



MARRIAGE

SOCIOLOGICAL EXPLANATIONS



The Sociology Guy
helping students understand society

Since the 1970s, marriage rates in the UK have steadily declined. This trend has prompted sociologists to examine why fewer people are choosing to marry and what factors are influencing this decision.



What changes can you observe in the marriage rates over the decades? Write down two key observations:

What might have contributed to these changes?



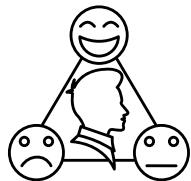
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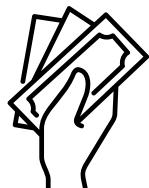
Sociologists suggest several reasons for the decline in marriage.



CHANGES IN SOCIAL ATTITUDES

Increased acceptance of cohabitation, delayed marriage, and rising individualism have all contributed to fewer people getting married. Secularisation has weakened religious pressures to marry, and growing feminism has promoted independence among women.

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) - argue that in a 'risk society', individuals are more focused on personal fulfilment, leading to greater individualization in personal relationships, including decisions about marriage.



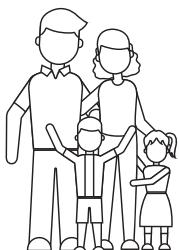
ECONOMIC FACTORS

The rising costs of weddings, combined with financial insecurity, especially among younger people, have made marriage seem less accessible or desirable. The average wedding in the UK costs £20,700 according to a 2023 study by [Hitched.co.uk](https://www.hitched.co.uk)



CHANGES IN WOMEN'S ROLES

Women's increased participation in the workforce and greater financial independence have lessened the traditional reliance on marriage for economic security. **Wilkinson (1994)** introduced the concept of the "genderquake," highlighting that women's shifting priorities, including career ambitions, are challenging traditional marriage patterns.



The rise in cohabitation, single-parent families, and reconstituted families reflects a growing diversity in family forms, reducing the societal pressure to marry. **Giddens (1992)** argues that society has seen a shift to 'confluent love'—where relationships are more about emotional fulfilment than fulfilling traditional roles—leading to an increased acceptance of cohabitation.

Though marriage rates have dropped, **Chester (1985)** argued that most people still aspire to marry, but delay marriage until they feel financially secure.

Which factor do you think has had the greatest impact on the decline of marriage rates? Why?



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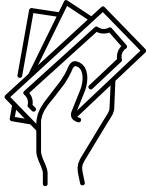


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Different sociological perspectives offer insights into the decline in marriage

FUNCTIONALIST PERSPECTIVE

Functionalists argue that marriage serves important functions for society, such as providing stable family units for raising children. The decline in marriage could be seen as destabilising family structures. Functionalists view marriage as a foundational social institution that promotes order and cohesion. It provides a framework for raising children, ensuring their socialization, and passing on cultural values and norms.



FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

Feminists see marriage as a patriarchal institution. The decline in marriage could be seen as a positive step towards gender equality, as women no longer need to marry for financial security or social status. Feminists argue that marriage is fundamentally structured to uphold patriarchal norms, placing women in subordinate roles. Traditionally, marriage has often emphasised women's roles as caregivers and homemakers, limiting their autonomy and economic independence.



POSTMODERNIST PERSPECTIVE

Postmodernists argue that in today's diverse, individualistic society, people have more freedom to choose how they live their lives. The decline in marriage is a reflection of this freedom, with people prioritising personal choice over traditional norms. Postmodernists argue that marriage is no longer a singular institution but exists alongside various forms of relationships, including cohabitation, single parenthood, and same-sex partnerships. This reflects a broader acceptance of diverse family structures, challenging the notion that marriage is the only or best way to form families.

How has the rise of individualism contributed to the decline of marriage in contemporary society? Discuss with examples from recent sociological studies.

In what ways has cohabitation become a more accepted alternative to marriage? Analyse the sociological implications of this shift.