
FAMILIES

AQA GCSE SOCIOLOGY UNIT 1
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DEFINING A 'FAMILY' AND A 'HOUSEHOLD'

DEFINING A 'FAMILY'

The term 'family' can be defined as a married couple or cohabiting couple, with or without dependent children or a single parent with their child or children.

Different family types in Britain today:

- **Nuclear families:** A two-generation family containing married or cohabiting parents and their children or child who live together
- **Extended families:** A group of relatives extending beyond the nuclear family. In the classic extended family, three generations live together or nearby. In the modified extended family, members live apart geographically but have regular contact and provide support
- **Single parent families:** A family in which one parent lives with their child or children
- **Gay/lesbian families:** A family in which a homosexual couple (married or cohabiting) live together with their child or children
- **Reconstituted (blended/step) families:** A blended family in which one or both partners have a child or children from a previous relationship with them
- **Beanpole family:** A multigenerational family in which each generation has one or very few members

DEFINING A 'HOUSEHOLD'

Most people in the UK live in households. A household can be defined as either one person living alone or a group of people who share a house or flat. Some, but not all, households are family households.

There are two different types of households which include:

- **Family household:** A household containing a family group such as a nuclear or a single parent family.
- **Non-family household:** A household containing either one person living alone or a group of unrelated people such as students who live together and share facilities or one meal every day.

A FAMILY HOUSEHOLD COULD CONTAIN:

- One family or
- One family plus people who are not family members such as a live-in housekeeper or
- Two or more families

A NON-FAMILY HOUSEHOLD COULD CONTAIN:

- One person living alone or
- Two or more unrelated people living in a shared house and sharing a daily meal or facilities such as a living room

Around 1% of the UK population lives in residential establishments such as care homes, nursing homes or prisons.

People are generally living longer now and this has resulted in more elderly, one-person households.

Data from the 2001 Census highlights variations in households by ethnicity. Here are some example findings from this secondary source of data:

- Household size varies: households of Bangladeshi and Pakistani heritage, on average, contained more people than other households
- 10% of Bangladeshi and Pakistani households, 3% of black Caribbean households and 2% of white British households contained a multigenerational extended family.

LIFE COURSE DIVERSITY

One way of looking at diversity is to examine the different family and non-family households that a particular individual experiences over their life course. For example, a baby born into a single parent family could later become part of a reconstituted family. As a young adult, they could live with friends in a shared house before living on their own in a single-person (non-family) household. After this, they could live with their partner before having children and forming a nuclear family and so on.

KEYWORDS

- **Beanpole family:** A multigenerational family in which each generation has one or very few members
- **Cohabitation:** Living with a partner outside a marriage
- **Cultural diversity:** Culturally based differences between people in a society in terms of religion, ethnicity, social class and so on
- **Extended family:** A group of relatives extending beyond the nuclear family. In the classic extended family, three generations live together or nearby. In the modified extended family, members live apart geographically but have regular contact and provide support
- **Family:** A couple who are married or cohabiting, with or without dependent children, or a single parent with their child or children
- **Family diversity** The variety of family types living in Britain today
- **Gay/lesbian family:** A family in which a homosexual couple (married or cohabiting) live together with their child or children
- **Household:** This comprises of either one person who lives alone or a group of people who live at the same address and who share at least one meal a day or facilities such as the living room
- **Single parent family:** A family in which one parent lives with their child or children
- **Migration:** The movement of people either nationally from one region of a country to another, or internationally from one country to another
- **Nuclear family:** A two-generation family containing married or cohabiting parents and their children or child who live together
- **Reconstituted family:** A blended family in which one or both partners have a child or children from a previous relationship with them

DIFFERENT SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO FAMILIES

There are several different sociological approaches to the study of families and family life. The functionalist approach emphasizes the positive aspects of the nuclear family and its key role in society; whilst the feminist approach is critical of the family and its role in society.

THE FUNCTIONALIST APPROACH

During the 1940s and '50s, functionalists viewed the nuclear family in positive terms as a necessary and important part of society. They argued that the nuclear family performed essential functions for individuals and for society including:

- **Reproduction:** The nuclear family produces the next generation of society's members
- **Primary socialization:** The nuclear family is the agency of socialization through which young children learn the basic behavior patterns, language and skills needed in later life.
- **Emotional support:** The nuclear family provides for its members' emotional well-being.
- **Economic support:** The nuclear family provides its members with financial support

THE NEW RIGHT APPROACH

The New Right approaches of the 1980s and '90s have a more recent reworking of the functionalist approach. Both approaches agree that the nuclear family is the family type that works best in meeting the needs of both society and its children. The New Right approach suggests that women should have the caring role within nuclear families while their husbands should have breadwinner roles. It views families other than the nuclear family as damaging to society.

