



10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

21 December, 1982

*File A11
cc F Mount*

HOME AFFAIRS-

Dear Dear.

Thank you very much for giving me a copy of Values and the Changing Family.

It is a most thoughtful and well-balanced report. I found it as encouraging about the future of the family as you suggested I might, and I am glad to note that such diverse contributors came to the same conclusion about the continued popularity of family life.

Yours sincerely

Nancy and Robert

The Right Reverend The Dean of Windsor

AA

PRIME MINISTER

The Dean of Windsor left the attached letter with a copy of the report by his study commission on "Values and the Changing Family". He suggested that to get the flavour of it quickly, you should look at the preface (Flag A) and Part 6 (Flag B).

I have shown it to Ferdi Mount, who comments that the report corrects several popular misconceptions about the decline of family life - and has had reasonably good publicity on this account. There are one or two points which may be relevant to the work of the family policy group. Ferdi has suggested the attached reply.

FERDI

20 December 1982

20 December 1982

MR BUTLER

I suggest:

"Thank you very much for giving me a copy of Values and the Changing Family. // It is a most thoughtful and well-balanced report. I found it as encouraging about the future of the family as you suggested I might, and I am glad to note that such diverse contributors came to the same conclusion about the continued popularity of family life."

The report corrects several popular misconceptions about the decline of family life - and has had reasonably good publicity on this account.

There are one or two points which might be relevant to the Family Policy Group. Could you let me have it back in due course?



FERDINAND MOUNT



10 DOWNING STREET

Mr. Mount

The Dean of Windsor left
the attached for the Prime Minister
to see, suggesting that she might
get the gist of it from the Preface
and Part VI if she did not have
time to read the whole thing.

Would the Policy Unit like
to suggest a brief reply for the
Prime Minister to send? And
would you like to consider where
there is anything valuable to extract
for the work of the Family Policy
Group?

F.R.B. 17.12.

mb

THE DEANERY
WINDSOR CASTLE.
WINDSOR 65561.

16th December, 1982.

Dear Prime Minister,

For the last few years I have chaired a Working Party of the Study Commission on the Family on "Values in the Family." This Report has received some publicity, and I thought that you might be interested to receive a copy. I think you will find this quite an encouraging document. Another interesting point is the diversity of the Working Party which came to an unanimous mind.

Yours very sincerely,

Michael Mann.

VALUES

AND THE CHANGING FAMILY

A FINAL REPORT FROM THE WORKING PARTY ON VALUES

STUDY COMMISSION ON THE FAMILY

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Preface

Because we tend to be ambivalent towards change, wanting the advantages which it brings, but reluctant to pay the costs of having these advantages, we find it difficult to come to a clear decision about some of the challenges we face. This difficulty in reaching a consensus about this balance is compounded by the nature of change. Some changes may be permanent, others temporary, and yet others may be cyclical where the time factor may be short or long. Because legal or statutory provision to help meet such challenges takes time to enact, it becomes important to identify the nature of each change. If it can be clearly seen to be good then it should be welcomed; if it is thought to be bad, it should be resisted; but it is where there is controversy and ambiguity that time is needed to ensure that statutory changes are not made in haste that will be out of date or unwelcome by the time they come into effect.

Some of the challenges posed by family issues, many of which display ambiguity and are subject to controversy are:

- 1 The role and place of women in the family. This is an area of concern where there is a considerable degree of intellectual assent to the ideal values which ought to pertain, but equally there is strong resistance still to paying the price for achieving these values.
- 2 The balance between **continuity** and the need for **security** which impose certain obligations and responsibilities and **change** and the desire for **freedom**.
- 3 The balance between the realistic expectations of real life and the fantasy world encouraged by so many modern developments.
- 4 The expectations placed upon children in the family, and the balance between competitive and material success and the desire for fulfillment and happiness, through caring, loving and sharing.

At present, society has not made up its mind about these value issues, and it is unlikely to do so until there is a lot more discussion and debate about the balance of values deemed desirable. This report is intended as a contribution to that debate.

The family in Britain is changing — in some respects quite dramatically. Increasing rates of divorce and a related increase in the number of one-parent families are perhaps the most discussed aspects of these changes but there are other important and related elements. Most notable amongst these are the changing role of women, both in the family and in the wider society; the growing importance of remarriage; and the popularity of cohabitation before, or perhaps as an alternative to marriage.

These changes, amongst others, have focussed attention on the state of the British family and this in turn prompts specific and concrete questions about social policy and raises practical issues for those who deal with family problems through voluntary bodies or in other spheres, such as industry. However the changes that are taking place also raise more fundamental questions about **values**.

The Study Commission on the Family has been concerned with the 'values' question since the start of its work and our membership was drawn up to reflect this concern. In our 1980 discussion paper, 'Happy Families?', we noted:

"There has undoubtedly been a shift in certain forms of behaviour and in attitudes and beliefs about some aspects of family life. What changes have taken place and do they constitute simply adjustments to changing circumstances or a more fundamental change in values?"

This is perhaps the key question we address ourselves to in this report.

The Study Commission's working party on values was set up in July 1980, under the chairmanship of the Rt Revd Michael Mann, Dean of Windsor. From the start we recognised that we were dealing with an important, but ill-defined, complex and contentious issue. Any attempt to look at values in any sphere of life must recognise a number of problems. First, there is considerable confusion in the literature regarding concepts such as values, attitudes, traits and norms, and there have been

many attempts to provide precise definitions. Notwithstanding the considerable debate within the academic community regarding precise definitions, for the purpose of this report, values are taken to be enduring and central beliefs, thoughts and feelings which influence or determine important evaluations or choices regarding persons, situations and ideas. They shade imperceptibly into attitudes.¹

An important distinction should be made between those values pertaining to 'what is preferred' compared to those pertaining to 'what is preferable' and 'what is desired' compared to 'what **ought** to be desired'. There is a complex relationship between values, attitudes and behaviour. People may hold one set of values for themselves and a completely different one for other people; they may behave in a very different way from other people who appear to hold similar values. As Michael Mann has noted:

"There is also an ambivalence in each of us; when we are subject to conflicting pressures our true values are revealed by the way in which we act. We may give intellectual assent to a particular set of values, but our actions often indicate that we are motivated by a rather different set. We may also act in a certain way as an individual under one set of values, whereas we may behave very differently as a member of various groups. And both our basic values and the circumstances arising from them are by no means constant and will often alter as our circumstances change."²

The field of values is not only complex and difficult intellectually, it is also very controversial and, particularly in relation to aspects of family life, the evidence available to us is often open to different interpretations. As we shall see, some trends associated with marriage may indicate, at first sight, a decline in the value placed on marriage, but other trends may suggest an entirely opposite conclusion. Similarly some aspects of social change indicate, to some, that the family has been weakened as a unit, while other evidence might suggest that the family is remarkably strong and vital. Again, some facts might suggest that state support has undermined the family, while others evaluating the same facts will urge more state support for the family. Differences of interpretation may shade into straightforward disagreement about certain major trends. Some may point to certain forms of behaviour as indicating a healthy development in society, while others regard them as morally shocking.

We are aware therefore, that the area of family values is an intellectual and moral minefield and we do not present this

report as an infallible guide through these obstacles. Rather, it is intended as a contribution to the wider public debate about family life in Britain today, which perhaps too readily neglects the fundamental value questions underpinning it.

We are concerned then with the following key questions. First, how have family patterns been changing and also what other key trends are affecting family life? Second, how do we interpret these changes? To what extent, for example, do they represent a departure from traditional values? What are the major areas of concern? Third, what values and attitudes do people themselves hold about the family? How have these changed and to what extent is there a consensus or conflict about values in relation to the family?

Many of these questions, and particularly those relating to how the family has changed, can be tackled at first descriptively. In the next section we therefore present a description of the family today and how trends are affecting it. We also look at other trends that are relevant, such as those affecting employment. This description shows that undoubtedly, a number of important changes are affecting family life. These are discussed and evaluated in Part 3 before we move on in Part 4 to consider the evidence that is available about peoples' own attitudes and values concerning the family. Given that changes can be identified, we then proceed in Part 5 to consider some of the implications of these changes in a number of different spheres and the dilemmas they have generated.

The nature of the subject defies a straightforward answer to most of the questions posed above. We therefore refrain from labelling the final section 'conclusions'. Rather, it is a statement of those issues which the working party are agreed appear to be central to any discussion of values and the family.

Changing family patterns

To what extent are changing family patterns in Britain associated with changing values? This was the question we posed in the introduction to our Report and in this section we review the evidence about changing patterns before considering the significance of those changes in Part 3.

Continuities

Most contemporary accounts of the family emphasise change and, consequently, an increasing diversity in family patterns. In this account however we start by emphasising **continuity** in family life and only turn to changes later. For the fact is that **most** young people in Britain will get married; **most** marriages will survive; **most** married couples will have children; **most** children will be born legitimate and be brought up by two parents. Indeed nine in every ten children are still born within marriage and seven out of eight are living in two-parent families. The broad elements of continuity in family patterns are described below. A more detailed review can be found elsewhere.¹

Marriage is, at least in one very important sense, more popular today than in earlier periods of our history. Partly because of a more balanced sex ratio the proportion of eligible persons marrying has increased during the course of this century. In mid-Victorian England almost one-third of women remained spinsters and of every thousand women in the age group 20-39 (in England and Wales) 552 were married in 1911; in 1931 the figure was 572; and by 1961 it had reached 808. And while later we note a decline in the marriage rate during the 1970s (a trend which is open to different interpretations) the fact remains that even on the basis of the 1976 marriage patterns only some 8% of women and 14% of men will **not** marry.

