

Family

Helping to understand the
modern British family





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Foreword

Scottish Widows' heritage is rooted in a desire to support families in need.

Established in the early nineteenth century, our founders had the foresight to understand that the widows, sisters and families of those lost or wounded in the Napoleonic Wars needed help in securing their physical and financial well-being.

While the world has evolved beyond all recognition in the past two centuries, family remains an enduring and integral part of our everyday lives.

But just as the world around us has changed over time, so have our families.

Economic and social change has been relentless in the past 200 years – and no more dramatically so than in the past half century. Gone are the days when we could consider the 'nuclear family' to be the norm.

What is striking about our new research on families is how quickly new family structures and our attitudes towards them have changed in the past few decades.

So quickly in fact, we suspect society has failed to keep up with the dramatic changes we are seeing in family life across the UK.

By society, I mean Government and public policy. But I also mean companies, charities and our public services.

Are we confident we truly understand the challenges facing modern families in the UK?

Can we say hand on heart that whether we are in the public, private or voluntary sector we are properly addressing the variety and diversity of needs that different families may have?

The Centre for the Modern Family is our attempt to spark a debate on how we might all respond to the seismic shifts in modern British family life.

Given the current economic turmoil, there is no better time to be looking at how we can rise to this challenge.

We are indebted to our panel of experts who collectively bring a diversity of view and strength of opinion that will guide us through the complex issues our new research will throw up.

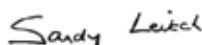
This first report sets out our preliminary research. It demonstrates how dramatically family life has changed. And through the lens of our expert panel it begins to explore some of the issues and questions the research poses.

We provide no answers or recommendations at this stage.

Instead we set out our 'manifesto' for how we might better understand and respond to the changing dynamics of British family life.

Over the coming years we will investigate specific challenges posed by the changing nature of our families.

Our long term ambition is the same as our founders when they established Scottish Widows in 1815 – finding ways to support families when they need us most.



Lord Leitch
Chairman, Centre for the Modern Family

Introduction

Loving but frustrating, supportive yet argumentative – our families make us who we are.

Our families shape our lives in every sense, from the argument we had this morning to the hope of a visit of a loved one. Yet, we don't often consider the size, structure, shape and attitudes we have towards our own family or what we would view as a 'normal' family in today's Britain. In this report, **Family**, we hope to shed new light on the subject by not only exploring the architecture of family, but also our attitudes towards it. Can we live alone and still be part of a family? Do unmarried couples with children or gay couples constitute a 'proper' family? Are our changes in attitude a positive force for good, or are we just accepting a poorer future for all?

“My biggest concern is how I am going to bring up my children in a safe, secure, loving society – and for me the family, in whatever form, is at the centre of that”

Jenny Powell

This report, produced by Scottish Widows Centre for the Modern Family, will be the first of many to provide insights into attitudes towards family in Britain today. Rather than offering answers at this stage, this report, and the research it reflects, asks important questions. It is the springboard for further, more detailed research, discussion and investigation by the Centre for the Modern Family, which hopes ultimately to find solutions to some of the most common and significant problems faced by families today.

The family conversation

Through the creation of the Centre for the Modern Family, Scottish Widows has committed to adding to the debate around family in two ways. Firstly, by identifying 'New Family Types' based on strong evidence that brings new insights into how we see our families. Secondly, by using the expert voices and interpretation of 'The Panel', whose breadth of opinion reflects the richness and diversity of British society.

The Traditional Nuclear Family: 'the co-habiting married parents with 2 or more children',

To launch this important Centre, Scottish Widows has undertaken a significant research project, asking 3,000 individuals across the UK about their own family make-up and feelings towards it, as well as their views on different family structures in modern society. The headline findings this research has produced show clearly just how much society's attitude to the family has changed in recent years.

Using the detailed demographic and attitudinal data, we have also developed a helpful model for presenting this which provides us with a new, clear way of examining and understanding British families. These 'segments', or New Family Types, have been identified by shared attitudes towards family life, as well as the architecture within individual families.

“The family is a lifeboat that we have created which gets us through the sea, which is life”

Reverend Jeremy Fraser

Our Starting Point – The Traditional Nuclear Family

If you asked a typical British child growing up in the 1960s or 70s to draw their family, you would be very likely to get a picture like this:



It represented the typical British family for most of the last century. But the question the Centre for the Modern Family asked was whether it remained as accurate today? Not purely in demographic terms, but also in terms of how we view and feel about families. We all know times have changed, but that change is dramatic. People, their lifestyles, wants, needs and social attitudes have changed, and reflecting this, so has their family structure.

In 1961, 38 per cent of families consisted of a married couple with two or more children, the 'traditional model'.¹ Figures published in November 2011, by the Office of National Statistics, show that there continues to be a long-term decline in the proportion of the adult population who are married or widowed, whilst the proportions who are single and divorced continue to rise.² The Scottish Widows data shows that today just 16 per cent of the UK population believe that they fit the 'traditional model'. In short, there has been a meltdown in the traditional nuclear family.

Half the population believes that society has an outdated view of the family

77% see single parents as a proper family

So if we fast forward to today, a typical child's sketch of their family might well look very different and could be like this:



And if one type of family looks like this and another type of family looks very different, this raises a number of questions about our society and points to some inherent tensions within it. Can we, and should we, try to reconcile the diverse perspectives on the rights and wrongs of family structure and set up? What can we, as a society, do to meet the needs of these different types of families? Where does the line between tolerance, choice, circumstance and acceptance lie?

“Families are dynamic and change over time. It is about understanding the individual life course and the different family structures that people experience.”

Jane Elliott

“Nowadays, when you ask people who is a member of your family, they do not necessarily give you genetic answers. They will say, oh Uncle Sid. It turns out Uncle Sid has no genetic connection whatsoever.”

Professor Laurie Taylor

“A family is a group of people who live and work together, and love each other. They may be married, they may not, but what is important is the emotional bond between them.”

Professor Cary Cooper

In the following sections of Family, we hope to provide insights that illuminate this debate. As a reader you may well identify with some of what we have found, but you may also profoundly disagree. The first section on the research looks at the headline attitudinal and demographic findings, the second section on the segmentation. Following that we have drawn together many of the key questions raised – are some family types more resilient than others; what are the consequences for the ageing society, given the significant proportion of over 60s that live alone? The final section of the document looks to the future as we consider the questions and look to build upon the research.

Fundamentally, our research shows not only how much British families have changed but also that our attitudes towards the changing family types are now more diverse than ever. How we respond is up to all of us.

1 Office for National Statistics, 'Social Trends 40', (2010 edition) p.14

2 Office for National Statistics, Marital Status Population Estimates Excluding Marriages Abroad - Mid 2010

A range of voices – Our Panel

In forming the Centre for the Modern Family, Scottish Widows felt that it was important that the response to the research went beyond the traditional corporate view and truly reflected the diversity of attitudes towards family that exist across our society.

The Centre for the Modern Family is not about forming a unified view, but providing a range of voices and insights that reflect society as a whole. At the end of the process we want to understand where there is tension and where we can find harmony.

As you will see, the panel consists of leading academics and professionals from research and psychology, a documentary film maker, a consumer champion, family experts, a marketing director, a television presenter, a policy adviser, a curate and a faith leader. The Centre is chaired by Lord Leitch, one of the UK's leading businessmen and an expert on the skills agenda.

With their in-depth knowledge and understanding, personal and professional experiences and invaluable insights, they will contribute a very significant part to our improved understanding of the challenges facing British families. From their individual perspectives they will identify ways in which we can help more families to function as well and successfully as they can.



