

Why does divorce happen, and what changes afterwards?

AQA A Level Sociology 7192 • Families & Households • L020 • v1.0

CONNECT & CHECK | SHARE | PRESENT | APPLY | RECALL & REVIEW

Connect & Check → Share → Present → Apply → Recall & Review. Distinguish separation from divorce, explain social causes and evaluate varied consequences through specific mechanisms. Use fictional examples; no personal family disclosure is required.

Recall and connect

Missed the preparation? Why can cohabiting couples have different trajectories? Meanings, resources and later transitions differ even within the same current category. What is a selection effect? Differences may reflect who enters a group and their prior circumstances rather than the effect of group membership alone. Why is a statistical association not enough for a causal conclusion? Timing, rival explanations and a plausible mechanism must also be examined.

Retrieve the previous lesson, then record a view you can revisit.

R1

Why can cohabiting couples have different trajectories?

R2

What is a selection effect?

R3

Starting judgement: “Divorce always produces the same consequences for every family.” Explain your view.

Measure the event correctly

Separation is a relationship transition; divorce is a legal event and can occur later. ONS records 105,002 divorces and 959 civil partnership dissolutions in England and Wales in 2025. Its opposite-sex divorce rate was 8.4 per 1,000 opposite-sex married people, below the 1993 peak of 14.2. The rate denominator changed from age 16+ in earlier years to 18+ in 2025, limiting exact comparison. These figures do not measure all relationship breakdown, including cohabiting separations. Court processing and legal change affect when events appear, so a count is not a direct measure of when dissatisfaction began.

D1

Why is separation not identical to divorce?

D2

Why does a divorce count not measure every relationship breakdown?

Several causes may interact

Reduced stigma and secularisation may make ending an unsatisfactory marriage more socially acceptable. Access to independent income can make leaving materially possible, while expectations of emotional fulfilment can affect whether a relationship is continued. Law also changes the process: no-fault divorce took effect in England and Wales on 6 April 2022. It removed the need to assign blame through specified fault facts. A legal route does not establish why a particular relationship ended; intentions, constraints and prior conflict require separate evidence.

D3

Explain a link between independent income and the possibility of leaving.

D4

What does the 2022 legal change explain, and what does it leave open?

Consequences need a mechanism

Consequences vary with what happened before, during and after separation. Maintaining two homes can reduce resources; conflict may continue or diminish; care may be reorganised across addresses. An outcome associated with divorce may partly reflect earlier conflict or economic disadvantage. Compare changes over time and the circumstances of families, rather than ranking forms. This lesson uses fictional cases only. Learners should analyse the supplied mechanisms without disclosing their own relationships or assuming a universal effect on children.

D5

How might prior conflict affect a causal claim about divorce and wellbeing?

D6

Name two conditions that could change post-separation experiences.

Apply the evidence

Fictional comparison: In the Vale case, adults separate after repeated disagreements. They organise predictable care across two nearby homes; day-to-day conflict becomes less frequent, although both budgets tighten. In the Hill case, a separation is followed by insecure housing and disputes about travel for care. A report labels both 'divorced families' and predicts identical experiences for everyone involved. These accounts illustrate mechanisms only; no learner is asked to discuss personal family circumstances.



Observe the visible activity and identify what further evidence is needed. This photograph also appears on slide 19.

A1

Describe what is visible in the photograph. What further evidence would be needed to apply this lesson's concepts?

Apply the case evidence

Fictional comparison: In the Vale case, adults separate after repeated disagreements. They organise predictable care across two nearby homes; day-to-day conflict becomes less frequent, although both budgets tighten. In the Hill case, a separation is followed by insecure housing and disputes about travel for care. A report labels both 'divorced families' and predicts identical experiences for everyone involved. These accounts illustrate mechanisms only; no learner is asked to discuss personal family circumstances.

A2

Explain one possible benefit and one cost in the Vale case.

A3

Explain why the same legal label does not predict identical consequences.

Optional scaffold: Name the concept → select a precise case detail → explain the connection → state what the detail cannot establish. Rehearse aloud, then write independently.

Challenge and judge

Make a precise claim, connect it to evidence and state its limits.

C1

What research would strengthen an explanation of consequences?

C2

Improve: Divorce is the single cause of every later difficulty.

Prove and improve

Complete retrieval, then write independently for eight minutes.

P1

Explain two reasons why the consequences of divorce may vary between families. [6 marks]

P2

Identify the two points in your response. Improve one missing explanation or example.

P3

Return to R3. Give a qualified judgement and identify one piece of evidence still needed.

Prepare for Lesson 21

Read the three short passages and answer the preparation questions.

Law and recognition are distinct

The Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 enabled same-sex marriage in England and Wales, where the first marriages took place on 29 March 2014. Same-sex civil partnerships had provided an earlier registered status. Legal recognition changes the options available and the public status of relationships. It does not mean those relationships first existed when the law changed, nor that approval or treatment instantly became uniform. Dates and jurisdictions matter: England and Wales should not be relabelled as the whole UK.

Two connected concepts

Legal recognition: Acknowledgement of a relationship or status through law. Social recognition: Acknowledgement or acceptance of a relationship in everyday social settings.

A question to bring

Distinguish legal recognition from social recognition. Legal recognition concerns status in law; social recognition concerns acknowledgement and treatment in everyday settings. They can change at different rates.

F1

Summarise the main idea in the first passage in one or two sentences.

F2

Define legal recognition and give an original fictional example.

F3

What evidence would you need to test the opening claim? Retrieve two current-lesson concepts tomorrow and next week.

Retrieval check for self study

Complete before the extended response. Cover the key while answering. One mark per correct answer; total 6. Correct insecure ideas and retry tomorrow. Extended writing needs teacher review.

Q1

Which meaning best fits separation?

A A decline in religion's social influence, potentially affecting attitudes to separation. B Disagreement or tension already present before a later transition. C Partners ending their relationship or shared life; this need not involve a legal divorce.

Q2

Which meaning best fits divorce rate?

A Divorce events relative to a specified married population and period. B Disagreement or tension already present before a later transition. C A process through which an initial change affects a later outcome.

Q3

Which meaning best fits economic independence?

A A change in arrangement within a person's continuing biography. B Access to resources that can reduce reliance on another person's income. C Partners ending their relationship or shared life; this need not involve a legal divorce.

Q4

Which meaning best fits material consequence?

A An assertion that one factor produces a change in another. B The number of legally ended marriages in a specified period and area. C An effect on income, housing, work or other tangible resources.

Q5

If conflict existed before separation, can every later difficulty be attributed to divorce alone?

A Yes: the legal status explains all differences. B No: prior conflict and changing circumstances must be examined. C The question can be answered from a person's appearance alone.

Q6

What can the supplied fictional case establish?

A It illustrates a mechanism to examine with further evidence. B It proves what all UK families do. C It establishes a causal law without further evidence.

Self marking key

Q1: C. Q2: A. Q3: B. Q4: C. Q5: B. Q6: A.