

Diverse family structures and functions

When British people today think of a family they think of a father, a mother and two children. This is the stereotype of the family, which is called Nuclear Family. In fact, there are many other family structures such as, Extended Family, Linear Family, Single-parent Family, etc. This essay will look at a range of diverse family structures and functions in Britain today, especially the four kind of family structure: Nuclear, Extended, Single-parent and Homosexual Families.

So, what is a family? A family is a group of people who live with, love, protect and support each other in spite of ethnic, blood, gender etc.

The family acts as a person's backbone for individuals, without it person cannot go normally. The family plays an important role for the society, because it is a social unit. Therefore, the family is not a separate form of social relationship.

Moonie N 1995 a family which consists of parents and their children, and other relatives such as grandparents, uncles, aunts.

Extended Family—a family consists grandparents, parents, uncles, aunts, brothers, sisters, cousins, and so on.

Such family base on kinship, kinship ties control people's life.

This kind of family structure used to be very common in many countries, and the classic extended family is patrilineal because the family is passed down through the male line. Obviously, male is the head having the considerable power.

The members of the extended family are close to each other. They may provide or get extra help around the house, and they share food and clothes made by members. Children are brought up by parents and grandparents or other members.

Beaver M 1995 a family consists of parents and children who share a residence and co-operate economically and socially.

Nuclear Family—a family which consists a couple and children.

It is a small family pattern in a separate residence.

The life style is different from the extended family. Nuclear families usually have a long

distance with other relatives, but they often contract with each other. So, the relative ships are not so close as that in extended family.

Children are brought up by their parents with a little help from grandparents or without help from grandparents. Because the parents have to work to support the family, children may need to ask for a babysitter who is not the family member.

Such family structure is the most popular in Britain today.

Moone N 1995 a family consisting of one parent and children.

Single-parent Family—a family consisting of one parent and children.

Such family is often made up of a mother and children. Most of the single-parent family caused by divorce, and some are a women who has not married have children.

Both reasons show us some social problems. First, the increase of divorce made the situation serious, more and more people do not want to marry—the rate of marriage falls. Second, the rate of co-habitation doubled in Britain since 1981, and the unmarried young people have a baby before they marry. What's more, those people would co-habitation rather than marry. I do not know whether we can put these people and their babies in the range of single-parent family, if not, how should we define this group of people?

Furthermore, children are innocent victims. This particular kind of family may bring bad influence to children. A broken home cannot give children a healthy environment to grow up, even may lead children to criminal way. Why should children bear the hurt from the adults? Do those parent think about enough for their children?

Homosexual Families—a family which consists of a gay couple or lesbian couple.

Denmark is the first country to legalize homosexual marriages in 1989, and it is the only one country who legalize homosexual marriage in Europe. The Britain is still not recognizing it.

In Britain, gay households tend to include children from a previous heterosexual relationship. Sadly, in several widely publicized cases in recent years, these children have been ostracized from their families by social services, which claim the best interests of the child. Nevertheless, changes like these can be seen to really harm traditional family values (**Macdonis & Plummer 1998**)

Such family shows a serious social problem, there are more and more homosexuals who are not adopt by normal social opinion. Additionally, they may get AIDS—a dangerous sexual disease which spread in all over the world.

Meanwhile, the family functions are changing, but many basic functions are retained. Then, we

will look at four main functions:

Reproduction

Society needs members to develop itself. The family acts as a generation role, and then reproduces human being.

Economic support

We all need food, clothes, shelter to survive, especially when we are young or old. The family can support us those needs.

Emotional mainstay

Besides of economic support, we need love, care, protection from, other people to live. Our family supply most of the emotional and psychology needs.

Education

We need to know the social rules and values by education. The education does not only refer to school, it emphasizes family first. Family is the first school to educate us in all one's life.

Above all, we have a range of diverse family structures and functions in Britain today. There is not unique family as old times. This is the result of society development.