

Introduction

This essay seeks to critically explore how a ‘child’ can be located within the structure of family. The three constructs of focus will be the nuclear family, grandparent care in kinship family and looked after children.

Families have changed and diversified alongside the social movements of societies. The term ‘family’ is a longstanding concept yet the boundaries of what constructs a family in the UK has been rapidly changing over the last few decades. Family today is defined by the UK government as ‘either a couple - married, cohabiting or in a civil partnership, with or without children - or a lone parent with one or more children, dependent or non-dependent’ (ONS, 2012, p.2), however, this definition leaves much to be desired in terms of recognising the variety of constructs found within 21st century families (Brown, 2019).

Challenges have prevailed, but as society evolves, families experience different struggles to previous generations and contemporary families continue to adapt to the world they live in and the trials of their time (Corsaro, 2015). The modern age caused many changes, which consequently required alterations to happen at home and in family life. Some of these changes include the rights of women progressing to allow women the freedom of work and choice (Beckett and Taylor, 2019). Followed by a gaining interest of childhood, with studies created for research, and by observation leading to discoveries, which continue to guide and change the way children’s rights and child development are understood. These changes alongside the idea of what family is have caused debates as to whether family is adapting or deteriorating (Rodger, 1996).

The diversity now in families and their internal dynamics, means that children are living in more diverse circumstances than before and ‘the nature of their contribution to society has changed’ (Corsaro, 2015, p.33). Families in the 21st century are described as more complex than before, and the challenges faced can be attributed to the freedom of individual rights, moralities, individualism and adjustments that continue to develop within society (Giddens, 1991). These developments can cause change and until this change is understood, it can for a while, cause disruption to social order and therefore such changes are seen as a threat and a ‘problem’ (Bittman and Pixley, 2020).

Nuclear family

Image 1: Nuclear Family Clipart Illustration



(Clipart Library, no date)

The nuclear family for a long time has been seen as the ‘normal’ family and the way family ‘should’ be. A nuclear family describes as ‘a mother and father romantically involved with each other, and their genetically related children that they conceived naturally’ (Cutas and Chan, 2012, p.1) who live together in the same household (Dinisman *et al*, 2017). The nuclear family is understood as being the most stable type of family because it has been accepted by the ‘regime of truth’, which means it will also be more valued within the system (Beckett and Taylor, 2019).

Extended Family: Grandparents raising grandchildren.

Image 2: Grandparents and grandchildren



(Millar, 2018)

Moving away from the nuclear family as a norm is a continued struggle across society and in policy making, yet less couples are choosing to marry, and divorce is high across the country. This depicts a more fluid yet unstable family structure and in many cases, grandparents are becoming more central in the upbringing of their grandchildren.

Across the UK, more than five million grandparents are taking regular care of their grandchildren, ‘providing childcare on a weekly basis... and one in ten looking after their grandchildren at least once a day’ (Age UK, 2017). The role of grandparents is changing, and so is the relationship grandchildren have with their grandparents (Hunt, 2017). For those children who are unable to live with their parents yet have family members able and willing to look after them can make arrangements for kinship care. This alternative care enables children to remain with relatives instead of going into state care (Grandparents Plus, 2017). This section will focus on grandparents as kinship carers.

Looked after Children

Image 3: Children



(Nadezhda1906/Fotolia, 2017)

Looked after children are unable to be safely cared for at home or by family members and have been ‘in the care of their local authority for more than 24 hours’ (NSPCC, 2021).

Conclusion

The bond between children and their carers is important for building a secure attachment, which helps provides greater wellbeing in children and the child learns positive relationship skills for later in life (Corsaro, 2015). Children who feel as if they do not connect emotionally with their primary caregiver can become more insecure, confused, unbalanced, misunderstood and unloved (Esping-Anderson, 2016).

References

Age UK (2017) *5 million grandparents take on childcare responsibilities*. Available at: <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/latest-news/articles/2017/september/five-million-grandparents-take-on-childcare-responsibilities/> (Accessed: 5 June 2021).

Beckett, C. and Taylor, H. (2019) *Human Growth and Development*. Fourth Edition. London: SAGE Publications.

- Bifulco, A. and Thomas, G. (2012) *Understanding adult attachment in family relationships*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Bittman, M. and Pixley, J. (2020) *The double life of the Family*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Brown, A. (2019) *What is the Family and the Law?* Oxford: Hart Publishing.
- Clipart Library (no date) *Nuclear Family Clipart Illustration*. Available at: <http://clipart-library.com/clip-art/family-clipart-transparent-background-12.htm> (Accessed: 10 June 2021).
- Corsaro, W. (2015) *The Sociology of Childhood*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Cutas, D. and Chan, S. (2012) 'Introduction: Perspectives on private and family life' in *Families – Beyond the Nuclear Ideal*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, pp. 1-12.
- Department for Education (2010) *Family and Friends Care*. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/288483/family-and-friends-care.pdf (Accessed: 4 June 2021).
- Dinisman, T. *et al* (2017) 'Family structure and family relationships from the child well-being perspective', *Children and Youth Services Review*, 80, pp. 105-115.
- Esping-Anderson, G. (2016) *Families in the 21st Century*. Demand: SNS Forlag.
- Giddens, A. (1991) *The consequences of modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Grandparents Plus (2017) *Growing up in Kinship Care*. Available at: https://kinship.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/GUICKC_Full_Report_FINAL.pdf. (Accessed: 4 June 2021).
- Hunt, J. (2017) 'Grandparents as substitute parents in the UK' *Contemporary Social Science*, 13(2), pp. 175-186.
- McCandless, J. (2012) 'The Role of Sexual Partnership in UK Family Law' in *Families – Beyond the Nuclear Ideal*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, pp. 13-33.
- Millar, D. (2018) *Grandparents and grandchildren*. Available at: <http://gboomer.co.uk/2018/06/07/grandparents-raising-grandchildren/> (Accessed: 10 June 2021)
- Nadezhda1906/Fotolia (2017) *Children*. Available at: <https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2017/10/03/new-looked-children-statistics-dont-tell-us/> (Accessed: 10 June 2021).
- NSPCC (2021) *Looked after children*. Available at: <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/children-and-families-at-risk/looked-after-children> (Accessed: 2 June 2021).

1702179

SJSI6022

Ass. 2

ONS (2012) *Statistical Bulletin: Families and Households*. Available at:
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/families/bulletins/familiesandhouseholds/2012-11-01> (Accessed: 4 June 2021).

Rodger, J. (1996) *Family Life and Social Control*. London: Macmillan Press.

Sarkisian, N. and Gerstel, N. (2012) *Nuclear family values, extended family lives*. Abingdon: Routledge.