



GSOC.FA7 Reasons for the Decline in Family Size in Modern Britain

AQA 8192 · Calculators not allowed · about 60 minutes

Total Marks

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Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / ____

Answer ALL questions. For questions that ask for two reasons or two examples give both in full sentences. Spend about 60 minutes on the whole pack.

- 1** Which one of the following is a sociological reason often given for why families in modern Britain have fewer children?

- ☐ A) wider access to contraception
- ☐ B) higher natural birthability
- ☐ C) lower school enrolment
- ☐ D) reduced life expectancy

(Total for Question 1 is 1 mark)

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- 2** Define what sociologists mean by 'family size' in the context of modern Britain and demographic change.

(Total for Question 2 is 2 marks)

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- 3** Identify and explain one way wider access to contraception has contributed to smaller family sizes in the UK since the late 20th century.

(Total for Question 3 is 4 marks)

- 4** Identify and explain one way more women staying in education leads to smaller family sizes in modern Britain.

(Total for Question 4 is 4 marks)

- 5** Give one example of a financial reason why many UK couples choose to have fewer children today, and briefly explain it in the context of raising a child in Britain.

(Total for Question 5 is 3 marks)

- 6** Explain two reasons why changing cultural attitudes in Britain have contributed to families choosing to have fewer children.

(Total for Question 6 is 6 marks)

7 Item A: A short clinic report from a hypothetical community family planning service in a northern English town. The report notes that in the last ten years the clinic provided more information on long acting reversible contraception, appointment times outside school hours, and contraceptive counselling for university students living away from home.

(a) Using Item A and your knowledge of family size, identify one way the clinic changes might lead to fewer children in families from this town. (2)

(b) Using Item A, explain one limitation of assuming clinic improvements alone will cause smaller families across the whole town. (2)

(Total for Question 7 is 4 marks)

8 Give one way government family policy could unintentionally encourage smaller family sizes, as relevant to families in the UK.

(Total for Question 8 is 2 marks)

9 Give one sociological reason why men and women might disagree about family size decisions in a couple in modern Britain.

(Total for Question 9 is 2 marks)

10 Explain one way the rising cost of housing in Britain can affect family size decisions for young couples starting out.

(Total for Question 10 is 4 marks)

- 11** State one criticism of explaining smaller family size only by reference to individual choice and changing attitudes.

(Total for Question 11 is 2 marks)

- 12** Explain two ways greater female participation in the paid workforce can lead to smaller family sizes in Britain.

(Total for Question 12 is 6 marks)

- 13** Describe two sociological changes, other than contraception and education, that have contributed to the decline in family size in modern Britain.

(Total for Question 13 is 4 marks)

- 14** Discuss how far sociologists would agree that economic reasons are the main cause of the decline in family size in modern Britain. Write your answer in the context of the UK and refer to different sociological explanations.

(Total for Question 14 is 8 marks)

- 15** Identify and explain two practical barriers that might prevent some low income families in Britain from accessing contraception or family planning services.

(Total for Question 15 is 4 marks)

- 16** Discuss how far sociologists would agree that cultural changes, rather than economic pressures, are the main reason for the long term decline in family size in Britain. Use sociological perspectives where relevant and reach a reasoned conclusion.

(Total for Question 16 is 12 marks)

Mark scheme · GSOC.FA7 Reasons for the Decline in Family Size in Modern Britain

Question 1

- **B1** A (wider access to contraception)
- **Answer: A**

Question 2

- **B1** identifies family size as the number of children in a family or household, usually counted per family unit (oe)
- **B1** development, e.g. can be expressed as the typical number of children parents choose to have in a household
- **Answer: Family size is the number of children in a family or household, usually counted per family unit; it refers to the typical number of children parents choose to have.**

Question 3

- **B1** identifies wider access to contraception as reducing unplanned pregnancies
- **B1** explains that reducing unplanned pregnancies means couples can limit the number of children they have
- **B1** identifies availability of family planning services or contraceptive methods as part of the explanation
- **B1** develops this by noting access gives greater control over timing of births and effective spacing between children
- **Answer: Wider access to contraception reduces unplanned pregnancies, so couples can limit the number of children they have; family planning services and more contraceptive methods give people control over the timing and spacing of births.**