Lord Leitch, Chairman, Centre for the Modern Family and Chairman Scottish Widows

Lord Leitch, Baron Leitch of Oakley, is a Labour peer and the Chairman of Scottish Widows and Bupa. After a successful career in insurance, he became Chairman of the National Employment Panel. In 2006, after two years of intensive study and consultation, he produced "The Leitch Review of Skills in the UK" - an independent strategic review covering skills, productivity and social justice. This is now Government policy. Lord Leitch has a strong interest in social mobility and the impact that the family has on prospects for young people.



Dr Husna Ahmad, OBE, Faith Regen Foundation

Dr Ahmad is the CEO of the Faith Regen Foundation and sits on the Advisory Board to the East London Mosque. She previously sat on the Department for Work and Pensions' Ethnic Minority Advisory Group (EMAG) and was also a member of a Ministerial Working Group on Child Poverty in London in 2008. Dr Ahmad offers the panel insight into the family from both a faith and multiculturalism perspective and is renowned for her work on inter-faith issues.



Daisy Asquith, Documentary Film Maker

Daisy Asquith is an award-winning documentary film maker who has produced 18 hard-hitting BBC and Channel 4 documentaries since 1998. Her films centre on modern, multi-cultural and often unconventional British families, and explore a number of thought-provoking issues affecting today's youth. Her documentaries include *Cutting Edge: My Weird and Wonderful Family*, about homosexual parents; *My New Home*, which studied three immigrant children settling in the UK and *Marrying A Stranger*, about arranged marriages in Britain.



Professor Tanya Byron, Psychologist

Tanya Byron is a consultant clinical psychologist with an NHS career spanning over twenty years. She regularly appears on TV and radio and is best known for her work on *The House of Tiny Tearaways*, *Little Angels* and *Am I Normal?* She has a column in *The Times*, *The Saturday Times* and *Good Housekeeping* magazine and has authored four books on parenting and child development. She also acts as an advisor on children and young people to governments both nationally and internationally. She is a Professor in the Public Understanding of Science (UK) and Honorary Professor of Psychology at Shandong Normal University, China.



Dr Samantha Callan, Centre for Social Justice

Dr Samantha Callan is recognised as a research and policy expert in the field of family relationships and work-life integration. She has acted as a research consultant to major non-governmental organisations aiming to strengthen family life. In this capacity she chaired the Family Breakdown Working Group of the Social Justice Policy Commission and the Family Law Review and Early Years Commission for the Centre for Social Justice. She was previously the Family and Society Policy Adviser in the Conservative Policy Unit. She has recently completed a major review on mental health which was unusual in emphasising the importance of the family.



Cary Cooper, Professor of Organizational Psychology and Health

Cary Cooper is Distinguished Professor of Organizational Psychology and Health and is Chair of the UK's Academy of Social Sciences, an umbrella body of 41 learned societies in the social sciences, comprising over 87,000 social scientists.

Professor Cooper is former Chair of The Sunningdale Institute, a think tank on management and organizational issues, in the National School of Government (2004-2009). He was also the lead scientist to the UK Government Office for Science on their Foresight programme on Mental Capital and Well Being (2007-2009).



James Daley, Editor, Which Money?

James Daley is Which?'s Money editor, overseeing all the personal finance content for the organisation and also acting as one of Which?'s key spokespeople on financial issues. He has been a financial journalist for the past 11 years and joined Which? in May 2009, after spending five years at The Independent, where he was the Personal Finance Editor. Prior to this, he was a Personal Finance Reporter at the Sunday Telegraph.



Professor Jane Elliott, Director of the Centre for Longitudinal Studies

Jane Elliott is Director of the Centre for Longitudinal Studies which houses three of Britain's most renowned cohort studies: the National Child Development Study (1958); the British Cohort Study (1970) and the Millennium Cohort Study. The studies involve multiple surveys of large numbers of individuals from birth throughout their lives and the findings are used to inform policy debates including that on changing family structures.



Reverend Jeremy Fraser, Curate East Greenwich Team Ministry

Reverend Fraser is a curate in the East Greenwich Team Ministry in the diocese of Southwark. Jeremy is Chair of the Olympic Group for the diocese and Co-ordinating Chaplain of the multi-faith chaplaincy based around the O2. He is also a Non-Executive director on the local NHS Board.

As well as serving his parish, he is an Honorary Chaplain to two local schools. In one of these schools Reverend Fraser mentors young men who are not yet in the criminal system but are heading that way. Before being ordained, he had a career in business and politics and is the former Labour leader of Southwark Council. He is currently a board director at a PR agency.



Professor Susan Golombok, University of Cambridge

Susan Golombok is Director of the Centre for Family Research at the University of Cambridge. She specialises in new family forms with an emphasis on parent-child relationships and children's psychological development and wellbeing in lesbian and gay families, single parent families and families with children conceived by assisted reproduction. She has acted as an advisor to government departments and policy-makers nationally and internationally, and has sat on advisory committees on family research. Her books include "Parenting: What really counts?"



Richard Jones, Marketing Director, Scottish Widows

Richard Jones has been Marketing Director of Scottish Widows since May 2010. He is responsible for developing and implementing the Products and Market Strategy for the Scottish Widows business and for all aspects of Marketing Communications, Brand Management, Insight, Customer Loyalty and Retention.



Sarah King, Managing Director, The Futures Company

Sarah King runs the London office of The Futures Company. As an expert in interpreting qualitative and quantitative research and identifying trends, and as the leading figure of the company conducting Scottish Widows' research into the family, she is ideally placed to offer insight on the family panel. The Futures Company was responsible for carrying out the quantitative and qualitative research at the heart of the Centre.



Jenny Powell

Jenny Powell is a TV presenter and a mother to two girls. She began her career presenting the music programme, No Limits, and was the hostess on Wheel of Fortune. She has presented To Buy or Not to Buy on BBC 1 and appeared on Celebrity Come Dine With Me and Celebrity Masterchef last year.



Dr Katherine Rake, Chief Executive, Family and Parenting Institute

Katherine Rake has a strong background in social policy and research and previously spent seven years as Chief Executive of the Fawcett Society. Prior to that she was a Lecturer in Social Policy at the LSE and was seconded to the Women's Unit, Cabinet Office where she edited a ground-breaking report on women's lifetime incomes. Rake has advised the Prime Minister's Policy Unit, HM Treasury and a variety of other government departments. She is a regular broadcaster and has contributed to a wide range of print media.



Professor Laurie Taylor, Birkbeck College, University of London

Laurie Taylor presents Thinking Allowed, a weekly programme devoted to social science research on BBC Radio 4. His satirical column on university life has been running in the Times Higher Education Supplement for over 30 years. He is the author of 14 books including a study of contemporary attitudes to children and family life called What Are Children For? (written with his son, Matthew Taylor). He is chairman of The Rationalist Association and an editor of New Humanist. The third series of his highly praised television interview series In Confidence will be broadcast by Sky Arts in the new year.

Methodology

The report presents an analysis of the Centre's detailed research, based on in-depth perception interviews with, demographically, different types of family structures and short interviews with respondents on their attitudes towards the family. This qualitative and quantitative research has produced the headline findings which have informed the report.

The Futures Company was commissioned to undertake this research, which took place over three phases.



1

In the initial phase, the existing knowledge and segmentations were explored, whilst interviewing the experts in the area. The goal of this initial phase was twofold. Firstly, to better understand what is in the marketplace to ensure that the research does not replicate prior work and, secondly, to start to develop a hypothesis of the form for the end segmentation.