Once married, and despite the increased divorce rates, some two out of three marriages will survive, to be ended naturally, rather than through divorce. And of those couples who marry, most will have children. Indeed, compared with earlier times, there are fewer childless families today: among women

marrying in the period 1961-65 only 8% were childless after ten years. This compares with 10% for the period 1956-60 and 16% for 1920-24. And, as we have already indicated, the overwhelming majority of children are born within marriage and, despite the impact of divorce, over 87% of them are living in two-parent families at any one point in time. Also, despite major changes in patterns of work and family life, most very young children have mothers who do **not** work outside the home – some 79% in 1978 for those under two, for example.²

The views about what constitutes a 'normal' or 'traditional' family might vary, but for those who regard it as essentially based around a married couple with children, cemented by permanent relationships, then the family might be said to be alive and well.

Changes

It is, however, the changes, rather than the continuities, in family life which attract interest and concern. Evidence about divorce and the numbers of one-parent families make the headlines and encourage extreme predictions, such as the view that 'the future of marriage is now in question'.³ What therefore are the facts, and which are the most important trends?

Marriage: We have already noted that, compared with the past, a large proportion of men and women now get married, but that is the broad historical trend. On a shorter time scale, things look somewhat different. In the early part of the 1970s there was a rapid fall in the total number of marriages, of the order of 15% in four years and marriage rates have dropped from the very high rates in the late 1960s to levels similar to those in the 1920s. However, since 1976, there has again been a slight increase in the total annual number of couples marrying, but not to the levels pertaining in the 1960s. Thus the picture for the 1970s is complicated, partly because of changes in the timing of marriage. In the 1960s nearly 10% of bachelors and 30% of spinsters married in their teens partly because of changing fashions. But an added impetus was the Family Law Reform Act, which took effect in 1970 and allowed young people over 18 years old to marry without parental consent. The effect was a 'borrowing' of marriages which would otherwise have taken place in the 1970s.

Divorce: Perhaps the key changes, from the viewpoint of values, concern the permanence of marriage and most attention is focussed on the question of divorce. As noted in another Study

Commission publication, 'Families in Focus', over the last twenty years there has been a 600% increase in the divorce rate. Currently one in three marriages is likely to end in divorce.⁴ Some 60% of these will involve dependent children and the number of children involved in divorce each year is now around 163,000. Thus we might expect that between one in five and one in six children born today may witness their parents' divorce before they reach 16.⁵

One-Parent Families: One major consequence of divorce is the increasing numbers of one-parent families. There were 570,000 such families in 1971, 750,000 in 1976 and an estimated 920,000 in 1980. About one in eight families then is headed by a single parent, but this snapshot picture underestimates the impact of divorce on family life, for a far higher proportion of children will spend part of their childhood in a single-parent family.⁶

It is important to note, however, that one-parent families are not a homogeneous group and their diversity has implications for their quality of life. Today one in nine lone parents is male, one in seven an unmarried mother, one in six a widow, one in three divorced and one in five separated. We know little about the length of time children and parents spend in one-parent families. For many it would appear to be a long term experience, but an increasing number of lone parents do remarry and a new family type is therefore created.

Remarriage: Following changes in the divorce rate, the proportion of marriages involving a remarriage for at least one partner has increased from 13% in 1901 to 20% in 1971 to 34% today. Today 11%, or about one in nine, of all new marriages involve couples who have both been previously divorced. It is estimated that on the basis of current trends around one in five men will have been remarried by the year 2000, and a slightly smaller proportion of women will have entered a second or later marriage. The likelihood of remarriage varies with age, and is particularly high at ages under 30. Indeed trends suggest that something like 80% of those who divorced under 30 will remarry within five years.⁷

Cohabitation: An increasing number of people cohabit. Around 10% of women who first married between 1971 and 1975 had lived with their husbands before marriage compared with 3% who were married for the first time five years earlier. Data from the 1979 General Household Survey (GHS) suggests that this proportion had risen to 20% for those who married in the late 1970s and in addition about one in ten single women aged 20-29 reported that they were cohabiting.⁸

Extended Families: One further aspect of demographic change is the rapidly increasing number of very elderly people in the population. In 1901 for example there were 1,529,000 over 65s representing 4.7% of the total population. By 1981, however, there were 7,287,000 people over 65 – 14.2% of the population. And while in 1901 there were only 50,000 over 85s, by the year 1981 there were 514,000 and by 2001 there will be an estimated 778,000 people aged 85 or over. This represents a percentage increase between 1901 and 1981 of 930%.⁹

Increased life expectancy and growing numbers of the old have dramatically changed the nature of the family in modern times. Compared with earlier periods today's children are likely to have grandparents alive during much of their childhood and some will have one or more great-grandparents too. However, a significant proportion of the elderly appear to have very few potential family contacts. Undoubtedly, as we discuss in the next section, the increasing number of the very elderly in society represents one of our major social challenges and the nature and extent of the family's caring role in relation to elderly relatives is a primary focus of contemporary concern.

Women's Employment: The demographic and social changes described so far have been paralleled by qualitative changes in roles and relationships within the family and between the family and the wider society. Perhaps one of the most pertinent examples in this realm is the changing role of women and, in particular, their increasing participation in the formal labour market after marriage and childbirth. In 1921 women were only one in three of the labour force and the vast majority of working women were unmarried. Today, two out of every five workers are women and within this figure, married women now outnumber unmarried women by about two to one. Overall, one quarter of the labour force are married women and about one-half of these can be expected to be caring for at least one dependent child.¹⁰

Though marriage therefore no longer means the end of formal labour market participation for most women, as it did at least until the Second World War, childbirth and child care responsibilities still have a marked impact on women's ability to work outside the home. And the younger the child the less likely it is that women will have paid work. It must however be noted that the increase in proportions in paid employment can be accounted for almost completely by those women working part time. The proportion of women working full time with children under school age has remained relatively constant.

The trend towards smaller families means the earlier completion of family formation so giving more women the choice of whether to work or not. Women over 35 have a much higher participation rate reflecting both the return to work after childrearing and the smaller proportion of this age group responsible for a pre-school child.

These then are the major social and demographic trends affecting family life in Britain today. Undoubtedly they do indicate that a number of important changes are occurring. But to what extent do these changes represent a threat to family life – a fundamental change in certain key values or attitudes or mere adjustments in practice and style? It is to these issues that we now address ourselves.

Interpreting change in family life: problems and implications

Do the family trends that we have outlined represent an undermining of family life? Indeed do they indicate a crisis for the family? It is possible to identify three major spheres of concern within today's debate about the family: the changing role of women; the welfare of children; and the nature of responsibilities and obligations between family members. However, it is also evident that the implications of change within these different spheres are the subject of considerable controversy.

Certainly there are many who are ready to argue that the social and demographic changes described are associated with decline. They feel that the family is being undermined, that its health is threatened; that it is not as valued as it used to be; and that, furthermore, it no longer performs adequately certain crucial functions such as child care and discipline, moral education, and the care of its elderly members. Others, however, will take a radically different view. They would not deny that there have been changes but would point to the increasing diversity of family life as a not unwelcome trend in that it allows individuals to express their own individuality and preferences in a way not always possible for earlier generations. There will be others who may welcome evidence of the decline of the traditional family on the grounds that it represented a patriarchal and conservative authority, which involved oppression of its female members. Some such critics may look for alternatives to the family in the form of communes or other co-operative forms. Given such differing views how should we therefore evaluate the family trends that are undoubtedly taking place?

Some Caveats

At the outset there is a need for caution. Every generation, throughout history, has interpreted some trends as evidence of moral decline and a lack of stability in certain key societal institutions. For this reason Fletcher prefaced his own book on 'The Family and Marriage in Britain', published originally in 1962, with the cautionary warning of L C A Knowles that:

"Englishmen are always despondent about their own times, and it would be easy to quote contemporaries in every period so that their testimony would show that we had gone downhill ever since the time of the Norman conquest."¹

An additional major hallmark of contemporary comment on the British family is an often over simple comparison with an idealised past. But accounts of family life in previous times rarely reveal a golden age of the family. Historical evidence on social structure, illegitimacy, orphanages, pre marital and extra marital sexual activity suggests that the close knit and puritanical families of Jane Austen's 'Pride and Prejudice' for example, represented family life for only a very small sector of society, if at all. Other nineteenth century novels paint a far bleaker picture, as do twentieth century accounts of life in industrialised Britain. Commenting on the position of ordinary families in the nineteenth century, Fletcher concluded for example, that:

"The rapid developments of manufacturing industry and urbanisation then, did not bring about, for the wage earning classes, a total worsening of an earlier family life which had been altogether more satisfactory, so much as a new and terrible aggravation of existing evils. There was a new degree of family disunity in a situation where new insecurities, new harshnesses of work and environment, new miseries were added to the old."²

In other strata of society too, an ideal family life is difficult to discover. Within the aristocracy morals were lax to put it mildly; while within the middle class family, marriage was often based on a well defined subordination of women which many people today would find objectionable.