Question 4

- **B1** identifies that staying in education delays the age at which women have their first child
- **B1** explains that delaying first births shortens the period in which women are likely to have additional children, reducing total family size
- **B1** identifies the link to career and further study commitments
- **B1** develops by noting that combining higher education with childrearing is harder, so some women choose fewer children to complete education and training
- **Answer: More women staying in education delays the age of first birth, which shortens the time available for having more children; increased study and training commitments mean some women choose fewer children to complete education and start careers.**

Question 5

- **B1** gives a correct example, e.g. the high cost of housing or childcare
- **B1** explains how that cost affects decisions, e.g. expensive childcare makes having more children unaffordable for working parents
- **B1** brief development linking the example to choosing fewer children overall
- **Answer: Example: the high cost of childcare and housing. Expensive childcare can make it hard for parents to work and pay for care, and high housing costs reduce disposable income, so couples may decide they cannot afford more than one or two children.**

Question 6

- **B1** identifies first reason, e.g. greater emphasis on personal choice and self-fulfilment
- **B1** develops first reason, e.g. people may prioritise careers, travel or leisure over having many children
- **B1** identifies second reason, e.g. changing attitudes to gender roles and parenting responsibilities
- **B1** develops second reason, e.g. with more equal expectations, couples negotiate smaller families so both partners can work and share childcare
- **B1** offers a linking point, e.g. these cultural shifts change social norms about how many children are desirable
- **B1** adds a brief example or consequence, e.g. later marriage or cohabitation as part of lifestyle choices leads to smaller families
- **Answer: One reason is a greater emphasis on personal choice and self fulfilment, so people often prioritise careers, travel or leisure over having many children. Another reason is changing gender role attitudes and parenting**

Question 7

- (a) **B1** identifies a clinic change, e.g. more information on long acting contraception or appointments outside school hours
- (a) **B1** links it to fewer children, e.g. better access reduces unplanned pregnancies or helps students avoid early parenthood
- **(a) Answer: More information on long acting contraception or out of hours appointments improves access and reduces unplanned pregnancies, helping people avoid early parenthood and therefore contributing to smaller family sizes.**
- (b) **B1** identifies a limitation, e.g. not everyone uses the clinic or cultural beliefs may limit use
- (b) **B1** develops the limitation, e.g. some groups may still face barriers such as stigma, cost, or lack of transport so overall family size may not change uniformly
- **(b) Answer: Not everyone will use the clinic and cultural or practical barriers such as stigma, cost or transport may limit take up, so improvements may not produce smaller families uniformly across all groups in the town.**

Question 8

- **B1** gives a correct way, e.g. limited childcare support or short parental leave makes having many children less affordable
- **B1** brief development linking policy to family size choices
- **Answer: If government childcare support is limited or parental leave is short, the financial and practical cost of having more children rises, so parents may choose smaller families.**

Question 9

- **B1** gives a reason, e.g. different expectations about careers and parental roles
- **B1** brief development, e.g. one partner may prioritise career advancement while the other prioritises family time, affecting desired number of children
- **Answer: They may have different expectations about careers and parenting, for example one partner may prioritise career advancement while the other values family time more, leading to disagreement about how many children to have.**

Question 10

- **B1** identifies the rising cost of housing as a real pressure
- **B1** explains how high housing costs reduce disposable income or delay moving to suitable family housing
- **B1** develops how reduced disposable income or delays make couples postpone children or choose fewer children
- **B1** offers brief consequence or example, e.g. renting in a small flat makes having more children impractical
- **Answer: Rising housing costs reduce disposable income and can delay moving to a larger home suitable for children, so young couples may postpone having children or decide on fewer children because smaller homes and tight budgets make larger families impractical.**

Question 11

- **B1** identifies a criticism, e.g. it ignores structural factors such as economic constraints or unequal childcare provision
- **B1** brief development, e.g. presenting smaller families as purely a choice can overlook how costs or lack of support limit real options
- **Answer: A criticism is that focusing on individual choice ignores structural factors such as economic constraints or unequal childcare provision, so smaller families may result from limited options rather than free choice.**