2

The next phase started to refine these hypotheses within a qualitative environment. Through a series of in-depth interviews (eg. with individuals or a husband and wife pair), different forms of families were investigated. They were asked how they felt about each other, what attitudes and beliefs they share or do not share across generations, and how they believe society views and values different family set ups.

3

The final phase of the process moved to quantitatively evaluate the hypotheses developed and size the different attitudinal groups so forming the new family types. To ensure the view was representative of the British population, the research was conducted over the phone on a sample of 3,000 people, and the sample was controlled for region, age, social grade and gender.



What does the modern family look like?

The research findings.

The family has long been a popular subject for policy makers, academics and dinner tables alike, so it is perhaps unsurprising that a wealth of research into social structures and family set-ups is already available. But what makes the Centre for the Modern Family's research unique is its focus on people's attitudes: how people feel about their own family; how valued they feel by society; and what they believe a family should look like, both now and in the future.

All shapes and sizes

Some of the most striking research findings centre on people's attitudes to what constitutes a "proper family". Our research shows that 57 per cent of people no longer believe that a couple with children have to be married in order to be called a family. Beyond the subject of marriage, 77 per cent of people believe that single parents can be a proper family; and 59 per cent believe that same sex couples can be a family.

Half of people agree that society is out of date in its view of the family, of whom 23% strongly agree.

"There is an extraordinary liberality that people are extending to different family formations. I am fascinated by the speed with which people have come to accept new family forms."

Professor Laurie Taylor

This shift away from the traditional nuclear family is also reflected in our findings on potential attitudes, with 64 per cent of people believing that society will have different opinions about what constitutes a family in the future.

That said, the research also shows that over one in ten families do conform to the traditional nuclear family model. This is particularly true of ethnic minorities who are 1.5 times more likely to have a '2.4 children' family than those who are white British. There is also a substantial minority who are against varying ideas of family structure, with 36 per cent stating that a couple with children should be married to be a proper family.

Thus, at the heart of the research there is some tension between a majority who support diversification in family types, and a substantial minority that conform to the traditional nuclear model and hold clear values to uphold it.

The family valued?

With society becoming more accepting of an array of different family types, it is perhaps unsurprising that the majority of people feel their family type is valued by society today, despite just 16 per cent conforming to a traditional nuclear model.

63%
of people feel that their family types are valued by society today, despite only 16% conforming to the model of the traditional nuclear family.

"I was surprised – and happily so – that 59% of people see gay couples as a family. When I started studying gay families 35 years ago that figure would have been somewhere between 0% or 2%."

Professor Susan Golombok

"If we do not have strong families and we do not nurture our children to have ambition and drive, that has a seriously damaging effect on the economic viability of this country."

Dr Husna Ahmad

Even with this greater acceptance of different family set-ups, however, our research still shows that 22 per cent of people feel their family type is not valued by society, with 18 per cent stating that they feel judged because of their family set up.

A lonely old future?

With this diversification in attitudes towards the family, what are the repercussions for our older generations?

Did you know that?

52% of people think that the Government fails to take their family set-up into account

55% of people do not think that their family set-up is portrayed positively by the media or in TV advertising

26% of people think that businesses do not cater for their type of family set-up

Our research has found that 43 per cent of people over 60 years of age live alone and even more poignantly 25 per cent of people over 60 live alone with no family nearby. Therefore, many older people are not just living in a unit on their own, but their immediate family is not there to support them in the way it was in past years. Moreover, our research also revealed that one in five of the whole population now live in a household on their own.

One potential factor driving people to live alone is the changing face of the multi-

generational family. Only 2 per cent of the population lives in a multi-generational household, and where multi-generational families do exist, they are over four times more likely to be from an Asian background.

So what are the consequences for families with a higher incidence of people living alone? Does this mean that “the family” is coming to an end?

The family: a unit beyond the household?

Whether or not we live with our families, research shows that the family support network and the communities that support our families are both still intact.

For example, in financial advice, Scottish Widows has a substantial research base into savings behaviours indicating that significant numbers of people turn to family members for support and guidance. The Scottish Widows Pensions Report 2011 revealed that 25 per cent of people go to a family member of their generation and 24 per cent go to a family member from an older generation for financial advice.

Outside the family network, people also have religious institutions to which they can turn. Despite a generalised belief that the UK is becoming a secular society, 75 per cent of people still associate themselves with a religion. Interestingly though, only 40 per

cent of people say this has an impact on the way they lead their lives.

When all this is taken into account, one conclusion is clear – that despite diversifying ideas about what constitutes a family, the family remains at the bedrock of UK society. Indeed, with 92 per cent of people feeling very or fairly close to their families, the family is as important and as relevant as ever.

“I am not a hugely religious person, but I know from my friends the significant support network that the church can bring, especially when you have a young family. My Catholic friend, who has four young children all under the age of ten, gains immensely from the structure that her faith provides. She is also still married.”

Jenny Powell



3,000 people were interviewed
on a number of dimensions relating
to their attitudes to family

Their views have helped us
identify **10** new family types



The New Family Types

A segmentation approach to understanding the modern British family.

Segmentation is the process by which we divide up a population in order to be able to understand it better. To use the analogy of “I can’t see the wood for the trees”, the idea of a segmentation is to help classify the trees and to be able to describe and understand the marketplace in a way that everyone can understand. Segmentations measure individuals on a number of dimensions to identify areas of commonality. This allows researchers to reorganise the entire population into a number of clearly identifiable groups with either common attitudes or demographics.

The research process assessed the responses of the 3,000 people interviewed on a number of dimensions relating to their attitudes to family:

- **Traditionalism** (e.g. can same sex couples be a proper family?)
- **Shared values** (e.g. do you have the same values as other people in your family?)
- **Desire for closeness** (e.g. do you have enough space from our family, or would you like to be more involved?)
- **Fitting in** (e.g. do you feel judged because of your family set-up?)
- **Changing society** (e.g. is society out of date in its view of the family?)
- **Feeling valued** (e.g. is your family valued enough by society?)

Using the outcomes of this process, the New Family Types were developed to group people together by attitudes to their family. For each group, the researchers are also able to provide some demographic information about the people who share common attitudes, building up a vivid illustration of how our society views modern family life.

Attitudes to family in Britain

The research has defined ten New Family Types. Some readers will recognise themselves in one of the segments. Others will not. Segmentation is not an exact science, but provides a statistically robust way of looking at the world to help us understand it better. Throughout this section, you will find pen portraits of each family type, which will help bring them to life.

This segmentation is the output of Scottish Widows research and was not created by the panel.

Onderfuls

Young, single and with few close family relationships, this group is happy with their family set-up, but feels poorly portrayed by the media

People in this segment tend to be younger, with a high proportion of under-24s. They are more likely to be single and slightly more likely to be male. They all come from varied family set-ups and many of them report few close family relationships with limited contact and lack of a family member to whom they can turn for advice and support.

Their attitudes towards a range of family structures are positive and their limited family closeness doesn't bother them. Nevertheless some of them still feel judged because of their family network and most feel their situation is not well portrayed in the media.

Pen Portrait

Jamie is 22. He's just graduated from York St John University with a BA (Hons) in Graphic Design and is currently looking for work in the creative industry. Although Jamie was living in a flat share with friends while studying, he's now had to move back home with his Mum and younger sister in Hull as he's built up quite a bit of debt.

Jamie doesn't feel particularly close to his Mum and is sometimes frustrated when she doesn't seem to understand his need for space and independence. His parents split up when he was a toddler and his Mum married again soon after and had his sister, but then that marriage broke up too. Jamie doesn't have much contact with his Dad these days, seeing him only about once a year around birthdays. This doesn't particularly bother him, but sometimes he'd like to have a male role model to turn to for advice about jobs, money and personal stuff.

