(a) Explain how the Divorce Reform Act 1969 changed access to divorce. (2)

(b) Explain how the Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Act 2020 further changed divorce law. (2)

(Total for Question 4 is 4 marks)

5 Explain how secularisation, the declining social influence of religion, may be linked to changes in marriage and divorce.

(Total for Question 5 is 4 marks)

6 Explain how women's increasing economic independence may have affected marriage and divorce rates.

(Total for Question 6 is 4 marks)

7 State one criticism of the individualisation thesis.

(Total for Question 7 is 2 marks)

- 8** State one criticism of the New Right view that rising divorce and cohabitation are mainly a problem for society.

(Total for Question 8 is 2 marks)

- 9** Couples today have several relationship options available to them.

(a) Explain one reason a couple might choose to cohabit rather than marry. (2)

(b) Explain one reason a couple who are already cohabiting might choose to marry. (2)

(Total for Question 9 is 4 marks)

- 10** Give an example of a legal change to who can marry in the UK, state the year it took effect, and explain one impact this had on family diversity.

(Total for Question 10 is 4 marks)

11 For each trend below, identify one factor covered in this pack that sociologists link to it.

(a) A rise in the divorce rate after 1971. (1)

(b) More couples living together without marrying. (1)

(c) Fewer people feeling social pressure to marry before having children. (1)

(d) The average age at first marriage rising over recent decades. (1)

(Total for Question 11 is 4 marks)

12 State one similarity between Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's individualisation thesis and Giddens' idea of the 'pure relationship'.

(Total for Question 12 is 2 marks)

13 Explain two ways rising divorce and remarriage have changed patterns of family life for children.

(Total for Question 13 is 4 marks)

14 State one criticism that could be made of relying only on marriage and divorce statistics to understand relationship changes in the UK.

(Total for Question 14 is 2 marks)

- 15** Explain two ways rising life expectancy could affect patterns of marriage, divorce and remarriage.

(Total for Question 15 is 4 marks)

- 16** Explain two demographic changes, other than divorce, that have affected the average age at which people first marry.

(Total for Question 16 is 4 marks)

- 17** State one strength and one weakness of using official marriage and divorce statistics to study family change.

(Total for Question 17 is 4 marks)

Mark scheme · GSOC.FA4 Changing Patterns of Marriage, Divorce and Cohabitation

Question 1

- **B1** B (individualisation)
- **Answer: B**

Question 2

- **B1** a couple living together in a long-term relationship without being married (oe)
- **B1** development, e.g. cohabitation can be a step towards marriage or a long-term alternative to it
- **Answer: Cohabitation is a couple living together in a long-term relationship without being married, which can be a step towards marriage or a long-term alternative to it.**

Question 3

- (a) **B1** identifies that in modern society people increasingly make choices about their own lives, including relationships, based on personal preference rather than fixed traditions (oe)
- (a) **B1** development, e.g. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim argued this applies strongly to love and family life, which they described as becoming more like a personal project than a fixed duty
- (a) **Answer: The individualisation thesis argues people increasingly base life choices, including relationships, on personal preference rather than fixed tradition, treating love and family life more like a personal project than a fixed duty.**
- (b) **B1** identifies that if relationships are based on personal choice rather than tradition, fewer couples may feel they must marry before living together
- (b) **B1** development, e.g. couples can choose cohabitation as a valid option in itself, not only as a step on the way to marriage
- (b) **Answer: If relationships are based on personal choice rather than tradition, fewer couples feel they must marry before living together, so cohabitation can be chosen as a valid option in itself.**

Question 4

- (a) **B1** identifies that it introduced 'irretrievable breakdown of marriage' as grounds for divorce (oe)
- (a) **B1** development, e.g. this made divorce more accessible than under the older, narrower fault-based grounds, contributing to a rise in the divorce rate after it came into force
- (a) **Answer: The Divorce Reform Act 1969 introduced 'irretrievable breakdown of marriage' as grounds for divorce, making divorce more accessible than the older fault-based grounds and contributing to a rise in the divorce rate.**
- (b) **B1** identifies that it introduced 'no-fault' divorce in England and Wales, in force from 2022 (oe)
- (b) **B1** development, e.g. couples no longer need to blame one partner or prove fault; a statement that the marriage has broken down is enough
- (b) **Answer: The Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Act 2020 introduced no-fault divorce in England and Wales, in force from 2022, so couples no longer need to blame one partner or prove fault to divorce.**

Question 5

- **B1** identifies that religious teaching has traditionally discouraged divorce and encouraged marriage before living together or having children
- **B1** development, e.g. as religion's influence on everyday life has declined for many people, these traditional expectations carry less weight
- **B1** identifies that this can make cohabitation, having children outside marriage, or divorce feel less stigmatised than in the past
- **B1** development, e.g. this is one factor, alongside legal change and individual choice, that sociologists link to rising cohabitation and divorce rates
- **Answer: Religion has traditionally discouraged divorce and encouraged marriage before children; as religion's influence has declined for many people, cohabitation, having children outside marriage and divorce feel less stigmatised, contributing to rising cohabitation and divorce rates.**

Question 6

- **B1** identifies that more women in paid work, and more women earning independently, means women are less likely to depend financially on marriage
- **B1** development, e.g. this can make it more possible for a woman to leave an unhappy marriage rather than stay for financial reasons
- **B1** identifies that greater financial independence can also reduce the pressure to marry in the first place
- **B1** development, e.g. cohabitation becomes a more realistic long-term option when both partners can support themselves
- **Answer: Women's greater economic independence means less financial dependence on marriage, making it more possible to leave an unhappy marriage and reducing the pressure to marry in the first place, making cohabitation a more realistic long-term option.**

