

Outline and explain two ways increased life expectancy has impacted on changes to the family structure. [10]

One way increased life expectancy has impacted on changes to the family structure has been through increased family diversity. As individuals are living longer, due to advances in medicine, better lifestyles and less dangerous jobs, individuals' attitudes to relationships have changed. Whilst in modern society, people married for romantic love, according to Giddens, in late modern society, with increased life expectancy, people are more likely to follow a pattern of serial monogamy, that is a series of relationships with one person at a time, before ending a relationship and moving onto a new one. This has resulted in an increase in marital breakdowns, leading to greater diversity as partners go their separate ways, being unwilling to remain in an unhappy relationship as they have more time ahead of them to find a new relationship. This results in the formation of lone parent families, lone person households and potentially, remarriage and reconstituted families. As a result, the conventional nuclear family is no longer perceived to be the norm, as people will change their relationships over the life course.

A second way in which increased life expectancy has impacted on changes to the family structure is through the rise in beanpole families. Beanpole, or vertically extended families, are multi-generational families that maintain close ties with one another, sometimes under the same roof. In practice, this means that a parent may be moving in with their grown children and their grandchildren. One reason for this may be due to people living longer but having more years of poor health ahead of them. Illnesses such as dementia may require elderly members of the family to be cared for by their children, particularly given the costs of social care for the elderly. As a result of the average life expectancy increasing, illness such as dementia and some forms of cancer are on the increase, and this would necessitate a change to the family structure in order to provide emotional and physical support to elderly loved ones.

### Item A

Over the last 50 years the experience of children in society has changed. Whilst some children benefit from changes that place children at the centre of society, others are often isolated or have adult burdens placed upon their young shoulders.

## 2. Applying material from item A, analyse two ways childhood can be argued to be a social construction. [10]

One way childhood could be argued to be a social construction is through different experiences of childhood. As Item A states, some children 'have adult burdens placed upon their young shoulder' from an early age. This can refer to cases of child carers, who due to financial constraints and emotional connections, provide care for a sick parent. The experiences those children will have will differ greatly from the experiences of other children, as they may experience disrupted sleep patterns, stress and anxiety over the health of those they care for, and responsibilities such as making sure others in the house are fed and looked after, particularly younger siblings. This experience would be in stark contrast to the Westernised notion of childhood as being a time of innocence and that children should be protected from the worries of the adult world.

A second way in which childhood could be seen as a social construction is through children being 'isolated' in society (Item A). In contemporary society, many children are excessively controlled due to fears that they may become a target for unwanted attention. As a result, parents will limit children's independence by controlling the spaces that they inhabit. Gittens argues that this form of age patriarchy can lead to children lacking the social skills necessary to function in society. Furthermore, Palmer argues that there is a form of 'toxic' childhood whereby children are pacified by technology, which has become more relevant following periods of lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is in contrast to the ideal of child-centred society that is put forward by other sociologists, whereby children's needs are central to the experience of growing up in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Hence, it can be argued that the isolation of children, either from their peers or from social spaces deviates from the norms constructed of a childhood as a time of exploration and social development.