Jamie really misses his university mates and his girlfriend Laura who is still up in York. Laura and Jamie are hoping to move in together in a year or so when they've both settled into jobs. He'd love to have kids one day but not for a few years and he's certainly in no hurry to get married at all – if ever.

10%
of the population



Modern Classics

Unlike their parents, this group believes that society is moving away from “the 2.4 children family”, but still have a more traditional family structure themselves

This segment is younger and most open to a broad variety of family structures. Most are of white British background and many are living comfortably on their income, with almost half working full time.

They tend to feel their own family set-up is typical and sufficiently valued by society. Although relatively close to their family, their differing views on family networks can cause friction. They are less likely to share the same values, or to say they think about family in a similar way to their parents, and only some desire greater closeness.

Pen Portrait

Michael is 37 and is a lecturer at Westminster University. His background is in youth work and he has recently completed a PhD on youth crime and violence in London. He is currently lecturing while applying for senior posts in the charity sector. He lives in South London with his wife Hannah and their new baby Edward.

Michael keeps in touch with his wider family, but likes to keep them 'at arms length'. The majority of his family live near each other, and keep in very regular contact. Michael likes to see them regularly, but does not feel the need to involve them in every aspect of his life. His parents and two sisters would love him to move home. He does not share the same values as his parents on the family, and considers that occasionally their beliefs are outdated.

Michael and Hannah have been together for seven years and think they are fairly typical. Hannah has a full-time job as a travel writer and they are comfortable. They got married two years ago at Islington registry office with 30 family and friends. Michael's family did attend, but made it clear they would have preferred a church wedding that included more of their extended family.

10%
of the population



Born and Red

This group believes that the family is changing and, like their parents, are very open in their views about what a family should be

This segment predominantly consists of younger people under 45. Most are of white British background and from social grade ABC1. Many are married, and men and women in this segment are also likely to be cohabiting. The vast majority feel very close to their family. They are particularly close to their parents with whom they share common values.

Although they feel their own family set up is typical, they are very open in their views of what a 'proper family' should be, particularly concerning same-sex couples and single parents. The majority also believe that society will think about family in a different way in the future.

Pen Portrait

Sarah is 42 and is a part-time midwife. Sarah lives just outside Manchester with her long-term partner Daniel who is a maths teacher. They have two children under five called Darcey and Samuel.

Sarah has never lived far from her mum and dad and her sister. It is extremely important to her to be close to her family, and they see each other at least once a week. Sarah only left the area for three years to study midwifery at Sheffield University, and always knew she would settle back near her parents. Daniel is also from her local town, and his family is close by. Sarah shares very similar values to that of her parents, and is committed to bringing her children up with the same outlook.

Sarah met Daniel just after University, and they feel that their family set-up is fairly usual. They may get married in the future but are in no rush. They are not religious, and neither are their parents, so do not feel obligated to marry.



19%
of the population

Middletowners

Usually affluent, they are close to their family, feel well catered for and do not think that society is out of date with its view of families in Britain today

People in this segment are more likely to be affluent, white and from ABC1 social grades. They have close family relationships, particularly with their parents and share their values.

They feel their family set up is typical or fairly typical and well catered for by government and business, as well as portrayed in the media. Hardly any of them believe that society's view of the family is out of date or that people will think about family in a very different way in the future.

Although they are accepting of single, co-habiting and divorced family set-ups they are likely to believe that the term 2.4 children still applies today.

Pen Portrait

Pete is 54 and lives with his wife Angie in a village in Hertfordshire. He owns a successful building contracts business, and Angie helps with the firm's accounts.

They have three children, Andrew, Stuart and Claire who are aged 25, 23 and 22. All three children went to University. Andrew is currently working overseas, and Stuart and Claire both work in London.

Pete loves his family, and sees his children as much as possible. He knows he is lucky to have a good relationship with all of them, the family are regularly together for Sunday lunch. His parents are still alive, and live in the next village to him and Angie.

Whilst they are becoming increasingly reliant on him, he is keen to support them as much as possible, and has always enjoyed a good relationship with both. Angie's mum is still alive and lives in a care home near their house. She also helps Pete with his parents, recognising the importance of keeping their family well and happy.

Pete feels valued by society, and is generally content with his view of the world. He thinks both Government and businesses cater for him and his children.

11%
of the population



Born and Red

This group believes that the family is changing and, like their parents, are very open in their views about what a family should be

9% of people are middle-aged divorcees

Onederfuls

Young, single and with few close family relationships, this group is happy with their family set-up, but feels poorly portrayed by the media

Deconstruction Workers

Likely to be middle-aged divorcees, who are coping well with the pressures that this brings, but feel that society does not cater for their family set-up



Modern Classics

Unlike their parents, this group believes that society is moving away from “the 2.4 children family”, but still have a more traditional family structure themselves

Middletowners

Usually affluent, they are close to their family, feel well catered for and do not think that society is out of date with its view of families in Britain today

10% of the population say limited family closeness doesn't bother them

Critical mass

Likely to be single or single parents, this group are struggling to cope financially and feel excluded by society. They aspire to be married and have a stable family, but feel that circumstances make this unachievable

Old Loud and Prouds

Mainly retired, this group are coping well financially and feel valued by society. They hold traditional views which are shared by their families

Groan ups

Mainly made up of older generations, this segment has a traditional outlook on the family and its role. Whilst they feel typical, they also believe that society is increasingly ignoring “the 2.4 children family”



New Traditionalists

Made up mainly of ethnic minorities, this group places a strong emphasis on cultural heritage, marriage and close knit family relationships

Once Upon a Timers

Strong supporters of traditional family models, they are younger and many are from ethnic minorities, religious and close-knit families. This group emphasises the importance of marriage in making a proper family, but believes that society undervalues this

10% of people have a strong desire for closeknit family relationships

Deconstruction Workers

Likely to be middle-aged divorcees, who are coping well with the pressures that this brings, but feel that society does not cater for their family set-up

People in this segment tend to be middle aged, with almost half in their late 40s or early 50s. They tend to have more experience of divorce than average, leaving some as either single parents or living away from their kids.

Either way, many have financial commitments to more than one family. They tend to think their family values are different from others in their family although most are unconcerned about this.

In general they have more permissive attitudes towards alternative family set-ups. Some would openly say that society is out of date in its view of the modern family. All feel that their own family type is not valued enough by society and many feel they are not catered to by government or businesses.

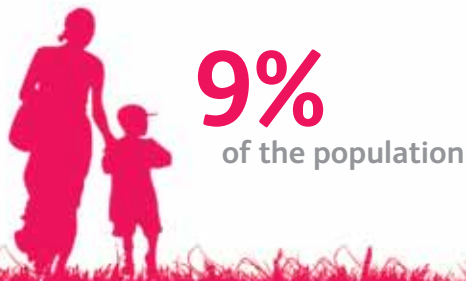
Pen Portrait

Hilary is 52 and is currently single. She has been married twice and has a son called Charlie from her second marriage. Charlie lives with Hilary in her house in Kent and has just turned 18. He is about to start a degree in Technology at a university in London.

Hilary runs a successful interior furnishing business and is proud of everything she has achieved, especially her son. Hilary is no longer in contact with her first husband, but maintains a cordial relationship with her second husband who sees Charlie every other weekend. Her second husband is remarried with a young family, and Charlie enjoys spending time with his dad and half-sisters.