The idea that families knew greater conformity and stability in the past is therefore open to considerable doubt. Indeed, it has been argued that major social changes and legislation such as compulsory school attendance, institutionalised retirement ages and labour laws may have imposed **more** rigid patterns and therefore **greater** uniformity today than yesteryear.³

Some problems of interpretation

The popularity of marriage

To start with an obvious statement, the evaluation of family trends depends crucially on **what** is valued about the family. Thus, in regard to marriage, if it is **permanence** which is valued

— 'til death us do part' — then undoubtedly there is cause for concern, for as we have noted, increasing numbers of couples, many of whom will have taken traditional marriage vows, end their marriage with a divorce. As one of us has noted:

"Forty years ago the word 'family' was commonly recognised as meaning father, mother and children in the first instance, with grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins at one remove all contained in British society within the bond of lifelong monogamous marriage. Today the same certainly no longer exists."⁴

Indeed the Rapoport's have argued that:

"There is a sense in which variation, either by chance or by choice is now the norm. Attempts to isolate any 'normal' or even 'mainstream' type family are thwarted by a host of variables which cut across every apparent type."⁵

Those who value marriage, but not necessarily permanence, may well be less despondent about the evidence. As we have shown, some 90% of people get married and, despite some ambiguous evidence about marriage trends in the 1970s, this is likely to be the picture for the foreseeable future. It would certainly be wrong to assume too readily that divorce suggests a widespread disillusion with marriage itself; for again, as we have shown, many of the divorced get remarried, including the vast majority of those who divorce at a young age. Moreover, it is arguably the case that divorce often signifies not so much a rejection of marriage — or even a disillusionment with it — but rather a search for a better relationship and therefore a more fulfilling marriage. Indeed Dominian has suggested that:

"It may be that the present level of divorce is an indicator of the massive changes in marriage which need examining and adapting to rather than a precursor of any serious challenge to monogamy. There is certainly no evidence that there is any serious alternative to marriage which is replacing it. There is however evidence that marriage has many variations reflecting the increasing multiplicity of the characteristics of personal fulfilment."⁶

The question of whether or not marriage is less valued today than in previous generations is not therefore as straightforward to answer as a cursory acquaintance with the evidence might suggest. There is a need to distinguish between divorce, separation, marital breakdown and an unhappy marriage. Undoubtedly there are many more divorces than previously, but do more marriage breakdowns signify more unhappy

marriages? Divorce statistics understate the true extent of marriage breakdown, but this is less likely to be the case today than previously. Divorce Law Reform has certainly enabled more marriages to formally dissolve than used to be the case. However whether there are today more unhappy marriages than previously is an impossible question to answer, but one which it is important to pose for our discussion.

Cohabitation: trial marriage or alternative

Cohabitation is another trend that has been noted. Though there is now some evidence on the extent of cohabitation, the meaning for the individuals involved and the longer term implications are far from straightforward. There are many possible reasons for a couple choosing to cohabit. Some will enter cohabitation with no intention whatsoever that it should be permanent, or even a very long term relationship. Others may be unable to marry or remarry (because one partner is already married for example) or may not do so because of financial expediency (the loss of a widow's pension for instance). Still others may consider it a trial period before entering marriage whilst for some cohabitation represents a total rejection of the institution of marriage.

One French sociologist suggests that:

"Most de facto unions . . . are now deliberate . . . because the great majority of the younger generation believe that the partners are sovereign in the choice of their way of life, the status of their union and its duration. Even those who marry say that marriage is only a formality for them and that they consent to it for social convenience."⁷

For many cohabiting couples the period of living together does seem to be a stage before marriage — a trial marriage which frequently precedes the birth of a child. However, cohabitation may well be an increasingly popular alternative to marriage. One important indication of the nature of change is the increase in the proportion of illegitimate births which are jointly registered, from 49% in 1974 to 55% in 1979.⁸ Joint registrations of illegitimate births suggest that parents, though unmarried, may be living together in a stable relationship.

Whether cohabitation does or does not represent a threat to **marriage** is a somewhat different issue from whether it represents a threat to the family. Research suggests for example, that qualities such as monogomy and permanence are highly valued by some of the couples involved. Indeed a government survey on patterns of family formation found that one group of cohabiting women regarded themselves as

'married'. They . . . saw the relationship as a long term commitment usually including having children and sharing possessions and income.⁹

A woman's place . . . ?

As with trends in marriage, divorce and cohabitation, the evaluation of female employment trends depends greatly on what is valued about the family. Is it the 'traditional' family unit itself — 'mother's place is in the home' — or is it other factors which may or may not be associated with that, such as the high quality of child care and parental responsibility?

For those who value what is regarded as 'traditional' family life and equate this with very separate roles for husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, then the trends since the war involving more and more mothers successfully seeking paid employment, will be a cause for concern. Others would argue that historically large proportions of women have always worked outside, as well as within, the home. They would welcome current trends towards more sex equality, which involves alongside other no less important developments, equality at work.

Issues associated with female employment, however, raise important practical questions and are the subject of controversy. Child care is of paramount importance. There is little evidence showing adverse effects on children as a direct result of the mother going out to work per se. However, there are conflicting views between those who feel that mothers should stay at home to look after very young children and those who feel that it is quite acceptable for such mothers to work and, indeed, would argue that there may be beneficial effects for both mothers and children in such circumstances. Indeed, a new analysis of trends since the war shows that while social security and fiscal benefits for families with children have failed to protect family living standards, vis a vis those of childless couples and young people, the fact that more of these families have both mothers and fathers working has, in fact, enabled these families to protect and indeed, increase their material standard of living.¹⁰ Furthermore, it is estimated that between three and four times as many families would experience poverty were it not for the wives' earnings.¹¹

While the trend towards more dual worker families raises, for some, questions about the woman's role, for others it raises a broader question about the relationship between family life and work. Indeed, while a great deal of attention is focussed on the problems for women in combining parenthood and

work, others would also focus attention on men. In recent years, increasing academic interest has been directed towards the possible adverse effects on the family of fathers' absence through work or the effect of 'unsocial hours' associated with shiftwork, nightwork, etc. Men's involvement in domestic activities and child care is also the subject of interest and debate.

While evidence on these questions can affect public debate, the views of some will not be fundamentally changed, partly because evidence is seldom unqualified and conclusive, and more importantly because fundamental value positions are involved. Despite these differences, it is apparent that the trends towards greater female employment — and the rise of the dual worker family — have profound implications for public policy, as do many of the other trends we have discussed. The association between values and policy choices is discussed in a later section.

The caring role of the family

Female employment trends raise questions about the family's capacity to care for children adequately and whether or not the family is now valued in this respect as much as in the past. Similar questions concern the family's role in relation to the elderly. In particular, doubts are expressed about the family's willingness to care and some argue that the pursuit of individual self fulfilment has adversely affected this aspect of family life.

As we have seen there are many more elderly people to care for today than there were in the past, particularly the very elderly. In this sphere too, historical comparisons are prey to 'golden age' comparisons which may not always stand up to factual analysis. Indeed a study by Moroney demonstrates that every generation bemoans the family's neglect of its old.¹² For example the Report of the 1832 Royal Commission observed that:

"The duty of supporting parents and children in old age or infirmity is so strongly enforced by natural feelings, that it is well performed, even among savages and almost always so in a nation deserving the name of civilised. We believe that England is the only European country in which it is neglected."¹³

Bearing in mind the obvious point that the number of people receiving any form of care depends at any time on the amount of such care available, it is worth noting that the proportion of elderly people in institutions, whether hospitals or other forms

of accommodation, has not increased since the turn of the century and then, as now, represents some 5% of the elderly population.¹⁴

What is the evidence today about the family's role in the care of its elderly members? Inevitably, it is only possible to build up a partial picture from the available evidence. Much of it depends on official statistics and, while it is possible to develop a reasonably accurate picture of household composition and social contacts, for example, it is obviously more difficult to measure the **quality** of relationships and feelings and attitudes that are present. The statistics can, undoubtedly, be interpreted in different ways, but much of the evidence supports the view that the family continues to provide a great deal of care for older people and this is all the more encouraging, perhaps, given the increasing numbers to which we have already referred.

The statistics for Great Britain in 1978-79 show that of all those aged 65 and over, some 51% still live with their spouse (and sometimes also with others); 15% live without their spouse but with others; and 34% live alone. Among the more elderly groups the picture changes radically, however. For women (and most of the very elderly are women) only 8% of those aged 85 or over live with their spouse; 39% live without their spouse but with others; and as many as 53% live alone. It is important to point out that of those living with others, most are living with children, children in law or other close relatives.¹⁵

This evidence shows, however, that large proportions of the very elderly — and therefore the most vulnerable — live alone. Does this represent familial neglect? This is not necessarily the case. First, it needs to be noted that some one-third of all elderly people have **no** living children and it appears from the evidence that the proportion of very elderly people in this situation is even higher. Thus, what might be viewed as the first line of family care, is not present. Second, it needs to be emphasised that living alone is not the same as social isolation. Rather, research shows that many of those living alone, even among the very elderly groups, live full active lives and have a great deal of contact with family members, neighbours and friends. Many elderly people would prefer to live alone, rather than with their families, whilst others may choose to live alone out of fear of the alternative, in particular residential care, which some elderly people may dread.

There is however considerable evidence of a great deal of contact between generations. A study for England in 1976, for

example, showed that 78% of those living alone reported that they visited relatives and some 39% said that they had visits from relatives 'several times per week' while a further 19% received visits 'at least once per week'.¹⁶ Further evidence would support this picture with contact between the generations often taking the form of practical assistance during visits.