Question 7

- **B1** identifies a recognised criticism, e.g. it may overstate how much free choice people really have, since money, housing, children and social expectations still shape people's decisions
- **B1** brief development, e.g. or that patterns of marriage and cohabitation still differ by social class, religion and ethnicity, suggesting choice is not equally free for everyone
- **Answer: Critics argue the individualisation thesis may overstate real freedom of choice, since money, housing, children and social expectations still shape decisions, and patterns still differ by class, religion and ethnicity.**

Question 8

- **B1** identifies a recognised criticism, e.g. it can present divorce and cohabitation as simply negative, when for many people divorce ends an unhappy or unequal marriage
- **B1** brief development, e.g. or that it may not fully explain why divorce and cohabitation have also risen in many other countries with different welfare systems
- **Answer: Critics argue the New Right view can present divorce and cohabitation as simply negative, when divorce often ends an unhappy or unequal marriage, and it may not explain why both have risen in countries with very different welfare systems.**

Question 9

- (a) **B1** a genuine reason, e.g. to test the relationship before a bigger commitment, because wedding costs are a barrier, or because personal beliefs do not require marriage
- (a) **B1** brief development
- (a) **Answer: A couple might cohabit to test their relationship before a bigger commitment, or because the cost of a wedding is a barrier to marrying straight away.**
- (b) **B1** a genuine reason, e.g. for the legal rights and protections marriage provides, or for religious, cultural or family reasons, or to publicly mark a long-term commitment
- (b) **B1** brief development
- (b) **Answer: A cohabiting couple might marry for the legal rights and protections marriage provides, or to publicly mark a long-term commitment to family and friends.**

Question 10

- **B1** a correct example, e.g. the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act
- **B1** a correct year, e.g. 2014
- **B1** identifies an impact, e.g. it gave same-sex couples the same legal right to marry as opposite-sex couples
- **B1** development, e.g. this added to the range of officially recognised family and marriage forms in the UK
- **Answer: The Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act allowed same-sex couples to marry in England and Wales from 2014, giving them the same legal right to marry as opposite-sex couples and adding to the range of officially recognised family forms.**

Question 11

- (a) **B1** the legal change made by the Divorce Reform Act 1969 (easier grounds for divorce)
- **(a) Answer: The Divorce Reform Act 1969, which made divorce easier to obtain.**
- (b) **B1** individualisation/personal choice, secularisation, or women's economic independence (any one, credit if consistent)
- **(b) Answer: Individualisation and personal choice (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim), or declining religious influence, or women's economic independence.**
- (c) **B1** secularisation/declining religious influence
- **(c) Answer: Secularisation, the declining social influence of religion.**
- (d) **B1** individualisation/personal choice, or women's economic independence (e.g. more time in education/career before marrying)
- **(d) Answer: Individualisation and personal choice, or women's greater economic independence and time spent in education and careers before marrying.**

Question 12

- **B1** identifies a genuine similarity, e.g. both argue modern relationships are increasingly based on personal choice and satisfaction rather than fixed tradition or duty
- **B1** brief development, e.g. both can help explain rising cohabitation and rising divorce, as people choose relationships that suit them and leave those that do not
- **Answer: Both Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's individualisation thesis and Giddens' 'pure relationship' argue modern relationships are based on personal choice rather than fixed tradition, helping explain both rising cohabitation and rising divorce.**

Question 13

- **B1** identifies one way, e.g. more children now experience their parents separating and living in a lone-parent or step-family household at some point in childhood
- **B1** development
- **B1** identifies a second, different way, e.g. more children have contact with step-parents, half-siblings and step-siblings through a parent's remarriage or re-partnering
- **B1** development
- **Answer: More children now experience a parent's separation and live in a lone-parent or step-family household at some point, and more children have contact with step-parents, half-siblings and step-siblings through a parent's remarriage.**

Question 14

- **B1** identifies a recognised criticism, e.g. official statistics do not capture cohabiting relationships that form or end without a legal marriage or divorce
- **B1** brief development, e.g. this means marriage and divorce statistics alone may understate how many committed relationships form and end
- **Answer: Official marriage and divorce statistics do not capture cohabiting relationships that form or end without a legal marriage or divorce, so they may understate how many committed relationships really form and end.**

Question 15

- **B1** identifies one way, e.g. marriages can now potentially last longer before a partner dies
- **B1** development, e.g. this can mean more years in which a marriage could also end in divorce rather than by a partner's death
- **B1** identifies a second way, e.g. people who are widowed or divorced now have more years remaining in which they might remarry or re-partner
- **B1** development, e.g. this can add to the number of reconstituted families and wider step-kin networks in later life
- **Answer: Marriages can now last longer before a partner dies, giving more years in which a marriage could also end in divorce; people who are widowed or divorced also have more years in which to remarry or re-partner, adding to reconstituted families and step-kin networks.**

Question 16

- **B1** identifies one change, e.g. more people now attend university or focus on starting a career before marrying, raising the average age at first marriage
- **B1** development
- **B1** identifies a second, different change, e.g. rising cohabitation means many couples live together for years before marrying, if they marry at all
- **B1** development
- **Answer: More people now spend longer in education or building a career before marrying, and rising cohabitation means many couples live together for years before marrying, if they marry at all, both raising the average age at first marriage.**

Question 17

- **B1** identifies a genuine strength, e.g. they cover the whole population and are collected consistently over time, allowing long-term trends to be tracked
- **B1** development of the strength
- **B1** identifies a genuine weakness, e.g. they do not capture cohabiting relationships that form or end without legal marriage or divorce
- **B1** development of the weakness
- **Answer: Strength: official statistics cover the whole population and are collected consistently over time, allowing long-term trends to be tracked. Weakness: they do not capture cohabiting relationships that form or end without legal marriage or divorce.**