Hilary is in touch with her family, but does not draw on them for support, instead choosing to glean advice and help from friends in a similar position to her. Whilst she loves her parents, she feels that they lack empathy with her position and as a result are unable to truly support her.

Hilary feels that society has an out of date view of the family, and that her set-up is much more typical than the media portrays. She feels completely ostracised by the typical '2.4 children' view depicted by the media and advertisers. This does not worry Hilary, but it is very important to her that Charlie feels 'normal' and not isolated.



Critical Mass

Likely to be single or single parents, this group are struggling to cope financially and feel excluded by society. They aspire to be married and have a stable family, but feel that circumstances make this unachievable

Over half the people in this segment are single and some are single parents. They are less likely to be working with many belonging to social grades DE and struggling to cope financially. They are close to their families and place a high importance on shared values.

They believe that marriage is an ideal situation, especially if children are involved, and as such is one that they aspire to.

There seems to be a degree to which they feel excluded, as they are concerned about fitting in and feel that society is out-of-date in its view of family set-ups.

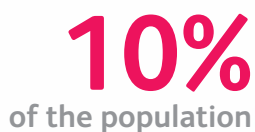
Pen Portrait

Jade is 27 and lives in Southport with her three children. She does not work and relies on support from the Government for housing and essentials. Jade's ex-partner, Chris, is the father of all three children and provides some financial support when he can. He does have full time work, but is not well paid.

Jade has been out of the work environment for six years, since she had her first child. She trained as a nursery nurse at college, and would like to go back to this job, but as a low-paid role she is better off at home with her children for now. She also lacks confidence in her ability to go back to work, because she has been out for so long. She is hoping to begin working part-time in the next year, with support from her parents.

Jade lives close to her parents and her two sisters. Her family is a constant source of support, and they share similar values on raising the children. Jade has no plans to move far away from her family as it is important to her to see them as much as possible. She has no idea how she would cope without her close family unit, especially as a single mum.

She feels uncomfortable that she is no longer living with the father of her children. She believes strongly in marriage and always hoped to marry Chris. Her parents have enjoyed a successful marriage, and as such she feels her family is more unusual. She would love to marry but of course will consider her children's happiness before her own.



New Traditionalists

Made up mainly of ethnic minorities, this group places a strong emphasis on cultural heritage, marriage and close knit family relationships

Over half the people in this segment are married and there is a very low rate of divorce. A high proportion are from a non-white background and they tend to be less affluent, with almost a one-third from social grade DE.

Almost all in this segment are religious, with their beliefs playing an important role in their lives. Shared family values are very important to them and they tend to have very traditional views about the family, believing strongly in the importance of marriage and with a higher incidence of negative attitudes towards same-sex couples than any other group.

Although many have grown up outside the UK, they believe it is important for family members to live close to one another.

Pen Portrait

Zahir is 38 and lives in Tower Hamlets with his wife Tanzila and three children aged 14, 12 and 8.

Zahir was born in Bangladesh and moved to the UK when he was 19 looking for work. He now works as a taxi driver for the local mini cab firm, while his wife is a full-time mum.

Although he earns a below average wage, Zahir is putting away any extra money that he earns to bring his mother over from Bangladesh to live near him and his family. His brother moved to London just after Zahir did, and they are both intent on settling their mum in Britain. His brother lives nearby with his family, and they see a great deal of each other. They miss their mum and feel a sense of duty to take care of her in her old age.

Both Zahir and his brother have very strong family values, instilled in them by their parents. Zahir believes that couples should be married before they have children, and that it is important for families to stick together, and have the same values. Zahir and his family are practising Muslims and religion plays a very important role in their lives. They hope that their children will continue to share their beliefs and take pride in their heritage.



Groan Ups

Mainly made up of older generations, this segment has a traditional outlook on the family and its role. Whilst they feel typical, they also believe that society is increasingly ignoring “the 2.4 children family”

This is an older segment with traditional values. Most people in this segment are married and are parents, although in most cases their children will have left home.

They are close to their spouse and in general, close family relationships and shared values are important to them, as is regular contact with family members living outside their home.

Religion is likely to play an important role in their lives, which may partly account for their traditional attitudes and belief in the importance of marriage. But while most of them feel their family set-up is typical, almost everyone in this segment feels undervalued by society and not well catered for by government or the media.

Pen Portrait

William is 67 and lives with his wife, Charlotte, in Yorkshire. William and Charlotte have two children and a grandchild. William retired from his role in the family’s manufacturing business last year but still acts as the chairman.

Charlotte has been a housewife since they had their first child 40 years ago and William believes that the traditional model of 2.4 children is the glue that holds society together.

As such, he strongly supports the concept of traditional family set-ups and disapproves of same sex couples and single parents.

William feels that Britain is changing for the worse, and is not afraid to voice his opinion on the subject. He has seen the decline of what he considers to be proper family values – and is concerned for the future of his children and grand child in this ever-changing society.

He does not envy their position in today’s world and worries how they will carve out a successful life for themselves, without the benefits that his generation enjoyed. He tries to offer advice where he can, but realises his children just think his old-fashioned views are out-dated.



Once Upon a Timers

Strong supporters of traditional family models, they are younger and many are from ethnic minorities, religious and close-knit families. This group emphasises the importance of marriage in making a proper family, but believes that society undervalues this

People in this segment tend to be younger, with a high proportion of 25-34s. They come from close knit families and have a traditional view of what makes a family.

Many have grown up in another country and almost a third of them say that their religious beliefs influence how they live their lives a great deal. They tend to think that modern family types are not 'proper' families. This applies particularly to same sex couples, single parent families and families with unmarried parents. They can feel judged because of their own family set-up and most are not happy with the way their family are portrayed in the media.

Pen Portrait

Adil is 29 and lives in Birmingham with his mum, dad and three sisters. The family moved to the UK from Pakistan in the 1990s.

He likes still living with his parents – they're a very close family and spend a lot of time together. If and when he does move out, it will be to get married and he still plans to live close to his parents. He can't imagine a time when he won't see his family every day.

Religion plays a vital role in his life. He plays a big role at his Islamic community centre, teaching and working with the younger kids. Several of his friends come from within this community and he enjoys playing football with them at weekends.

Adil finds it hard to understand the seemingly relaxed attitudes society takes to what he sees as family breakdown. In his mind, the media and government seem to get it all wrong in their portrayal of what makes a 'proper' family.

4%
of the population



Old Loud and Prouds

Mainly retired, this group are coping well financially and feel valued by society. They hold traditional views which are shared by their families

People in this segment tend to be over 65 and the majority are retired. They have very traditional values, which may be partly influenced by their religious beliefs as well as their age. It is important to them that their family shares similar values.

They tend to live in two-person households but some live alone. Overall, they seem to be a contented. They tend to feel happy with their level of involvement with their family, valued by society and many are living comfortably within their means.

Pen Portrait

David and Joan have been married for forty years and are now retired and living in Suffolk. They have two children, Jonathan and Caroline, both of whom are married themselves with young children. They see both children regularly, with Caroline having moved just down the road and Jonathan and his family visiting as often as they can from London.

Both believe strongly in marriage as the bedrock of the family and are pleased to see their children married and settled. They are glad that Jonathan and Caroline share their values – to them, having children out of wedlock isn't right. They feel similarly about gay or single-parent families. They're not angry about it, but firmly believe their way is the right way and this fad for 'unusual' families will pass.

They regularly attend church, and find their church community an important part of their lives. Both are contented with their lot – they live in a comfortable retirement on their pensions, have their family around them and they feel valued by their local community and society.

