

## The Family

### GCSE Sociology



Many of the 10 and 20 mark questions are about why people and families behave in the way they do in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. If you understand the three points below you should be able to use them in most answers. Most of the questions revolve around the fact that society has changed in the last 50 years; that there are less marriages and more divorces. This is because there has been:

1. A **change in attitudes generally and particularly towards women** so they are more 'free' to do what they want.
  - a) Can have abortion (1967)
  - b. Contraception introduced in 1960's so can plan a family)
  - c. Sex Discrimination Act in 1975 so women can get better jobs
  - d. More women free to work
2. **An increase in Secularization.** This means the influence of the church has reduced so people don't feel pressured to behave as the church or Bible demanded. (E.g. They can live together, get divorced etc)
3. **A decrease in social Stigma** – That means people don't feel shame for not following accepted norms, like getting divorced or not getting married
  - a) The divorce act 1971 – meant more women could get out of marriage easier
  - b) Increase in 'Benefits' meant single mums could survive
  - c) More divorcees and single mums meant less stigma ( shame)

# The family

## What is a family?

Family – a group of two or more people associated by birth, cohabitation, marriage or adoption.

People have different ideas about who is in their family. Some people believe that only those who are related to you and live with you in your household are family whilst others include those related by blood, marriage, cohabitation, birth and adoption that live elsewhere. This is sometimes called a **kinship group**. Feeling part of an extended family is helped by the fact that we can keep in touch through visits via private and public transport and email, mobile phone and video links etc.

## Different types of family (Family structures)

**Family diversity** refers to the different types of families in Britain today.

### The Nuclear Family (Doesn't go down a bomb with the feminists – get it!!)

Often called the **cereal packet** image of a family as it is a stereotypical image

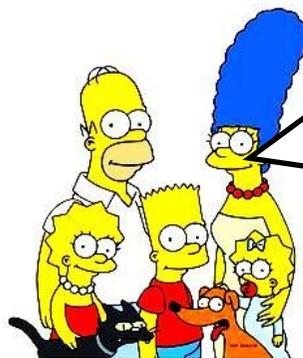
**Functionalist sociologists** see the nuclear family as perfect because:

**Work** – we specialise in a particular profession or job and must move round the country if these skills are not needed where we live. The small nuclear family allows us to be **geographically mobile**

**Status** – if grown up children have jobs with a higher status than their children it could cause conflict. The nuclear family prevents this conflict arising

**Conjugal bond** between husband and wife is stronger and children receive more support and affection

**Important functions** of the modern nuclear family. **Primary socialisation** of children in which parents teach children the norms and values of society; how to tell right from wrong. **Stabilisation of adult personalities** by providing comfort and security for adults as well as children



We are a **traditional nuclear family** – a husband and wife in their first marriage with their young **dependent children**. My husband earns the money whilst I stay at home and look after the home and children. This assumes that men are better at paid employment and women are better at looking after the home and family

This includes cohabiting couples with or without children

70% of the UK population currently live in a modern nuclear family.

And that is why we have collapsing morals and crisis in family leading to problems like crime and drug abuse

**The New Right** have provided new ideas behind many government policies. This view states that the nuclear family is in decline yet is needed to provide a stable environment for children. A series of changes since the 1960s are, they argue, responsible for this decline. These include:

- Easier abortion and contraception
- More divorce and cohabitation
- The rise of lone parents
- More illegitimate births
- More working women taking men's jobs making it harder for them to be breadwinners

That is what the **New Right** say!

# Other types of family

## The Extended Family

**Extended family** – this is a family that includes a nuclear; parents and children and either:

Grandparents – this is called **vertically extended**

Aunts and uncles – this is called **horizontally extended**



## Same Sex Families

Account for a very small proportion of all families. Adoption, IVF and surrogacy have given these families the opportunity to include children.



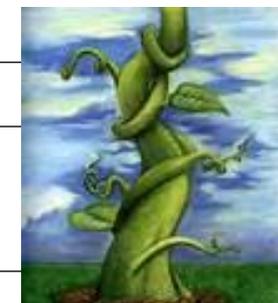
## The Reconstituted Family

With the rise in divorce over the last 50 years many divorced people remarry and form **reconstituted families** with step-parents and step-children



## Empty Nest Families

When children leave home and the parents continue to live together in the family home. The number of empty nest families is increasing because parents now live into their 80s and beyond.



## The Lone Parent Family

24% of children live in a lone parent family. The fastest growing family structure in the UK as a result of divorce, the mother choosing not to marry the father or the father not wanting to marry the mother.



## Bean pole families

Many modern family trees are tall and thin because families have fewer children and people are living longer

### Do children need two parents?

#### **Children need two parents**

Say that lone parent families are bad for children. Functionalists argue that two parents are essential and parents have different roles and skills that together make a successful family; lone parents fail to socialise children properly or be effective agents of social control

Negative effects of lone parenting:

- Underachievement at school
- Children are more likely to be unemployed
- Often dependent on welfare payments
- More crime, delinquency, drug and alcohol abuse
- Most lone parents are mothers. The absence of a father means that there is no role model for boys

#### **Children do not need two parents**

This group state that lone parents can be supported by other family members and / or the father even if he is living elsewhere. A lone parent can financially support a family and provide a stable loving environment which may be better than an empty shell marriage or arguments. There is no evidence that lone-parent families have more problems. The problems they suffer are often associated with poverty rather than the type of family.