Inevitably, however, there is another side to the story and some evidence of social isolation. For example the same 1976 study showed that, of those living alone, 4% 'never' received visits from relatives and 25% said that they would like relatives to visit more often. Additionally 1.5% (representing a not inconsiderable number of elderly people) neither made nor received visits at all. Similarly, and alarmingly, 13% of those elderly people who are bedfast or housebound never received visits from relatives and as many as 42% of this group would like relatives to visit more often. Other evidence, concerning practical assistance received with household tasks such as climbing stairs and bathing, while revealing a picture of much family help, also shows that not insignificant minorities receive no such help. Elderly people without children or other relatives may rely on neighbours and friends for assistance and company.

Overall, the evidence suggests that, faced with the major social challenge represented by the increasing numbers of elderly people in Britain, families are in general coping well and providing a great deal of care. However, significant minorities of the elderly do not receive care of this kind and, while this is often because no close family members exist, there will undoubtedly be cases of family neglect. More positively, however, practical issues are raised about how to encourage families to provide and maintain care, often in very adverse social and economic circumstances. There are implications here for social services, voluntary bodies and churches which deserve fuller discussion.

So far we have been referring to 'family care'. It should however be stressed that the majority of carers are women. Mirroring the situation with childcare described earlier, it would appear that responsibility for elderly and/or infirm dependants similarly affects opportunities for paid employment, the hours that can be worked and the nature of the work possible. Whilst many of these women consciously choose to 'care' for their relatives, recent reports from the Equal Opportunities Commission suggest that for some the task is lonely and frequently harrowing. An additional dimension of such responsibilities which is not widely appreciated, is that some women (and indeed some men) may

experience a sequence of care — for children, elderly relatives and then frail, elderly spouses. These women are often full time, unpaid carers whose lives are difficult indeed.¹⁷

Summary

This discussion of the nature of demographic and social trends in relation to the family and how they may be evaluated, raises a number of important issues. Though there are changes occurring in the pattern of family life, there are also important continuities as we have described. In the realm of values, no definite statements are possible, but the extent to which traditional values associated with the family are seen to be threatened must depend upon whether the continuities or the changes are the primary focus. Similarly, any attempt at evaluation must avoid misleading references to a 'golden age' gone by, which do not stand up to a close scrutiny of historical evidence.

One issue, perhaps above all others, arises from the discussion so far. There is a need for a much clearer understanding of what precisely it is that is valued in relation to marriage and family life if we are to understand the implications of change and begin to formulate appropriate responses. We turn now to look at the survey evidence on values and the family to see what light this may throw on the issues under discussion.

Part 4 Survey evidence

Survey evidence on values and attitudes towards the family reflects many of the dimensions of continuity and change already identified. However, before we look at the evidence in more detail we should stress the need for caution. The data in this sphere is far from comprehensive and the extent to which it is possible to identify changes over time, or indeed differences between groups, is severely limited by the nature of the material.

The survey evidence reviewed here falls into three groups: large and small scale academic surveys; surveys conducted by commercial opinion polling companies and advertising agencies; and finally data from questionnaires carried in national newspapers and magazines. Clearly they vary considerably in the degrees to which they could be said to be 'representative' of any section of the community in a truly statistical sense. In addition, by no means all of the surveys were expressly conducted in order to elicit information about values and attitudes towards marriage and the family. In many cases these issues were covered in a single section of a lengthy questionnaire or indeed a single question. This has obvious implications for the amount of comparative analysis which has been possible as data relating to a particular issue may only be available from one of the surveys. In a very real sense then the issues raised in this section partly reflect the nature and limitations of the material used.

Additionally we should stress that we have limited ourselves to a discussion of the nature of values and the extent to which they have or have not changed. Whilst we do not intend to imply that values develop in a vacuum we have not addressed the very important social and economic changes which have occurred in society over the past century or more and which will have clearly interacted in complex and dynamic ways with social attitudes and values. For those who would wish to pursue such issues we have included a short bibliography.¹

In survey evidence 'the family' is consistently ranked as an essential element of individuals' lives, crucial for personal satisfaction, happiness, contentment, psychological well being,

etc. However, there are a number of separate elements to be considered. The evidence suggests that both marriage and the family are still primary values for the majority of people; that despite the divorce rates, most people still view marriage (initially at least) as permanent; and that most couples still desire children and see them as an essential element in the transition from being a 'couple' to being a 'family'. However, though these elements would suggest a considerable degree of continuity, the picture is not so clear if one looks at the qualities being sought in a marriage; at the increasing acceptability of divorce, cohabitation and premarital sexual relationships; and at attitudes towards family forms other than the nuclear family. Similarly, whilst some changes are becoming more acceptable the possible or actual consequences of these, particularly for children, are a cause for concern for many people.

Dimension of continuity and change

The family and marriage as primary values

In surveys of values using different scales, in different countries, with different age and occupational groups and different sexes, some variant of the phrase 'family security' is consistently highly ranked.

In an open ended question in a national survey conducted in 1975 by the Social Science Research Council's Survey Unit, for example, people were asked what sorts of things they think of when they hear the term 'quality of life'; the largest single category of all references for the whole sample was to family, homelife and marriage. However, there were notable differences between men and women. Although 23% of all respondents referred to 'family' factors, only 18% of men did so, compared with 26% of women. The position was completely reversed for 'living standards', which were endorsed by 23% of men and only 13% of women.²

A more recent survey in Colchester in 1979/80 which involved interviews with 461 people similarly reported that most people in that sample saw marriage and family life as the most important aspects of their lives. There was little variation in the lists of aspects of life drawn up in order of importance by men and women of different ages — marriage and the family was consistently ranked ahead of health, job, money, friends, and so on.³

The Social Survey Unit's questionnaire also asked about the actual level of satisfaction with marriage and family life. No

separate figures were given for men and women, but on a scale from 1-10 the family remained high and constant between survey dates (Table 1). Clearly such results may simply indicate that people are reticent to admit to a strange interviewer that their family life is not good. However, other work supports a conclusion that the family is an important source of happiness.

Table 1. Satisfaction with different aspects of life

	Mean satisfaction rating		
	1971	1973	1975
Marriage	9.2	—	—
Family life	8.5	—	8.8
Job	8.3	8.3	8.0
Town	—	7.8	8.1
Health	7.9	7.7	7.8
District	7.9	7.5	7.9
Being a housewife	7.9	—	8.1
Leisure	7.6	7.5	7.7
House	7.4	7.8	7.8
Standard of living	6.9	7.4	7.7
Education	6.5	6.7	6.9
Democracy	6.1	6.7	7.3
Financial situation	5.5	6.6	7.3
Life in Britain	—	—	6.5
Life as a whole	7.8	7.6	7.8

Source: J Hall, (1976) *Social Trends No 7*, p 50, table III

On the basis of the surveys reviewed here it would seem justified to state that the majority of young people **still** want to marry. A 'Sun' newspaper survey of teenagers' attitudes in October 1980 claimed, for example, that most teenagers want marriage, parenthood and a happy home life in the future. Seventy per cent of the 13-19 year olds who wrote to the newspaper felt that marriage was definitely not out of date, with 80% of girls and 65% of boys wanting a religious wedding.⁴ The continued popularity of marriage is also supported by more representative surveys. Amongst the 15-19 year olds in a commercial survey by McCann Erikson in 1977⁵ only 9% of single men and women in the sample said they would not marry or did not know. The slightly older age group seem to hold the same views, for the vast majority of the 15-24 year olds in a 'NOW'/MORI survey in 1979 also intended to marry.⁶

The meaning of marriage and family life

The evidence does therefore support a conclusion that marriage and family life are still highly valued by the majority of people. More problematic perhaps is to what extent the meaning of these relationships and institutions have, or indeed are changing. We return again to a question posed earlier — what exactly is it that is valued?

Permanence: Despite the high rates of divorce, permanence still appears to be important. Although in the McCann Erikson survey of 15-25 year olds, 60% said they might personally divorce, only 13% of the 'NOW'/MORI sample of a similar age thought it likely that they **would** divorce. Significantly perhaps, 87% of divorcees in an NOP survey in 1980 had expected their marriage to last forever and the proportion of the younger age group (18-34 year olds) was similar to that of the over 55s.⁷ (It must be noted that the broad age bands used in these results may mask important differences.)

Divorce is however now fairly widely accepted, if not actually welcomed, though attitudes do reflect considerable concern. In a Mirror Group survey called 'Women in the '80s' and involving one thousand women aged between 18 and 40, around a quarter actually felt divorce should be made more difficult.⁸ Attitudes towards divorce also reflect a degree of dual standards. In the NOP survey of divorcees, for example, though 78% felt they had tried 'hard enough' to save their own marriage, only 36% believed that others had tried hard enough. One area where there does appear to have been a change in attitudes is in relation to sexual activity, though here too the picture painted by available survey evidence is far from straightforward.