8%
of the population







The Modern British Family

A cause for celebration or concern?

There are big question marks hovering above the data about new family structures and attitudes: does the view of the family painted by the research represent progress towards a more diverse, tolerant and egalitarian society? Or does it illustrate the consequences of moral decline: a collapse in the value system and support structures that make families, relationships and, ultimately, society successful?

For many, the diversification in family forms will be something to be celebrated. A widespread acceptance of previously marginalised family groups speaks to the tolerant, supportive and accepting part of our society. And with 64 per cent of people expecting attitudes to family in this country to change further in future, there is a strong possibility that we will become yet more tolerant.

As Dr Katherine Rake of the Family and Parenting Institute says: “We should celebrate where we are as a society. While there is much media debate about the perils of parenting and the collapse of families, this can overshadow the good in family life. We need to celebrate the resilience and adaptability of families and their ability to act as the shock absorber for the difficulties in the world around us.”

“People are very liberal in their attitudes and that liberality helps drive wider change.”

Sarah King

One of our experts, Sarah King of The Futures Company, even went so far as to suggest that the public is more flexible in than the way they view the family than governments or other power structures: “People are very liberal in their attitudes and that liberality helps drive wider change. One of the things

the Blair Government recognised was that the population was ahead of the lawmakers at one point when they gave legal status to kinds of partnerships.”

For many others, however, any interpretation of the fundamental shift in family structures as a positive change is a huge misrepresentation of reality.

As Dr Samantha Callan of the Centre for Social Justice notes: “Fatherlessness is not progressive. The idea that it is completely acceptable for men (or women) to walk out on their children is not progressive. The collapse of the two parent norm has hit the poorest communities the hardest. The biggest driver of youth homelessness is relationship breakdown. It feels like there is a story that is terribly up-beat about new family forms, but actually it takes seven years for step-families to cement, and those seven years can be so painful.”

“We need to celebrate the resilience and adaptability of families and their ability to act as the shock absorber for the difficulties in the world around us.”

Dr Katherine Rake

Did you know that?

Groan Ups are more likely than average to feel that a diversification in family forms is a cause for concern

Modern Classics are more likely than average to think that a shift in family structures is a cause for celebration

“Fatherlessness is not progressive. The idea that it is completely acceptable for men (or women) to walk out on their children is not progressive.”

Dr Samantha Callan

From this perspective, the family structures we see today can be the result of negative circumstances such as poverty, a lack of social mobility or even domestic abuse. Put another way, they may reflect a collapse in the moral values that once gave families their backbone. They are certainly not something to be celebrated, or enshrined in law or policy.

83%
of the population thought family breakdown was the source of the problem.

identified in this research exist because of a failure of society, breakdown of marriages and a rise in divorce, as well as a sharp moral decline.”

It seems that the wider British public is inclined to agree with this idea that a more traditional family form is important. Centre for Social Justice research undertaken immediately after the London riots in summer 2011 showed that 83 per cent of the population thought family breakdown was the source of the problem.³

Beyond the debate around individual family forms, the wider question facing us all is whether we are at risk of a loss of social cohesion through the fundamental differences underpinning our views of family. Will British society become ever more polarised between those that embrace family in a wide range of forms and those who view diverse family structures as the negative consequence of moral decline?

Sarah King of The Futures Company notes: “There are intrinsic tensions here. There are things about Born and Reds, Modern Classics and Deconstruction Workers which will never be reconciled with the way that Groan Ups think. It’s important to recognise that while there are things people have in common, there are also things that are fundamentally different.”

The data also shows that, beyond the view of social commentators, there is some discomfort with new family forms for the

22%
said their family type was not valued by society.

18%
feel actively judged by society for the family model in which they live

individuals within them. This manifests itself in some families having a sense of having failed in their own aspirations, as is clear in the Critical Mass segment. These people aspire to a ‘traditional’ family structure but are not able to achieve this, since many of them are divorced or separated.

In other families, whilst they personally are happy with their lot, they feel that society does not value their family type. 22 per cent of our respondents said their family type was not valued by society. 18 per cent feel actively judged by society for the family model in which they live.

As we consider the new family landscape before us, awash with new family forms, we must ask ourselves not only whether this diversity is desirable, but how we support the various groups struggling with change, and how the potential schism in society caused by radically different views on what family should be will play out and change in the coming years.

“The Fourth Commandment is: Honour Thy Father and Mother. Religion and family have a very close correspondence.”

Professor Laurie Taylor

This viewpoint may be particularly prevalent amongst particular faith groups, for whom moral values and family form are inextricably intertwined. As Laurie Taylor notes, “The Fourth Commandment is: Honour Thy Father and Mother. Religion and family have a very close correspondence.”

And for some faith groups, changing family forms are anything but progressive. Dr Husna Ahmad, of Faith Regen, says: “Whilst we should not be judgemental about the forms of families, it is very, very important that we actually say that there are certain values that should be instilled in modern British families. A lot of the segments

“There are intrinsic tensions here. There are things about Born and Reds, Modern Classics and Deconstruction Workers which will never be reconciled with the way that Groan Ups think.”

Sarah King

³ Centre for Social Justice, ‘Strengthening the Family and tackling Family Breakdown’, (October 2011), p1



An advertisement for choice, or victims of circumstance?

Many of the panellists involved in the development of the Centre for the Modern Family saw the outcomes of the research process as a celebration of freedom of choice.

For those who actively want to choose their own family form, and have the financial, practical and emotional support to make their own decisions about their family structure, the newly tolerant attitude of society can only be a positive. As Dr Katherine Rake says: “Modern family life obviously has its challenges. But, the modern family is also testament to a rise in tolerance and choice which was not there for generations before. No longer do people have to live with abusive partners, be punished with social stigma if they are lone parents or have to hide their gay relationships. Family form has changed throughout history but what remains constant is that families are the most important social institution in UK society.”

However, for many others, the family model in which they live is not a consequence of their own choice, but of necessity. They live in the family set-up they do because circumstances dictated it.

For instance, the rise in single person households, in particular for those over sixty, is not always driven by choice but also by circumstance. For some people who choose to live alone, it is a liberating and empowering life choice – for others, it can be a hard and isolating experience.

Similarly, the Scottish Widows research found that those who are married are more than one and a half times more likely to come from ABC1 social backgrounds than those of C2DE. As the Critical Mass segment would suggest, this could mean that marriage is an aspiration for many of society’s less advantaged.

Scottish Widows data shows that 25 per cent of people over 60 live alone with no family nearby and research from the Institute for Public Policy Research published this year noted that nearly one in five people over 75 say they feel lonely much of the time.⁴

One in five people over 75 say they feel lonely much of the time

Laurie Taylor noted two different family models where necessity overrides choice: “If you look at those people who are living alone over the age of sixty, in many cases it is not because they have chosen to live alone, but because circumstances have led them to be alone. In the US, research shows that there has been a big increase in multigenerational families, not through choice but because the economic environment means you have children who now after university have gone back to living at home for financial reasons.”

On the subject of ageing populations, Richard Jones of Scottish Widows says: “The ageing society is one of the biggest we as a country face. If we don’t find ways to help people look after themselves in retirement, there is a danger that we will see increasing numbers of people alone, isolated and unable to cope.”

Did you know that?

Critical Mass are more likely than average to think that their family structure is based on circumstance

Born and Reds are more likely than average to believe that their family architecture is based on choice

Many will view the choice of family set-ups as something to be celebrated. Yet others point out that what may be described as ‘progressive’ family structures will not always be seen as such by those living within them.