Question 12

- **B1** identifies first way, e.g. conflict between career and childrearing
- **B1** develops first way, e.g. women may delay or limit childbirth to protect career progress
- **B1** identifies second way, e.g. returning to work increases the monetary cost and childcare needs
- **B1** develops second way, e.g. high childcare costs can make additional children economically unattractive or impractical
- **B1** links both ways to the decision to have fewer children
- **B1** adds brief illustrative example or consequence, e.g. part time work decisions reduce time for more children
- **Answer: One way is career conflict: as more women participate in paid work they may delay or limit childbirth to protect career progress. Another way is that returning to work increases childcare needs and costs, so high childcare expenses make having additional children less affordable, leading couples to choose smaller families.**

Question 13

- **B1** identifies first change, e.g. rising cost of living or housing
- **B1** development of first change
- **B1** identifies second change, e.g. changing gender roles or greater acceptance of childfree lifestyles
- **B1** development of second change
- **Answer: Rising cost of living and housing has made raising children more expensive and delayed family formation. Changing gender roles and greater acceptance of childfree lifestyles mean many people now value careers, leisure or personal choice over having larger families.**

Question 14

- **Level 1** (1-2): Simple assertions that economic reasons matter or do not matter with little development or reference to other explanations.
- **Level 2** (3-5): Some developed points arguing economic reasons are important, with at least one alternative sociological explanation considered, but limited evaluation or balance.
- **Level 3** (6-8): A balanced discussion weighing economic explanations against other sociological factors such as contraception, education, and cultural change, with a supported judgement about the relative importance of economic causes.
- **Indicative content:**
 - Economic reasons to include: rising cost of housing, childcare and general living costs making larger families unaffordable.
 - Explain how economic pressures can lead to postponement of parenthood and a reduction in desired number of children.
 - Alternative explanations: greater access to contraception and family planning allowing choice, more women staying in education and employment delaying childbirth, cultural shifts prioritising careers and personal choice.
 - Consider how economic and cultural factors interact, for example economic constraints influencing attitudes and vice versa.
 - Possible conclusion: economic reasons are influential but need to be seen alongside education, contraception and cultural change; on balance sociologists might argue a combination of factors best explains the decline.

Question 15

- **B1** identifies first barrier, e.g. lack of transport or clinic hours that clash with work
- **B1** explains how it prevents access, e.g. inability to attend appointments reduces uptake
- **B1** identifies second barrier, e.g. stigma or lack of culturally appropriate information
- **B1** explains how it prevents access, e.g. fear of judgement or materials not in relevant languages reduces use
- **Answer: One barrier is lack of transport or clinic hours that conflict with working schedules, preventing attendance at appointments. Another barrier is stigma or lack of culturally appropriate information, which can discourage some groups from seeking contraception or make services less accessible to them.**

Question 16

- **Level 1** (1-3): Basic, undeveloped points that cultural change or economic pressure matters, with little use of sociological perspectives or balance.
- **Level 2** (4-6): Some developed arguments using at least one sociological perspective to support cultural or economic explanations, with limited counter-argument and an attempt at a conclusion.
- **Level 3** (7-9): Clear discussion using multiple sociological perspectives, for example functionalist, feminist and Marxist explanations, considering both cultural and economic factors and giving a balanced judgement.
- **Level 4** (10-12): A well-developed, balanced evaluation that integrates several sociological perspectives, analyses interaction between cultural and economic causes, addresses limitations of evidence, and reaches a reasoned and supported conclusion.
- **Indicative content:**
 - Cultural explanations to consider: changing values prioritising individualism, career and lifestyle choices, shift in gender roles and acceptance of childfree lifestyles.
 - Economic explanations to consider: rising costs of housing and childcare, insecure employment, austerity or welfare changes reducing affordability of larger families.
 - Use perspectives: functionalism might argue social institutions and modernisation change family roles and expectations; feminism might emphasise women's greater education and work opportunities changing choices about children; Marxism might stress economic constraints and class differences shaping family size.
 - Consider interaction: cultural shifts may be enabled by economic changes and policy, and economic pressures may influence cultural priorities; evidence limitations include reliance on surveys of attitudes rather than causal proof.
 - Possible supported conclusion: many sociologists would argue no single cause explains the decline; cultural change is powerful but works alongside economic constraints, so the best explanation is a combination with relative weight depending on social class and local context.