Premarital sexual activity

Premarital sexual activity does seem to be more acceptable — particularly amongst young people. In 1969 in a national survey Gorer found a 50% increase in the proportion of people in favour of sexual experience before marriage compared with a similar survey he was involved in twenty years earlier — an increase 'almost entirely due to the response of younger people'.⁹ Indeed, in the 1979 'NOW'/MORI survey of 15-24 year olds, 36% of young people actually **disapproved** of marrying someone they had not slept with. However, attitudes appear to be changing in all age groups. In the national survey of women under 40 years old, conducted by the Mirror Group Newspapers Survey Department in 1980, almost identical proportions in all age groups (over 50%) felt premarital sex

was acceptable. The data does in fact suggest that part of any age difference may be reflecting a greater willingness to admit to more permissive views. For example, in the National Opinion Poll survey of divorcees a perhaps surprisingly large proportion of the over 55 year olds (34%) admitted to having had sexual experience before marriage (though of course sexual experience can mean very different things to different people).

However, in this sphere too people may hold different standards for themselves and others. The 1980 Mirror Group survey of women aged 18-40 actually gave an option 'alright for some but not for me' in relation to pre-marital sex which was endorsed by 13% of the 31-40 age group compared with only 6% of the younger group. Similarly, in the same survey, although 84% of the single women accepted or positively favoured pre-marital sex, only 66% admitted that they themselves would have sexual experience before marriage.

Related to this, though perhaps showing even more uniformity with age, are the changes in attitudes towards cohabitation. In a 1980 survey conducted by MORI for the 'Sunday Times' only 7% of 15-24 year olds supported the view that living together was morally wrong compared with 50% of those over 65.¹⁰ Two years later, in the report of a further MORI survey, the reporter writes that the over 65s 'could not even summon up that degree of condemnation (50%) for the idea of unmarried couples living together'.¹¹

Cohabitation is therefore becoming more acceptable, but for those involved the perception of the relationship appears to vary considerably. In the 1979 General Household Survey over half of the women who indicated they were co-habiting had originally described themselves as married. They had been co-habiting longer, and were more likely to have children, than cohabiting women who described themselves as 'living together', suggesting a more temporary arrangement.¹² It is also perhaps worth noting that 6% of the cohabiting adults in the 1982 MORI survey thought what they were doing was morally wrong.

Fidelity:

Sexual conduct within marriage is also a subject of debate. A range of surveys continue to support a conclusion that faithfulness in relationships and monogamy are still highly valued. In 1981 in what is described as 'one of the largest surveys ever undertaken on a world-wide scale' focused on values, 78% of the UK sample agreed with the sixth commandment — 'thou shall not commit adultery' — a far higher proportion than in

any other country. However, reflecting extreme scepticism, only 25% of other people were believed to live by it and there does seem to be a view that infidelity within marriage is an important source of problems.¹³

On the basis of his two surveys in 1950 and 1969, for example, Gorer argued that infidelity was considered more important in the late 60s as a cause of unhappy marriages than 20 years previously — but so too was jealousy. Only 5% of the 1969 sample, evenly distributed by age, sex and social class, actually felt that faithfulness was not now so important and men appeared more concerned with fidelity than women. The recent 'Sunday Times'/MORI survey, in March 1982, provides some indication of the fine detail of these attitudes. Over 70% of 18-25 year olds, over 80% of 65 year olds and over two thirds of the total sample felt adultery was morally wrong. However, at the same time only 16% of the total (slightly fewer women than men again) felt sexual fidelity to be the **most** important ingredient of a good marriage. It does seem that whilst fidelity and monogamy are still valued, they are not considered to be as important as other qualities in a marriage.

Marriage: alive and well but different

In his 1950 survey, Gorer identified the traditional concept of marriage as a complementary relationship in which 'the ideal characters and function of husband and wife are seen as contrasting and complementing one another, man as the breadwinner and the defender of the home, woman as housewife and mother, man as aggressive and woman as timid'. In 1969, repeating the survey, Gorer claimed that the results of the 1969 survey demonstrated a major shift towards more egalitarian qualities — 'a symmetrical relationship'. Egalitarian ideals are certainly consistently highly ranked in different survey results as Table 2 shows. For most people, sharing, mutual adaptiveness, friendship and trust seem to represent the ideal qualities of a happy marriage. As the writer of the report in the 'Sunday Times' recently argued on the basis of the latest MORI survey of values in this field:

"the place that women now hold in society . . . has registered a sharp improvement in the eyes of both men and women over two decades."¹⁴

However, the existence of egalitarianism in practice within families is a very different issue and here change has been much less pronounced. Indeed in the 'Sunday Times' MORI survey, in 66% of cases the wife did all the housework, and other surveys suggests that even when working **full time**,

women are usually expected — and indeed often accept — that housework and childcare are their responsibility. In a recent study of women involved in factory work for example, the researchers noted that the women's employment had 'to be fitted in with household duties and childcare arrangements, which they and their families regard as unquestionably their responsibility.'¹⁵

Table 2. Qualities for a happy marriage, rankings in a number of surveys*

Quality	Rankings				
	A	B	C	D	E
Give and take/equality/understanding	1	1	1	1	1
Companionship/shared interests	2	4	2	2	5
Trust/respect/honesty	3	5	5	3	—
Love and affection	4	3	3	4	2
Children	5	6	—	—	12
Sexual compatibility	6	—	6	6	4
Financial security	6	2	7	—	7
Harmony/peace/contentment	6	—	3	7	—

- A Gorer: this data is taken from a National Survey in 1969 which involved a sample of 1,987 men and women between the ages of 16 and 65.
- B This work was carried out by the now defunct Social Science Research Council Survey Unit. The data is taken from a survey in 1971 which involved a quota sample of 593 respondents in the seven largest conurbations in Britain.
- C 'Enter Marriage': a commercial survey of 110 married and engaged women undertaken in 1979 by Schlackman Market Research Group, as part of a series of surveys called 'The Seven Ages of Women'.
- D 'Entering Motherhood': part of the above series. This survey involved a quota sample of women (either having a baby or already mothers) using both a questionnaire and group discussion. The sample size was 445.
- E This survey was conducted in April 1982 by Market and Opinion Research International, using a quota sample of 1,069 adults aged over 18.

*The categories of 'qualities' used here have been adapted from the originals to facilitate comparison between the different surveys.

It has been suggested that the expectations of young people entering marriage and family life may be **too** high and that this may precipitate problems, as the institution and its relationships fail to live up to preconceived ideals. Whilst significant changes are occurring in attitudes and values amongst the young, they do not perhaps suggest the dawning of realism in some important areas.

As we have seen for example, young people do appear to hold traditional aspirations in relation to marriage and parenthood, and romantic love in particular is seen to be very important to

young people as a quality for a good marriage. 60% of those under 24 felt it was the **most** important quality in the 1982 MORI survey. For the sample overall, of all ages 'romance' came tenth in a list of important qualities.

Attitudes to parenthood

Children are a key element in the ideas and experiences of family life. The belief that the couple do not become a family until they have children is epitomised in the phrase 'starting a family' and in this sphere too, continuity may be more significant than change. The importance of children, in both the ideal marriage and a happy family life and the predominance of the image of a two child nuclear family is well represented in survey evidence. There has been a decline in average family size, as we noted earlier, and this undoubtedly does reflect a change in views about what is considered to be ideal.

There is however also an important distinction between views of what is ideal for society and what is considered ideal for oneself: a distinction which is discussed in more detail in another Study Commission publication.¹⁶ Suffice it to say here that over the past decade or more, women's ideas about what is ideal for them have come closer to their ideals for society as a whole and the ideal of a two child family now predominates. However, as an EEC report of a Europe-wide survey in 1979, looking at attitudes towards parenthood, concluded, the reduction in family size does not appear to suggest a widespread rejection of parenthood, rather:

"the tendency to restrict the ideal size of the family . . . goes hand in hand with the continuing importance of the family to Europeans today."¹⁷

Parenthood is certainly still popular even amongst the more career minded young women. Indeed, only 7% of the working women under 25 years old in the McCann Erikson survey of young people mentioned earlier, said they actually did not want children. There does, however, appear to have been a shift in the view that parenthood is a **necessary** and indeed **primary** ingredient for a happy marriage. In the European survey in 1979, whilst over half of the UK sample agreed for example that parenthood is 'the **ultimate** fulfilment of men and women', a full 38% (more than in any other country) either strongly or slightly disagreed with this somewhat extreme statement. In the recent 'Sunday Times' report of the MORI survey in May 1982 only 14% of both men and women felt that having children was the **most** important ingredient for a good marriage. Similarly, in the national survey of women

aged 18-40 carried out by Mirror Survey Division, whilst 62% of respondents felt children were essential or desirable if a marriage was to be happy, a sizeable minority (35%) disagreed and women married without children frequently claimed that children were 'not at all essential'.

Parent/child relationships

One dimension of the continuing importance of the family is the extent to which it is still considered a major reference point for the young. Some early work in this area was done by the Lynds in 1929 and 1937 in 'Middletown' in the USA.¹⁸ They were concerned to identify elements of what is today termed the generation gap — the idea of a growing lack of understanding between parents and children associated with an increasing rate of social change. The Lynds concluded that the role of the home in the socialisation of the young was declining. A more recent study in 1979 in the same town provides somewhat surprising results however. The research concludes that there is 'increased family solidarity, a smaller generation gap, closer marital communications and more religion' than the studies of fifty years earlier had found.¹⁹

If the centrality of the family can be measured via attitudes toward parent/child relationships, what further evidence is there that these are significantly strained at the moment, or even that they have been markedly more or less in the past? The 'NOW'/MORI survey noted earlier reported 80% of their sample of 15-24 year olds — consistent across age, sex and social class — feeling that their parents understood them and 87% claiming to understand their parents. In a National Children's Bureau study, 86% of the 16 year olds in a national sample in 1974 felt they got on well with their mother, 80% got on well with their father.²⁰ In a commercial survey of 11-16 year olds published in 1980, 55% took most notice of their father and 54% of their mother compared with friends, teachers and others.²¹ These proportions however did decrease with age, but such figures do not suggest a widespread and rapid deterioration of parent/child relationships.

