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FAMILY LAW

A Very Short Introduction

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Introduction

Family life is changing at an extraordinary speed and family law is struggling to keep pace with what is happening. The standard building blocks of family law—marriage, parenthood, and childhood—are changing beyond recognition. We can no longer assume that marriage involves one man and one woman; that every child has one mother and one father; or that children need protection until they enter adulthood at age 18.

Family law is a fascinating area of study. It seeks to impose order on the chaos of people's intimate lives. While people will seek the advice of a lawyer before buying a house or executing a will, they, very sensibly, do not before having sex or moving in with a partner. The law is all too often left with a situation where there is no obviously correct answer which will leave everyone happy. Seeking the result which causes the least unhappiness is the more realistic solution.

This book does not seek to explain the law in any particular country in detail. Rather it explains the kinds of issues which family law must address and discusses the factors which influence its development. Examples are most commonly used from the US and UK, but the broader issues apply to any jurisdiction.