

Divorce

Divorce is becoming much more frequent in our society and many people have suggested that this is because there is something wrong with society, while others suggest that there is something wrong in families themselves.

Divorce Laws

Our culture in Britain is based on the Christian religion. Christians usually believe that a marriage is for life. It is written into the marriage ceremony, "Those whom God has joined in Holy Matrimony, let no man put asunder till death do you part."

The Ten Commandments say that "You shall not commit **adultery**." Christianity was very important in the lives of ordinary people in the past. The only end to marriage was through the death of one of the partners. Marriages tended to be short because people married later than we do and they died younger. Widowed people could remarry.

Other cultures do have a more relaxed attitude towards divorce and in Islam, the only ritual required for a divorce is for the man to say, "I divorce thee" three times. Only men can divorce. He has to give the wife back all of her wedding presents and any money that she brought into the marriage. This makes divorce rather impractical for people but it does remain possible.

1. Give one reason why some people think that divorce should be easy to obtain.

2. Give one reason why some people think that divorce should be more difficult to obtain.

A history of divorce laws in Britain:

- 1857 Divorce was available through a Court of Law. Men could claim adultery.
Women had to claim both adultery and cruelty. No divorce for poor. There was a guilty party'.
- 1923 Women could divorce on the same terms as men.
- 1937 Grounds for divorce were extended to included desertion
- 1949 Legal Aid was available for divorce so poor people could apply.
- 1969 The grounds for divorce were changed. There is no guilty party. Proof of irretrievable breakdown of marriage is required.
- 1984 The amount of time before application for divorce can be made was reduced.

Use the books and the LRC to see if you can find out more about divorce laws in Britain. The Citizen's Advice Bureau should be able to give you some information.

How many divorces?

The whole of the history of the law of divorce in Britain shows that the rate of divorce has been increasing steadily throughout the whole of this century. This is true of all Western countries.

Look up further information and statistics on this to add to your assessment folder. Use the **Factfiles**, the copy of **Social Trends 1993** or the two books called **Database** in the Learning Resource Centre. Any GCSE book will have pages that you can photocopy and add to your notes. The Internet may be helpful to you.

Divorce Rates in Britain - Draw this as a graph in your notes.

source: **Social Trends 1989**

year **no of divorces**

1961	27,000
1971	80,000
1976	136,000
1981	157,000
1982	159,000
1983	162,000
1984	158,000
1985	175,000
1986	168,000
1987	165,000

In what year was the divorce rate highest?	
What was the secondary source for this material?	
Do divorce statistics rise every year?	
How many divorces took place in 1961?	
How many divorces took place in 1981?	

Who is likely to have a marriage end in divorce?

Although each divorce is an example of an individual couple making a private decision to end a marriage, there are a number of factors that make some marriages more likely to end in divorce than others. Sociology is very interested in what causes some people to choose to end their marriages.

Here are some facts and figures about marriage in Britain:

- ♥ One marriage in three ends in divorce. One child in five will see his or her parents divorce before the sixteenth birthday.
- ♥ People who marry when they are still very young are more likely to have a divorce than people who marry when they are in their twenties and thirties.

- ♥ People who are in the poorer groups of society are more likely to have a divorce than those who come from wealthier backgrounds and who have well-paid and interesting jobs.
- ♥ Husbands who are married to women who are housewives are more likely to ask for a divorce on the grounds of adultery than husbands who are married to working wives.
- ♥ Women are much more likely to ask for a divorce from their husbands than men are to ask for divorce from their wives. On average, the number of divorce proceedings started by women is about 70%.
- ♥ In 1983, 29% of couples who divorced had no children.
- ♥ Most people divorce after about ten years of marriage.
- ♥ 5% of adults are divorced. 69% are or were married and 27% have never married.
- ♥ It has been found that children from divorced families are more likely to divorce themselves.
- ♥ Divorce is very expensive for the country because women are often made poor and need legal aid and social security.

Which of the above facts did you find most interesting/surprising? Why?

Why have divorce rates risen?

Legal changes.	
Attitudes towards marriage.	
Decline in religious belief.	
Length of marriage.	
Changes in the role of women.	
Lack of social support	

Development work for your assessment folder

1. Should people stay in an unhappy marriage 'for the sake of the children' or are the children themselves better off if the parents split up? Write down your opinions and then see what other people in your group think.
2. Is marriage sacred? Ask the opinions of some of the teachers, but only if they are willing to help you!
3. Is marriage a good thing for women? Ask some adults what they feel they have gained from marriage and what they have lost from being married.
4. Is it necessary to go through a wedding service to be like a married couple?
5. What special difficulties do single parents face in bringing up their children alone? See what you can find out from organisations such as Gingerbread or by asking people that you know.
6. What would girls of 14-15 years of age look for in a marriage partner?
7. Do girls of 14-15 years of age feel that they would like to marry in the future. What do they see as the advantages and disadvantages of marriage for them.
8. Find out as many facts as you can about divorce and marriage in Britain.
9. Should divorce be made more difficult? Do a survey or an essay to this question.
10. Should marriage be made harder for people?
11. Design a wanted poster or advert for your ideal marriage partner.
12. Ask grown ups what they think is the secret of a happy marriage.