The teenagers responding to the 'Sun' survey in October 1980 were reported to have been overwhelmingly happy at home though figures in the 'NOW'/MORI survey of 15-24 year olds showing those living at home to be less likely to be cheerful than those living away from home (41% against 53%), present a slightly more complex picture for this older age group.

Sources of disagreement between parents and children are perhaps predictable — appearance, time of going to bed, choice

of friends etc — but they would seem to be less significant than is commonly believed. The McCann Erikson survey reports only 5% of the parents of 15-24 year olds disapproving of the choice of steady boy/girl friends and in the National Children's Bureau study, only 2% of the 16 year olds disagreed often with their parents on choice of friends of opposite sex, and 11% about appearances.

Inevitably, however, the overall picture is far from straightforward. Despite the attitudes expressed in these surveys there is still a great deal of concern about the quality of parent/child relationships. In the EEC survey in 1979 mentioned earlier, for example, 78% of the UK sample complained that parents were not strict enough with their children — a much greater proportion in any country — either strongly or slightly disagreed however, and perhaps somewhat paradoxically, 44% in the UK (again higher than average) felt that parents were not concerned enough with their children's opinions. 62% — by far the highest proportion in any country — either strongly or slightly disagree that parents are closer to their children today than they had been themselves. In all other EEC countries under half of the sample disagreed.

Given these results it is perhaps not surprising to find that over 50% of those interviewed in the UK for the EEC survey felt that individuals and society fail to take the true needs of children into account. Such concerns are perhaps most apparent in attitudes towards working mothers and those attitudes associated with divorce.

Maternal employment and women's work

Irrespective of the research evidence on the effects of maternal employment on children, attitudes do reflect real concern that children will suffer if they do not have the full time care of their mothers in particular. However, there are large numbers who do not share these views or who hold ambivalent attitudes.

Two recent surveys of the readers of 'Spare Rib' and the 'Townswoman' magazine vividly illustrate the differences and dimensions of ambivalence.²² Whilst a majority of both groups felt work was good for women (albeit a smaller majority of the slightly older 'Townswoman' sample) the two groups were divided about the effects on the children. A clear majority of the 'Townswoman' sample felt it was bad for them, compared with only 7% of 'Spare Rib' readers.

Despite the overt desire for egalitarianism within marriage described earlier, traditional views of the division of responsibility within the family are still common. Indeed whilst 48% of the 1982 MORI survey disagreed that a woman's place still was in the home, 35% either strongly or slightly agreed. Though slightly more women disagreed overall than men the difference was not great. Traditional views were more common amongst older respondents, working class families and amongst separated and divorced people — 46% of whom agreed. 90% of working women, however, felt that work either had no effect on the quality of their family life or actually helped it.

It is in relation to mothers of young children taking paid employment that attitudes become most conservative. In the 1982 MORI survey 61% agreed that such mothers should stay at home and look after the children. Women, however, were not as sure as men and the age group most likely to have dependent children were evenly split between agreement and disagreement. Such figures however can be no more than suggestive of current values in this sphere which are extremely complex. Some surveys suggest, for example, that mothers of very young children are more likely to agree that such women should not work.

Interview material from the survey of several hundred women factory workers mentioned earlier suggested in fact that women with children under five were unwilling to consider full time work unless financial pressures were extreme.²³ A number of surveys have, however, noted different responses from men and women to the presence of young children in the home. In 1968 Gorer, for example, noted that fathers in his survey mentioned the presence of children as an essential component of a happy marriage more frequently than mothers, who were 'much more likely to complain about the way the presence of young children render their lives restricted and monotonous'.

There is some suggestion in survey results that people feel parents do not spend enough time with their children. Indeed, in the EEC survey, 71% of young parents in the UK felt this and in Europe as a whole, such fears were more common where both parents worked. However, 86% of UK respondents felt that flexitime would help parents to look after their children better (more women than men) and 50% felt that parental leave without pay after the birth of a child would be helpful.

Divorce

The welfare of children is an important focus of current debates about divorce and lone parenthood, as is the nature of obligations between divorcing parents and non parents. This is however one area where attitudinal material on a comprehensive basis is badly lacking. Indeed, in their recent report on the financial consequences of divorce the Law Commission note that:

"The lack of factual information obviously constitutes a formidable handicap to the task of law reform. Moreover although the response to the Discussion Paper has been helpful in enabling us to form some view of the public feeling about the policy of the law, it has to be accepted that this response is necessarily selective, and to some extent self-interested."²⁴

They go on to argue for a survey designed to ascertain public opinion on the major policy issues involved. These issues would include the custody of children and the payment of maintenance for these and for a spouse – usually the wife. The Commission noted that there was a considerable amount of agreement that priority should be given to making such financial provision 'as would safeguard the maintenance and welfare of children'. Payment of maintenance to wives however appears to be a more controversial area. Opinion appears to be divided as to whether marital misconduct should be considered when deciding maintenance, whilst many people now believe that women's increasing economic independence should make maintenance of ex wives redundant.

The Law Commission argues that the law should be based on widely accepted principles of justice, but it is clearly the case that to date we have very little information about which principles would be considered just. In relation to custody, there is certainly a view that, as one lawyer put it:

"although there is no legal rule that care should be granted to a mother, in most circumstances the mother is preferred if nothing else, by the laws of nature and the structure of society."²⁵

However just how widespread is the acceptance of these 'laws of nature' and to what extent social structures are being changed is an important gap in our knowledge about attitudes and values.

We do know that attitudes towards family units other than the nuclear family are changing to some extent, though the data is

again very limited and the samples very small. In a small scale survey in Nottingham in the early 70s for example, George and Wilding found that 65% of the people they interviewed believed that with a reasonable income mothers and fathers could bring up children alone.²⁶ Similarly, in a small commercial survey of married women entering motherhood, 38% disagreed with the view that children in one-parent families were at a 'terrible disadvantage', whilst a further third were unsure.²⁷

It would appear, however, that lone parents perceive that others' attitudes towards them are frequently unsympathetic. Over 60% of the sample in George and Wilding's study noted a change in attitudes towards them and the researchers estimated that 38.6% of these attitudes could be regarded as unhelpful or rejecting.

The caring role of the family

We have already discussed the extent to which families – and usually the women in the family – care for their dependent relatives. Until recently little attention was given to either the carers, or the cared for, in these situations and we still know little about the thoughts and feelings of the people involved.

The family's responsibility to care is valued in our society and it is this motivation which influences many of the people involved. Recent reports from the Equal Opportunities Commission have provided some qualitative material in this sphere. When asked why they had taken on the task of caring for elderly or other handicapped dependants, one report notes that:

"most were surprised and perplexed when the question was put to them . . . the vast majority considered that the responsibility for caring was naturally theirs . . . It's your family isn't it? . . . you can't say duty but they are family and it's a responsibility."²⁸

A related aspect of family relationships and responsibilities is the extent to which families maintain contact with other relatives. The recent EEC survey suggests that there is concern that contact with grandparents, for example, is not as great as it used to be. We have already noted the possibility of misleading historical comparisons, but whether grandparents do or do not have as much contact with their grandchildren as they did, does not alter the fact that two thirds of UK respondents felt they did not and that this was regretted.

Summary

The material reviewed in this section is certainly inadequate for an indepth exploration of changes over time, or differences between population groups. In many cases the samples are very small, not truly representative and the picture presented is frequently ambiguous. This is partly because of the difficulties of comparing responses to differently worded questions. But it is perhaps also because changes are occurring in certain values and attitudes associated with marriage, parenthood and the family. Ambiguity may inevitably accompany a time of transition but on the basis of material presented here, it is extremely difficult to point to any reliable evidence for a major widespread shift in **fundamental** beliefs. Even in those areas where change is more evident traditional values may persist. Cohabitation, for example, for many people entails permanent, monogamous relationships and parenthood. And whilst there have been changes in the qualities that people are seeking from a marriage, most people would be unwilling to criticise the quest for equality between men and women in principle.

The review of survey evidence has however thrown up into sharp perspective important areas of uncertainty and ambivalence. In particular, there is concern that children may be adversely affected by divorce, lone parenthood and maternal employment. In addition the attitudes expressed towards equality in the home appear to be at variance with behaviour within families. There are, as we shall see in the next section, some indicators of family stress which should be, and are, a cause for concern. However, it can be argued that these are at least partly a result of ambivalence rather than a direct consequence of change.

Responding to change: the nature of the dilemmas

Whatever the true comparison between the family in history and today and whatever the nature of the values attached to it, the family clearly remains and will remain a key social unit in society. Consequently, values and attitudes towards 'the family' underlie policy, guide practice and influence (but do not necessarily determine) behaviour in many fields.

Central and local government, the law, churches, voluntary bodies, trade unions, a range of professions and others, all have explicit or implicit views of 'the family', the roles and relationships within it and the interface between the family and other sectors of society. To the extent that such views fail to take account of the changes in roles and relationships we have described, they will not relate to the reality of family life for an increasing number of men, women and children.