THE MARXIST APPROACH

The Marxist approach is critical of the nuclear family and the role it plays in maintaining the capitalist system. This approach believes that the nuclear family:

- **Supports the capitalist system** by supplying future generations of workers
- **Socializes working-class children** to accept their lower position in an unequal society
- **Recreates inequalities** between the social classes over times (For example: Bourgeoisie, Nouveau Riche parents can afford to buy their children a privileged education and pass on their wealth to the next generation of their family)

THE FEMINIST APPROACH

The feminist approach is critical of the nuclear family and its role in society. Feminists see society as based on patriarchy and living in nuclear families as benefiting men more than women. Feminists see primary socialization in families as a gendered process.

The term gender refers to masculinity and femininity. Gender socialization describes the process through which people acquire their gender identity and learn how society expects them to behave in order to conform to masculine and feminine behavior. For example, from birth, babies are dressed differently, given different toys and names according to their gender.

DRAWING SIMILARITIES/DIFFERENCES BETWEEN APPROACHES

Similarities between functionalist and New Right approaches:

- Both approaches see nuclear family as the family type that works best in meeting the needs of society
- Both see the nuclear family as the family type that works best in meeting the needs of the children
- Both approaches tend to support the idea of traditional gender roles with women performing the caring role and men performing the breadwinner role

Similarities between the Marxist and feminist approaches:

- Both approaches are critical of the role of the family in society
- Both approaches see the family as a source of oppression

Differences between the functionalist and Marxist views:

- The functionalist approach sees the nuclear family as playing a positive role in society while the Marxist approach is critical of the nuclear family
- The functionalist approach sees the family as meeting the needs of its members while the Marxist approach sees the family as oppressing its members

Differences between the New Right and the feminist views:

- The New Right view tends to support the idea of having traditional gender roles in the family while the feminist approach challenges traditional gender roles
- The feminist approach is critical of the nuclear family while the New Right approach supports the nuclear family and family values

KEYWORDS

- **Agency of socialization:** A social group or institution responsible for undertaking socialization. Examples include families, peer groups, schools, workplaces, religions and the mass media
- **Bourgeoisie:** A term used by Karl Marx and others to refer to the capitalist or ruling class that owns the big businesses in capitalist society
- **Feminist approach:** A sociological approach which examines the ways gender operates in society against the interests of women
- **Gender socialization:** The process through which individuals learn what is seen as appropriate masculine and feminine behavior and acquire a gender identity
- **New Right approach:** An approach to studying families that emphasizes the importance of the nuclear family and traditional family values
- **Patriarchy:** Male power and dominance over women
- **Primary socialization:** The process of early childhood learning, usually within families, during which babies and infants acquire the basic behavior patterns, language and skills needed later in life
- **Role:** The pattern of expected and acceptable behavior of people who occupy a particular social position

CHANGING GENDER ROLES IN FAMILIES

Some sociologists argue that the roles of men and women in families have changed quite significantly since the 1960s. Other approaches disagree with this view.

<u>GENDER ROLES AND RELATIONSHIPS IN FAMILIES HAVE CHANGED SINCE THE 1960S</u>	<u>GENDER ROLES AND RELATIONSHIPS IN FAMILIES HAVE NOT CHANGED MARKEDLY SINCE THE 1960S</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Young and Willmott (1973) argued that the 'symmetrical family' was now typical in Britain and conjugal roles were more shared - Young and Willmott (1973) also found that financial decisions were shared more equally - Pahl (1989) found that compared with 30 years ago, more couples shared financial household income decisions - Gatrell (2008) found that many fathers in dual-earning couples today play a bigger role in their children's' lives compared with those of the past - Reasons for these changes can include: Rise of feminism, availability of effective contraception, women's increased participation in full-time paid employment and the increase in home-based leisure activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Feminists reject the idea of symmetry. Oakley (1974) found little evidence of symmetry. Women in paid employment still had the responsibility for housework. - Crompton and Lyonette (2008) argue that men's involvement in household work has increased less than women's involvement in paid work. The gap between men's and women's contribution to domestic work narrowed between the 1960s and '80s because women spent less time on it rather than because men did more of it. - Crompton and Lyonette (2008) also argue that attitudes to gender roles have changed a lot but men's participation in household tasks haven't. Women still usually do the laundry and ironing. - Some feminists argue that family life is still patriarchal.

ROLE AND AUTHORITY RELATIONSHIPS IN FAMILIES

CHANGING PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS

Many sociologists argue that parent-child relationships have changed over time.