Laurie Taylor says: “What do we mean by progressive? Does that mean we approve? We may in fact find that for people who have no choice but to live alone or in multi-generational households, these are in fact regressive structures in terms of people’s happiness or contentment.”

The data also shows that for those who are not living the life they hoped for, and for whom there is little choice in the matter, the disconnect between their aspirations and reality can be distressing. As noted earlier, 22 per cent of respondents in the Scottish Widows research study said their family type was not valued by society and 18 per cent feel actively judged by society for the family model in which they live.

“The ageing society is one of the biggest we as a country face. If we don’t find ways to help people look after themselves in retirement, there is a danger that we will see increasing numbers of people alone, isolated and unable to cope.”

Richard Jones

“For some of the people who felt most negatively about their family, it was because their ideal definition of ‘family’ did not tally with how they were living their life.”

Reverend Jeremy Fraser

As the Reverend Jeremy Fraser notes: “For some of the people who felt most negatively about their family, it was because their ideal definition of ‘family’ did not tally with how they were living their life.”

One risk of our new liberalism around family forms that Dr Callan notes is that it may gloss over what some people are experiencing as very real problems. “A recent study done by Addaction, the addictions charity, showed that the pain young people felt due to their fathers not being involved in their lives was made worse by the lack of credence society paid to it as an issue. There is no support or ‘space’ to resolve that pain, so many felt that it was no longer considered valid for this to be a problem in your life.”

The element of compulsion is one which cannot be ignored in any examination of the changing family structures we see today. Whilst there is clearly an element of choice at play, we must not ignore the many families whose form is dictated by the economic, societal or cultural pressures they face in their daily lives.



43%
of people over 60 live alone

25%
of this group live alone
with no family nearby

2%
of households are
mutli-generational

4 Institute for Public Policy Research, ‘Older Londoners, ed. Jonathan Clifton’, (October 2011), p.19

Function or form: What is the key to a successful family?

In the past, we have characterised families on their structure, or form: whether they are married or divorced, with or without children. But is this really the right way to judge the success of families, with the widespread diversity apparent in modern family life today?

Is the formation of a family critical to creating a stable, rock-solid core – a core more important today than ever before? Or, does the focus on the form of a family simply ignore the many successful and happy families that fall out of the traditional form?

While the new research indicates that a majority of people are readily accepting a range of family forms, sitting at the opposite end of the spectrum is a committed minority who believe that parents must be married, proving that the institution is by no means dead.

57% of people disagree that a couple need to be married to be a proper family, and 34% of these disagree strongly. Yet, 22% strongly believe that a couple with children should be married.

The same divergence of opinion is apparent when you look at views on same sex couples. 19 per cent of people strongly disagree that same sex couples can be a family. However, opposing this are 59 per cent who agree that same sex couples can be a family, a third of those ‘strongly’. Single parents do not split opinion as dramatically, perhaps because we have had more time to get used to the idea that families can be run by one committed parent as opposed to a single sex couple. Over three quarters, 77 per cent, say single parents can be a family and just 8 per cent strongly disagree.

Clearly our personal views on ‘proper’ family forms have a lot to do with our own experience. Even when the traditional nuclear family was at its height single parents existed, but same sex couples are a much newer addition to our varied family networks.

Documentary maker Daisy Asquith hopes views will change as people have a wider personal experience. “I think as people’s access to gay parent families grows, so will their tolerance. When you know gay parents and their children you quickly realise what good families they are. My son asked me why can’t he have two mums and two dads recently, as he regarded it as an enviable thing!”

Family research Professor Susan Golombok supports this view. Her work with single sex couples over the last 30 years has shown her that in some cases it is the families that have had to struggle the most that make the best parents. “Take for example a father who is in a same sex partnership and wanted to adopt a child. In my experience, they can be the ones who have the best relationships with their children. They wanted so much to be parents and as a result have a very good relationship with them.”

Given that the pinkpaper.com recently cited statistics that some parts of the country have witnessed an increase in gay adoption of up to 50 per cent,⁶ we are likely to see more of these new family forms in future.

Perhaps today’s traditionalism is more about the values a family supports than the form it takes? Jenny Powell says: “I think function-wise, deep down, speaking for everyone now, we are pretty traditional. It is a constant battle to keep those traditional ideals in place. Financially, there are so many distractions.”

Dr Katherine Rake agrees: “People are very traditional about the functions they wish families to fulfil, in other words, they expect respectful relationships and that children get the time and care they deserve. But people seem quite liberal around form. In other words they recognise that different arrangements – married couples, lone parents, grandparents, siblings, aunts and uncles – can all create the strong, caring relationships that are the hallmark of a good family life.”

“...people seem quite liberal around form. In other words they recognise that different arrangements – married couples, lone parents, grandparents, siblings, aunts and uncles – can all create the strong, caring relationships that are the hallmark of a good family life.”

Dr Katherine Rake

Did you know that?

Deconstruction workers are more likely than average to value function as they key to a successful family

Middletowners are more likely than average to believe that form is central to a proper family

Few would argue with the concept that good relationships are fundamental to successful families. What is in question is whether some family forms are more likely to nurture these good relationships than others.

It is clear that the Government values family form, pledging to introduce tax breaks for married couples before the next election. Work and Pensions Secretary, Iain Duncan Smith, recently called on the Government to preserve the traditional family as “the most vital part of society” in a speech in honour of late Tory Peer and family campaigner Janet Young. In his speech he made a clear distinction between marriage and cohabiting claiming “the relationships are not the same – and there are consequences for us all”.⁵

Duncan Smith also noted that studies showed children of single parents were 75 per cent more likely to fail at school, 70 per cent more likely to develop drug addiction and 50 per cent more likely to develop an alcohol problem.

When weighing-up form over function, what is clear is that the form of a family is the more simple mechanic to help us analyse family life. The family model of 2.4 children has stuck in our consciousness for a reason. It becomes significantly more challenging to reach consensus when seeking to understand and evaluate the many different functions of a family.

Like relationships themselves, there is a balance to be struck, and the evidence invites us to consider both form and function to help us understand the impact of evolving family life.

Professor Tanya Byron says: “It is not that function is more important than form. But there are many forms now and so it is impossible to just judge families against something with so many variables. It is the emphasis we need to change, while focusing on the impact of both.”

When considering the factors which makes families succeed, what seems clear is that it is impossible to exclusively choose function or form, as it is always a combination of the two.

“It is not that function is more important than form. But there are many forms now and so it is impossible to just judge families against something with so many variables.”

Professor Tanya Byron

⁵ Iain Duncan Smith, ‘Speech at the Janet Young Memorial Lecture’, (November 4th 2011)

⁶ PinkPaper.com, ‘US and UK see rise in gay adoption’, Peter Lloyd, (June 15th 2011)



Family resilience: The shock absorbers

Many families thrive, others survive, and some struggle. The reasons for this are often opaque, as there is no ‘standard model’ that we can follow to help us achieve a happy and successful family life. There is no definitive guide book and no exam. In fact, for many, the recipe for success is still a mystery.

With so many variables to consider, many of which are out of our control, should we even try to understand what works, or is it a futile exercise? Or, if we know what makes some families more resilient than others, could that learning be shared to the benefit of all.

Experts on the Centre for the Modern Family panel agreed that when families work well, they are able to absorb the ‘shocks’ life throws at us, whether they be related to finances, health, work or relationships. When families are not functioning well, or when they don’t have the right external support, simple problems can overwhelm them. Richard Jones of Scottish Widows says: “We see some families who end up in tragic circumstances because they have not understood some of the basic steps they need to take in their financial affairs.”