Many public and private services are for example organised upon explicit or implicit views and values about the respective roles and responsibilities of different family members. Within the world of work, despite some changes, there is still an underlying assumption that the traditional single earner family is the norm. Though maternity provisions have been introduced, paid paternity leave remains very rare and men are not yet seen to have child care responsibilities. Rigid ideas about the respective roles of husband and wife, mother and father are also reflected in the history of statutory day care provision,¹ whilst the assumption that mothers do not work could be argued also to underpin the provision of many health services. The recent moves to provide more accessible health facilities at places of work and at more convenient hours are to be welcomed, but similar arguments are heard in relation to parents' evenings at schools and other 'appointment' issues. Similarly, in the words of the recent Green Paper, the present system of family taxation, though under review, still:

"proceeds on the basis (originally enacted in 1806) that 'A woman's income . . . shall . . . be deemed for tax purposes to be his (her husband's) income'."²

Traditional views of the 'ideal family patterns' also continue to influence the attitudes and actions of many professions, which can have adverse consequences for some families. There is, for example, evidence that lone parents and step families may feel a great pressure to conform to 'ideal' standards of child care, possibly far removed from what is common in many intact two parent families.³ This may be particularly acute when the professional concerned is in a formal position of 'evaluating' them as parents — in custody cases, for example.

Change may also create dilemmas for those individuals and families adhering to 'traditional' beliefs. For example, whilst the Roman Catholic Church continues to insist on the rejection of all forms of artificial contraception, many millions of Catholic couples, for financial or other reasons, choose to disobey the teachings of the Church and control the timing, size and spacing of their families by 'artificial' means. Whilst the difficulties facing those who break the 'rules' are given some attention, the overall situation may also cause much soul-searching amongst those who remain committed to 'traditional' values.

Similarly, the continued insistence of the Church of England on the permanency of marriage vows means that many couples, where one or both partners are divorced, must remarry outside the church, despite their adherence to its teachings in other respects. Such dilemmas do present formidable problems for those within the church. For example, as one of our members has argued:

"Should Anglicans continue to insist upon the permanence of marriage? And, if that is the right thing to do, how do they cope in love and charity with the increasing number of people whose marriage has failed?" Michael Mann⁴

Resistance to change

The very complexity of much legislation and many administrative procedures represent a formidable barrier to any response to change. But there are others which relate more directly to value questions.

It is a matter for some considerable debate whether any sector or 'institution' has an obligation to uphold what are perceived as 'ideal' values, attempting to reverse or slow down certain trends rather than passively adapting to pressure from elsewhere. In many cases people look to the 'institution' in question for guidance (as with the church and medical ethics for example)

and they will be disappointed, if not in fact confused, if such guidance is not provided. There are very real fears also that legislative and institutional changes may inadvertently undermine the family. Such fears have been a constant feature of debates in Parliament and elsewhere for over a century. Proposals to ameliorate the situation of wives and children alone, for example, have been, and still are, criticised not only as being bad in themselves, but 'as securing the welfare of individuals by undermining the integrity of monogamous marriage and stable family life'.⁵ Two recent examples confirm that these fears are still very much a part of the contemporary debates around the family. For example, during the House of Lords debate preceding the defeat of the Marriage (Enabling) Bill, which would have allowed a person to marry anyone who is not a blood relative, it was argued that the Bill, as originally drafted, 'would undermine the whole fabric of family life'.⁶

Similarly, recent comments on the effects of the Divorce Law Reform Act of 1969 argue that it reflected a devaluing of marriage and the family which has had its reward in the increased divorce rate of the past decade.⁷ The same report, from the Society of Conservative Lawyers, also expressed the widely-held view that alternative life styles were not being merely tolerated but rather actively encouraged by being accorded the advantages previously reserved for marriage. They cited the Law Commission's proposals that the remaining distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate children should be eroded.

It is perhaps inevitable that change in policy and practice (whether enshrined in the law or otherwise) will have both intended and unintended consequences. But, at the same time, the social and humanitarian arguments for change are powerful.

The barriers to change thrown up by the value dilemmas discussed above are often explicitly recognised and the subject of much debate. Significantly, some of the most explicit value questions about family life, for example those concerned with divorce and abortion, have been the most controversial pieces of post-war legislation and have also, again significantly, involved private members' legislation and a free vote in the House of Commons. Such legislation often creates something approaching a national debate about the value issues involved and often is only introduced, or certainly carried, after many years of discussion, enquiries and heart-searching. But once these decisions have been taken, of equal importance, is the extent to which the implications for the required adjustments to a range of policies and practices are followed through or acted upon. Some such decisions or adjustments are taken

later, but they are not always taken, and confusion, ambiguity and often hardships are the results. Divorce provides a key example of this phenomenon.

There have been immense changes and the divorce laws of the 1970s do reflect a considerable shift since the views expressed by the Royal Commission on Marriage and Divorce in 1956, which noted that:

"the Western world has recognised that it is in the best interests of all concerned . . . that marriage should be monogamous and that it should last for life".⁸

But while divorce law reform has led, *inter alia*, to more divorces, an increase in the number of one parent families, increased remarriage and, hence, growing numbers of men and women who have more than one family, the implications of these developments for maintenance, social security and taxation, in particular, and the relative responsibilities of citizen and state in general, have not always been adequately thought through and acted upon.

The financial provision at divorce and the law relating to this are as we have already noted presently the subject of much debate. The emphasis in deciding maintenance payments is now expected to be shifted to encouraging self sufficiency. There are however many unresolved value issues. What value should be placed on the custodial parent's childrearing responsibilities? What of the limitations imposed on a woman's long term ability to be self-sufficient by past commitment to child care and domestic responsibilities? And what of women's continued disadvantaged position in the labour market, where they are most frequently found in low paid, low status jobs? In any event there is widespread recognition that maintenance payments do little to alleviate the considerable financial difficulties experienced by many one parent families. Scope for improvements are minimal. Few men, and even fewer women, earn enough to support themselves and a former family in a separate household, let alone two families. The reduction of poverty amongst one parent families is therefore an unresolved issue arising out of divorce.

We have also argued that the welfare of children is a major focus of the contemporary debate. The ties of parenthood and the rights and responsibilities it involves are in many respects independent of marriage and do not dissolve with the marriage. Yet the proportion of 'divorced' children losing contact with the non-custodial parent — usually the father — is high. There is an urgent need for processes and policies which will help to

reduce the often extreme levels of conflict around divorce and promote more positive relationships between both the parents and the children. Perhaps the slow progress in this sphere is a reflection of the still considerable ambivalence towards divorce. Conciliation procedures such as those being developed at Bristol, appear to make a positive contribution to this objective⁹ and the consideration of these by an interdepartmental committee in the Civil Service is therefore to be welcomed. Additionally, one report has recently argued that the alternatives to divorce being developed by some couples, which allow the ending of marriage without breaking the ties of parenthood are worthy of serious consideration.¹⁰

Many one parent families, but also many two parent families as well, are affected by the failure to think through, and act upon, the consequences of another major trend that has affected the family — the changing role of women and hence the developing relationship between men and women in society, and the changed association between work and family life. There are different views — and values — about these trends and perhaps as a consequence of this policies have not changed to accommodate them.

This produces problems, anxieties and not a little hardship for families, particularly for women who are caught in a values trap. If they stay at home to look after the children, as they are often urged to do, they may suffer the implicit and explicit suggestion from some that they should be working, while others may cast doubt on their suitability for motherhood if they do in fact work outside the home. And for those women with husbands on low wages, there is often considerable financial pressure to seek employment, not for luxuries, or 'pin money', but to help feed, clothe and perhaps educate their children. These pressures present women with a major dilemma.

There is a sense in which society (and Parliament) has not made up its mind about these issues. It neither provides adequate child benefits (and/or a home responsibility allowance) for parents who wish to stay at home to provide child care nor has it provided adequate alternative child care arrangements for the children of those families where both parents choose — or feel they have to — work. Arguably one set of provisions follows from one value judgement, another set from the other. Although many would urge the need for choice and hence the proper mix of services and benefits.

The consequences of inertia

It would be far too simplistic to argue that all family problems are due to an inadequate response to the social and demographic changes we have been discussing. As Steiner has recently argued, families may dissolve despite the presence of favourable social and economic circumstances whilst others 'hold together — providing for their members, maintaining Lasch's haven in a heartless world — under conditions of war, economic depression, slum living, environmental pollution and educational jungles'.¹¹ And there may well be 'no sure-fire policy prescription to strengthen families' but as he also notes, there is a very real sense in which the lack of adequate or appropriate support has led to severe difficulties for many individuals and their families — whatever form these families take.

In recent years, for example, the high incidence of depression amongst women at home with young children has received increasing attention.¹² Estimates of the frequency of significant depression range between 20% and 35% but it is without doubt a serious problem. Whilst the explanations for this are complex commentators have pointed to the association between mental well being and factors such as housing conditions, marital relationships, the presence of young children and the lack of choice in relation to employment.¹³

A number of important and influential committees of enquiry have argued for the extension of child care provision for the children of both working and non-working mothers, as a positive contribution to the quality of life for both adult and child, yet facilities are still woefully inadequate.¹⁴

Similarly, in England and Wales, in March 1980 there were just over one hundred thousand children under 18 in the care of a local authority.¹⁵ Over the past decade the proportion of children in care has been rising steadily standing at 7.9 per thousand children under 18 in 1980. Clearly, children are taken into care for a variety of reasons, ranging from the illness of a parent to grave neglect and delinquent acts, but there has been a decline in the numbers admitted voluntarily.¹⁶ A disproportionate number of these children are from one parent families, but others are from two parent families who find themselves homeless, unable to cope, or suspected of neglect. Financial difficulties are a common contributory factor, and may indeed be increasing.¹⁷ Family violence, teenage pregnancies, football hooliganism and other forms of vandalism, anti-social behaviour and juvenile crime are also cited as further evidence of family stress.