- Relationships are **less authoritarian** – there is less emphasis on parental authority/discipline and more on children's rights and individual freedom. Despite this, Pryor and Trindor (2004) found that middle-class families are more likely than working-class families to involve their children in decision-making.
- Relationships are **more child-centered** – more focus on children's interests and needs. The average family size is smaller today and so children receive individual attention from parents.
- Young people are now **more financially dependent on their family and for a longer time** – the participation age has been raised and means that tens will remain in education/training until age of 17 from 2013 and age of 18 from 2015. However, Scott

(2004) argues that some children may contribute by helping out in a family business or with childcare and housework.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE WIDER FAMILY

Young and Willmott (1957) found that during the 1950s in East London, extended family ties were strong and 43% of daughters had seen their mother during the last 24 hours. Some sociologists argue that family members see less of each other today due to increasing geographical mobility and women's involvement in full-time employment. Consequently, the wider family is becoming less important and family ties are weakening.

Other recent studies, however, have found regular face-to-face contact between family members. Charles et al (2008) found that in Swansea, grandmothers regularly cared for their grandchildren so that mothers could work. Furthermore, fathers often helped their adult children with DIY and adult children cared for their parents. When family members live some distance away they still maintained contact by telephone or visits and provided support by helping out financially or by exchanging gifts. So while contact and support may be changing, the wider family is not necessarily becoming less important.

KEYWORDS

- **Conjugal roles:** The domestic roles of married or cohabiting partners
- **Democratic relationships:** Relationships between, for example, married partners or parents and children, based on equality
- **Division of domestic labour:** The division of tasks such as housework, childcare and DIY between men and women within the home
- **Dual-earner household:** A household in which two adults work in paid employment
- **Dual-worker families:** Families in which both adult partners work in paid employment
- **Feminism:** This term describes the feminist movement in society, as well as a sociological approach
- **Gender roles:** Traditional social roles related to gender such as housewife and breadwinner (wage earner)
- **Geographical mobility:** Moving house from one area to live in another area, region or country
- **Joint conjugal roles:** This term describes domestic roles of married/cohabiting partners which are divided/shared in an equal way
- **Kinship relationships:** Relationships between people based on ties of blood, marriage or adoption
- **Male-breadwinner household:** A household in which the adult male works in paid employment and earns the bulk of the household income
- **Power:** The ability of an individual or group to get what they want despite any opposition they may face from other people
- **Segregated conjugal roles:** This term describes domestic roles of married/cohabiting partners which are divided in an unequal way
- **Symmetrical family:** A family in which spouses carry out different tasks but each makes a similar contribution within the home

CHANGING PATTERNS OF FERTILITY AND LIFE EXPECTANCY

CHANGING PATTERNS OF FERTILITY

'Fertility' refers to the average number of children that women of childbearing age give birth to in a particular society. Women born in the UK are having fewer children than 30 years ago and are having them at a later age. There is a trend towards smaller family size.

Changes in patterns of fertility are linked to:

- **Changing attitudes to family size**
 - o During 19th century, many poorer parents relied on their children's income from paid work to survive. Having big families means a larger income. Today, this financial incentive to have a large family no longer exists as it is now true that children are expensive.
- **Later marriage**
 - o In the 1970s people generally married younger than is usual today. Nowadays, women marry later and delay having children until they are older
- **Women's increased participation in education/paid employment**
 - o This means that they now have more options open to them in addition to/instead of motherhood
- **The availability of effective birth control methods**
 - o Contraception gives women more control over their fertility

CHANGING PATTERNS OF LIFE EXPECTANCY

In the UK, life expectancy has risen over the last century. In 2006, it was 77 years for men and 82 years for women and in the future it is expected to increase further.

Increased life expectancy is linked to:

- **Advances in medicine and surgery** during the 20th century
- **Healthier lifestyles and improvements to diet and nutrition** over the last 30 years
- **Welfare state provisions** such as free healthcare through NHS
- **Decrease in infant mortality rates** since the early 20th century
- **Improvements in public health/sanitation** during the 19th and 20th century such as clean water supplies and sewerage systems
- **Improvements in preventive measures** such as **national screening programmes** for breast cancer and **vaccinations** to prevent diseases like diphtheria and tetanus

INFANT MORTALITY RATES

The term 'infant mortality' refers to the number of babies who die before they reach the age of one. The infant mortality has fallen in Britain over the last 100 years. In 1930, there were 60 infant deaths for every 1000 live births in England and Wales but by 2006, there were only five deaths per 1000 live births.

One reason for the improvement in the infant mortality rates is developments in the level of care provided to pregnant women and babies through the NHS. During the early 20th century, a midwifery service was developed so more babies were delivered by qualified nurses. Advances

in medicine and surgery over the last 100 years mean that many more babies now survive serious illnesses and diseases.

THE AGEING POPULATION

As a result of declining fertility and longer life expectancy, the age structure of the UK population is changing. It now has a smaller proportion of young people and children and an increasing proportion of older people. In other words, it has an ageing population.

This may lead to changes in families/households such as:

- An increase in one-person households
- An increase in beanpole families

In a population that is ageing, the proportion of people over retirement age is gradually increasing over time. In 2007, the proportion of the UK population aged under-16 dropped below the proportion over state pension age for the first time. This ageing of the population is linked to past changes in birth rates and death rates.