James Daley at Which? also highlights the necessity to assist families in managing the risks associated with their financial affairs: “We must understand families better, how they make their decisions and how we can support them to make better decisions, particularly when it comes to their personal finances.”

Dr Katherine Rake feels that families are a shock absorber of all the varied, awful and wonderful things that happen to people and should not be underestimated. “Families often act as shock absorbers for all that life throws at us. In a time of austerity when budgets are cut, jobs are under threat, it’s important that families can support each other through the stressful, and sometimes awful things that happen. We should do more to support their creation and resilience – it is a tragedy when this depletes”

Reverend Jeremy Fraser uses the metaphor of a lifeboat, claiming that when families work well it helps get us through the often turbulent ‘sea of life’. Through his work with families in his Greenwich parish, he

believes that many families act successfully as shock absorbers. He explains “Most of the time it works but sometimes it leaks a bit. But a family remains a great thing to have, whatever sort.”

James Daley at Which? says: “Families are facing untold challenges, largely driven by the tough economic circumstance. It is clear that some families are more adept at dealing with social and economic challenges than others.”

Taking the New Family Types as an example, four of the ten groups are struggling either economically or socially. Many are finding the external economic situation tough. Other groups feel a sense of tension within their families.

Those in the Critical Mass segment, for example, feel isolated and face financial pressure to make ends meet. Modern Classics feel some tension with their parents because of the changing views of family form. Once Upon a Timers feel undervalued and concerned that society is changing for the worst. They may be drawn to the economic opportunities the UK offers, but feel detached from the values and morality they consider are fundamental to their beliefs. This has an impact on their role in the community and the lessons they pass on to their children.

There is also a wider question of who props up our families as they seek to absorb the shocks life throws at them? Dr Husna Ahmad says: “Faith communities give great support to the family. When the crisis hits, they help families to pick up the pieces. We have heard about the state propping up providers, but faith communities for hundreds of years have provided that function. Governments come and go but the faith community is still there.”

The role of government in supporting families is also a key area of consideration. As Samantha Callan says: “It is not a matter

of how will the economy change the family but how well equipped are different family types to withstand what could be really rocky waters, and how should policy and politicians respond to help them?”

There may be significant value in understanding how families can strengthen themselves to protect and support each other. Richard Jones says: “The Centre should aim to understand how we can help people create more shock absorbers. This piece of work will be relevant for everyone; business, media, communities and Government.”

With latest figures showing that the typical family median income is expected to fall by around 7 per cent in real terms, and youth unemployment just past the one million mark⁷, there are certainly more shocks to come for British families. A clearer understanding of the ‘shock absorbers’ is a focus for further investigation for the Centre for the Modern Family.

Did you know that?

New Traditionalists are more likely than average to use faith as a shock absorber

Onedersfuls are less likely than average to use their family as a shock absorber

⁷ Institute for Fiscal Studies, ‘Child and working-age poverty from 2010 to 2020’, by James Browne, (October 2011) p.2

In conclusion: The new family architecture

What does it all mean?

As the first report from the Scottish Widows Centre for the Modern Family, *Family* is just a starting point, a snapshot of family life in Britain in 2011. The research and our Panel's reaction to it, has shown what many of us already knew: that the family has changed.

The 'traditional nuclear family' model

Family can no longer be classified purely by the 'traditional nuclear family' model. Furthermore, the new research shows that our attitudes towards family have changed and diversified. For many of us, how we relate to our relations can no longer be portrayed in simple terms.

The New Family Types

As individuals, we won't all recognise our families within the New Family Types. We don't all fit into a box and the segmentation won't feel right to everyone.

But, from the perspective of the Centre for the Modern Family, these new groups have been insightful in framing many of the challenges that sit at the core of the debate around family. And what our segments do show, is that we may find similar values and opinions about family even if we don't share a common structure.

The segments will provide an invaluable platform for the Centre as it moves forward, as well as a resource for other organisations, policymakers and businesses delivering information and services to families.

Diversity in family form

So what does all of this mean for Britain today? The diversity of our family types means that there is no one-size-fits-all answer. Some of our panel members, like many others in society, consider the new diversity in family forms a cause for celebration: a widespread acceptance of diverse family types that speaks to a tolerant, supportive society. Others look to the question of choice or circumstance: are the new family structures a result of negative circumstance such as poverty, a lack of social mobility, or were they truly a positive choice?

Furthermore, should we view the diversity of family in Britain as progress or is it an acceptance of failure in the family that makes our lives all the poorer?

Successful families

This brings us to the big question about family architecture that challenges us all. Is success for a family about how it is structured (one parent, two parents, married, etc), in other words its form; or is it about how it works (the relationships, time, effort, care), its function? In responding to this, as we saw in the last chapter, the panel provided very different views on what makes for success.

Moreover, if some families are more resilient than others, thanks to the shock absorbers they have in place, then what can and should the other players in society - Government, charities, religious organisations and the commercial sector - do to ensure they provide the right levels and type of support to all families moving forward?

Next steps

Finally, it may just be that for some families the old saying 'you can choose your friends but you can't choose your family' holds true. Others, however, have gone out and made a choice.

By publishing *Family*, the Scottish Widows Centre for the Modern Family is hoping to aid understanding of this changing landscape. We will uncover insights into how we, across all sections of our diverse society, feel about family to ensure that the support structures are there to encourage family to thrive and adapt in a modern and changing Britain.



Our Manifesto

The Centre for the Modern Family is a new initiative set up by Scottish Widows to explore Britain's changing family structures and attitudes towards them. It has been created by one of Britain's leading financial institutions to better understand society, and society's needs, from the perspective of families in Britain.

Our Commitment

The Centre for the Modern Family represents a long term commitment by Scottish Widows to fund new research. Through the Centre for the Modern Family, Scottish Widows will continue to work with a panel of independent experts who will provide their own interpretation, insights and voices to the debate. The Centre will focus its efforts on furthering the understanding of families from a societal point of view to help improve family life.

Our Mission

Our mission is to improve the understanding of the challenges facing British families – providing insight and perspectives for Government, businesses, media, communities and faith groups to help improve family lives.

In order to achieve this goal the Scottish Widows Centre for the Modern Family will:

- Publish research into the British public's evolving attitudes towards the family and its changing form and function
- Give voice to a diversity of perspectives on the current state of British family life
- Explore challenges currently facing families
- Provide insights to those who have the power to improve family lives
- Communicate the Centre for the Modern Family to a broad community to help amplify and take forward the research

Our Plans

Family represents the very first output of the Scottish Widows Centre for the Modern Family. The Centre for the Modern Family will continue to support baseline research on changing family structures and public attitudes towards families.

Following the first full meeting of the panel at which the research was presented, the Centre for the Modern Family has summarised the findings in this report. A great many ideas for future exploration were discussed at the first panel, however, the Centre for the Modern Family is committed to the following themes:

Resilience – what makes a successful family and how well equipped are families to survive the current economic environment?

Social mobility – what impact do evolving family types and attitudes have on social mobility?

Ageing society – what additional challenges do new family types pose to the UK's ageing society?

Childcare – what new challenges do families face in accessing childcare?



About the Author



Liz Fraser, Writer and Presenter

Liz Fraser is the best-selling author of three parenting books, a family commentator on BBC Breakfast news, ITV1's Daybreak and This Morning, Sky News and many others, and a BBC Radio presenter. A Cambridge science graduate and mother of three, Liz is currently writing her fourth book, and is the author of *Family*.

For further information or to tell us what you think, please visit www.centreformodernfamily.com

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