Interpretation of all these trends in the context of changing family values and patterns is indeed a minefield. Some of the changes are partly reflections of changes in the way the data are collected, of increased public sensitivity to a particular phenomenon or of changes in the law. Similarly, comparisons with the past suggest that in many of these areas, the situation has apparently improved beyond recognition, for example, the treatment of children by parents or guardians. Cries of increasing lawlessness and the breakdown of social networks must be seen in this wider context, but, nevertheless, there is much deeply held and genuine public concern.

For some people, as we have described, the trends suggest that support for the traditional family is inadequate. They are frequently seen as a result of family poverty, caused by low wages and a fiscal system which discriminates against families with young children. Attention is also focussed on the inflexible relationships between work and the family, which almost inevitably place the full burden of breadwinning onto the father and of child care onto the mother. It is argued that support within the community has declined, perhaps encouraged by state provision of services and that extended family networks have been seriously affected by increased geographical mobility. Others, however, point to an increasing preoccupation with individual gratification which militates against the good of the family unit. There is certainly no simple answer to these issues and there is undoubtedly some truth in most of these positions.

A concluding comment

There are other issues which are at present the subject of debate in diverse fields, which also serve to throw into sharp perspective differing values relating to 'the family' and herald the many dimensions which are of relevance to a discussion of values and the family in the future.

The Council of Europe, for example, recently held a colloquy on the legal problems concerning unmarried couples. During the course of the discussions, the participants touched on almost all aspects of social and economic well being, for most of them may be, to a greater or lesser extent, affected if a couple choose to cohabit. The topics ranged, for example, from practical aspects of inheritance, pension rights and the ownership of property to formulating legislation which did not exclude non-married couples and the social and legal position of a child from such a union.¹⁸

Similarly, the present public debate over the possibility of artificial insemination of women unable to conceive, through a donor or a more anonymous 'spermbank', raises fundamental issues. It has involved much discussion of the rights of children to know their 'biological' parents and the difficulty of defining one in this case. The relative 'rights' of parents and children and the nature of responsibilities are also an intrinsic part of the contemporary debate about abortion and the position of severely handicapped children — both of which involve fundamental 'moral issues' beyond the scope of this report. Clearly, there are others we might have chosen. All of them suggest that 'value issues' and differing positions relating to the family and the nature of relationships and roles within it, will continue to arise as social, economic and technological changes have their impact.

Contribution to the debate

We have seen that the changes in family life have many different dimensions. Change in any sphere brings both benefits and disadvantages — new dangers but also new freedoms. One of the most important issues to arise from the discussion in this report has been the need for a clearer understanding of those particular aspects of family life which are valued if we are to better understand the implications of change.

We have identified three recurring themes in the contemporary debate about marriage and family life: the position of women both in the family and the wider society; the nature of family responsibilities and family obligations under conditions of change; and the welfare of children and other family members. Within each sphere we have seen that the implications of change are the subject of considerable controversy. This controversy arises partly from the lack of information in regard to some of these issues (for example the effects of divorce on children) but it also arises out of the confusion about which qualities and/or aspects of family life are in fact valued and the relative importance of these.

There does seem to be a considerable degree of consensus in some areas. We have demonstrated, for example, that the family is still a valued institution in society, even in a period of quite rapid change; that qualities such as faithfulness and permanence are still important; that the family still provides a ready made network of support with mutual obligations; and that children are still a valued dimension of family life and their welfare is still of primary importance.

But we have also illustrated change. Technological change — in the sphere of contraception in particular — has provided the opportunity for greater freedom, particularly for women. There is growing support for greater choice for both men and women in relation to family roles and a greater sharing of responsibility. Additionally, we have demonstrated a widespread acceptance of divorce or separation, should a partnership 'fail', and the growing popularity of cohabitation. These changes in family forms and relationships raise important questions about other obligations and responsibilities, questions

which we have constantly returned to in this report. Perhaps one of the 'new dangers' associated with change is that fundamental obligations will be neglected.

The growing choice available to women is a change to be welcomed. It is also one which offers more choices for men in some spheres, in particular, an opportunity to be more involved with the rearing of children. In the past we have as a society devalued the roles involved in the raising of children. There is a need for a greater shared responsibility and commitment between men and women in this sphere. Indeed, one way of achieving higher status for the nurturing role is the sharing of it.

However, more choice for women also implies less choice for men in some spheres. Freedom and security are primary values in our society, but in affirming freedom, what should be the limitations? Responsibility for children must surely also impose some limitations. We have described how families are smaller and that there are some couples who are choosing not to have children. Parenthood is no longer a universally accepted obligation within marriage. Indeed those who choose not to bear children may choose to accept other responsibilities and make positive contributions to society in other ways. However, if we wish our society to continue, someone must have children, and the major responsibility for child rearing must clearly rest with the family. But the obligations and responsibilities of parenthood in a situation of change remain confused.

Whether it is men or women or both who take the responsibility for child rearing, the continuous provision of care imposes responsibilities and obligations on other family members and indeed on the wider society. A recognition of the value of 'caring' — whether that be for children or for other relatives — demands reciprocal support. But there is a sense in which the implications of this reciprocity, and in particular of more choice for women, are not being followed through, either within individual families or, arguably, in broader policy spheres.

We have demonstrated that despite the changes which are occurring, family life, involving close intimate relationships and parenthood, is valued by the majority of people in this country. Indeed, the trend towards remarriage supports this conclusion. But it would appear that one of the problems we do face is that the image of marriage and family life passed on to the young is one which is more aligned to fantasy than to reality. Whilst there is some consensus that expectations of marriage and family life are unrealistic, there is a lack of agree-

ment about how expectations may be changed — but changed they should be. Some feel that cohabitation contributes to a more realistic view of relationships. There are however others who would not welcome a growth in 'trial marriages'. But whatever the balance of opinion in that sphere, there is a need to foster realistic expectations of marriage and parenthood as a contribution to the well being of family life today.

Education has a central role to play. But, whilst specific human relations courses have a contribution to make it is limited. What is required is that the ethos of realistic expectations and commitment to shared roles within the family, and indeed the wider community, pervade a range of educational activities.

In reducing the over valued position of certain aspects of family life, such as the romantic image of marriage, and affording true recognition to aspects such as parenthood and the care of the elderly (which are in reality undervalued and receive little 'reward'), we would hope to achieve a balance that could only foster more healthy relationships between men and women and parents and children.

In a period of rapid social and economic change, there will be increased uncertainty and for many people, an increased sense of insecurity. Change has brought with it diversity and this does have far reaching implications for many values in contemporary society. But, as one of our members has recently suggested:

'Pluralism, in so far as it denotes a wide range of individual beliefs, does not necessarily mean that this variety cannot lead to a consensus of agreed essential values.'¹

The family in Britain is not about to disappear, nor is it being fundamentally undermined. However, important changes are taking place both within the family and in other spheres, such as employment, that bear on family life. Stress is undoubtedly associated with some changes, just as new opportunities are offered by others.

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Part 6 Contributions to the debate

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The Study Commission on the Family is an independent body which draws together and analyses information and research about the family, and considers policy questions in this field. In this way it aims to inform and participate in public discussion of issues of importance to family life in Britain. The Commission is under the Chairmanship of Sir Campbell Adamson and receives financial support from the Leverhulme Trust.

Occasional papers and publications

- 1 **Marriage in Britain 1945-80**, Dr J Dominian, 1980, £1.50.
- 2 **Low Pay and Family Poverty**, Marie McNay and Chris Pond, 1980, £1
- 3 **Fair Shares for Families: the need for a family impact statement**, Frank Field MP, 1980, £1.20
- 4 **The Family in the Kibbutz**, Elizabeth Irvine, 1980, £1.50
- 5 **Equity and Family Incomes: an analysis of current tax and benefit policy**, Jonathan Bradshaw, 1980, £1.50
- 6 **Families in Focus; Marriage, Divorce and Family Patterns**, Lesley Rimmer, 1981, £3.00
- 7 **Family Issues and Public Policy**, Edward Craven, Lesley Rimmer and Malcolm Wicks, 1982, £2.25
- 8 **Crisis or Challenge? Family Care, Elderly People and Social Policy**, Chris Rossiter and Malcolm Wicks, 1982, £4
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- 12 **One Parent Families: parents, children and public policy** Jennie Popay, Lesley Rimmer and Chris Rossiter, £4.25

Happy Families? A discussion paper on families in Britain, 1980, £1.80

Women, Work and the Family: a report on a survey of 'Townswoman' readers, Chris Rossiter, 1980, 75p

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Family Finances: an interim report from the working party on the Financial Circumstances of Families, 1981, £1.80

ISBN 0-907051 138 £2.75

Values and the changing Family: a final report from the working party on values, 1982, £2.75