The social consequences of an ageing population include the following:

- An increase in one person households containing older females who have outlived their husbands
- An increase in multigenerational or beanpole families
- The need to provide support to some older people. Female relatives and neighbours are most likely to supply this informal support
- The need to provide local authority care home services
- A possible rise in social exclusion among older people

KEYWORDS

- **Ageing population:** In an ageing population, the proportion of the population over retirement age is gradually increasing
- **Demography:** The systematic study of human populations, including their size, age and gender structures, birth and death rates and life expectancy
- **Fertility:** The average number of children born to women of childbearing age in a particular society
- **Infant mortality rate:** The number of infant deaths per 1000 live births per year
- **Life expectancy:** The average number of years a newborn baby may be expected to live
- **Welfare state:** A system in which the state takes responsibility for protecting the health and welfare of its citizens and meeting their social needs. The state does this by providing services such as the NHS, and benefits such as Income Support

MARRIAGE, COHABITATION & DIVORCE

CHANGING PATTERNS OF MARRIAGE & COHABITATION

The marriage rate in the UK has declined from 7.1 marriages per 1000 people in 1981 to 5.2 marriages per 1000 people in 2005. The proportion of people cohabiting in Britain has doubled over the last 20 years. This increase is linked to changing social attitudes towards sex outside marriage. Before the 1960s, it was seen as unacceptable for unmarried women to be sexually active.

During the 1960s and '70s, the number of births outside marriage increased. In 2006 over 40% of babies was born outside of marriage. However, many of these babies are born to cohabiting couples. This increase is related to changing social attitudes towards births outside marriage. There is less social stigma attached to birth outside marriage now. Other important changes linked to marriage and cohabitation includes the introduction of the increase in the average age of first marriage.

CHANGING PATTERNS OF DIVORCE

In general, the number of divorces per year has increased since the 1940s. In 1970, 63 000 divorces were granted in the UK. The number of divorces peaked around 180 000 in 1993 but fell to 144 000 in 2007.

These factors have been identified to explain the general trend towards divorce since 1945:

- **Changing attitudes** mean that divorce is now **more socially acceptable**
- **Legal changes** have made **divorce easier, quicker and cheaper to obtain**. The Divorce Reform Act (1969) introduced 'irretrievable breakdown of marriage' as the ground for divorce. In 1984, new legislation allowed couples to petition for divorce after one rather than three years of marriage
- **Changes in the social position of women** have meant that a women in an unhappy marriage is less tied to her husband through economic dependence
- **The secularization process** has weakened the religious barrier to divorce
- **The media's emphasis on mutual attraction and romance in relationships** encourages couples to have **high expectations of marriage**. If these expectations do not match the reality of married life, this may result in an increase in divorce

THE CONSEQUENCES OF DIVORCE

Divorce has consequences for individuals and for society:

- Rising divorce rates have contributed to an **increase in some household and family types such as one-person households, single-parents, and reconstituted families**
- Some **children lose contact with fathers** following their parents' divorce
- Divorced people may experience **loss of emotional support**
- Divorce can lead to a **loss of income** for the former partners. After divorce, single parent families with dependent children may face financial hardship
- **Conflict between the former husband and wife** may continue after they divorce because of disputes regarding parenting/property issues

- Living in a **reconstituted family may cause problems for individual family members who have to adjust** to different expectations of behavior. On the other hand, **more people may be available to provide attention and support.**

GENERAL CHANGES SINCE THE 1960S

The following list includes issues such as cohabitation and divorce. It shows how each one has changed, in general, in Britain since the 1960s.

1. Births outside marriage: **INCREASED**
2. Cohabitation: **INCREASED**
3. Divorce: **INCREASED**
4. Average age of first marriage: **INCREASED**
5. Birth rate: **DECREASED**
6. Marriage rate: **DECREASED**
7. Number of reconstituted families: **INCREASED**
8. Proportion of households containing single parents with dependent children: **INCREASED**
9. Proportion of households containing one person: **INCREASED**
10. Proportion of households containing traditional nuclear families : **DECREASED**

KEYWORDS

- **Secularization:** The process whereby the influence of religion in a society declines

EXAMPLE EXAM QUESTIONS

1. Identify **two** reasons for the increase in the number of one-person households in Britain over the last 3 years. (2 marks)
2. Explain what sociologists mean by an 'ageing population'. (4 marks)
3. Explain what sociologists mean by 'primary socialization'. (4 marks)
4. Describe **one** way in which an individual's family or household situation might change over the course of their life **and** explain why this change may have occurred. (5 marks)
5. Describe **one** way in which the infant mortality rate has changed in Britain over the last 100 years **and** explain the reasons for this change. (5 marks)