**The Life Course of the Family** refers to all the changes that happen within the family. Most people's life course has four stages:

1. First age – when we are dependent children and socialisation takes place
  2. Second age – full employment, adult responsibilities; marriage and children
  3. Third age – about ages 50 – 74. Children have left home and parents live and active independent life although they may be caring for their own parents.
  4. Fourth age – old age and dependence on others
- The experience of different cohorts (people born in a particular period) is different and influences family life, e.g. more women working, equality of women, old age pensions.

# Is marriage in decline?

## Types of marriage

**Marriage** – a legally recognised union between a man and a woman by religious or civil ceremony.

**Monogamy** – being married to only one person at a time. This is law in Britain

**Bigamy** – having more than one marriage partner at a time if illegal in this country.

**Serial monogamy** – having several marriage partners one after the other, e.g. following divorce or death.

**Polygamy** – having more than one marriage partner at the same time; allowed in some countries.

**Polygyny** – a man having several wives; allowed in Africa and the Middle East.

**Polyandry** – a woman having more than one husband. This is rare.

**Arranged marriage** – a marriage in which the parents have a say in the choice of a husband or wife for their son or daughter.

**And... Divorce** – the legal ending of a marriage

## Why do less people get married in church?

It is expensive

It is formal

It is religious

Only 36% of marriages take place in church



You can now get married in a range of places previously it was a church or often grotty registry office.

About 40% of marriages are remarriages; people often want these to be low key.

## Why is marriage less popular?

Feminists – women are more aware that they are being exploited in the nuclear family.

Fewer women are willing to tie themselves down and are looking for more fulfilling lives.

Many women remarry and see the problem as finding the right partner rather than marriage being unattractive

Marriage is expensive.

Couples often choose to live together rather than marry

## Types of cohabitation

**Trial marriage** – this is the most popular type. The intention is to make sure that they can live together before they get married. This suggests that marriage is still valued.

The same as marriage without the ceremony.

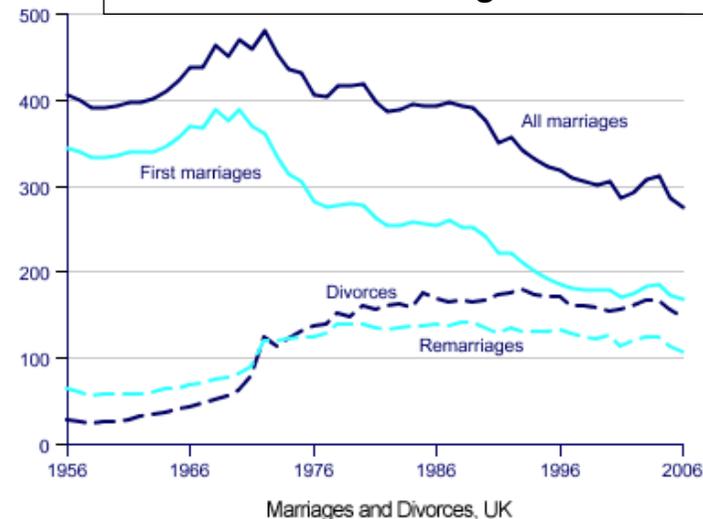
A short-term relationship without commitment

## Births outside marriage



42% of all children were born out of wedlock in 2004. There used to be strong social disapproval of such births; this is no longer the case. Most of these children are born to parents who live together and are in a stable relationship. However, around 40% of unmarried mothers giving birth do not live with the father of the child. In some cases the relationship has broken down or the father does not wish to live with the family and in others the woman chooses to live alone and can often support herself and a child. The later view may be influenced by the feminist view of the exploitative nature of marriage

## Main trends for marriage and divorce



First marriages declined steadily since 1971

Divorce rate increased

Remarriage is steady

## Cohabitation

This used to be unacceptable and was called 'living in sin.' Children born outside marriage were treated as inferior. A huge shift of opinion occurred in the 1990s and it became acceptable.

# Divorce and remarriage

**Why are there more divorces than 50 years ago? What are the effects of divorce?**



**Alternatives to the family**

**42% of all marriages end in divorce. Why?**

The social stigma / disapproval of divorce have declined and it is sometimes thought to be the best thing for children.

Divorce is easier  
 Since 1971 it has been easier to get a divorce because you are now allowed to divorce following irretrievable breakdown of a marriage. Before adultery, cruelty or desertion had to be proved. You no longer have to prove that your marriage has irretrievably broken down. You can divorce after one year; previously you had to wait for three years.

Individuals put their own happiness first and no longer feel tied to their spouse 'until death us do part.'

Women realise that they do not have to put up with a marriage that fails to meet expectations. Further they are more likely to be able to support themselves and so can escape if they wish.

Divorce is cheaper; previously only the rich could afford it.

**For the husband and wife:**

Emotional stress and arguments.

Difficult decisions to be made about: who has which possessions, who will live in the family home, who has custody of the children and rights to see the children

**For the children:**

Children mostly live with the mother and are more likely to:

Live in poverty, behave in anti-social ways, do less well at school and as a result earn less, become a young parent and use drugs, smoke and drink a lot

**Communes**

This is a group of people who live together sharing at least some of their property. Domestic work is usually shared out, e.g. cooking and child care. An example of a commune is the kibbutz in Israel. Communes are often motivated by religious beliefs.

**Is divorce bad for children?**

Many children of divorced families do not suffer any disadvantage. Factors that seem to matter the most:

How well off the family is after divorce. Many problems have more to do with poverty than divorce

The amount of conflict before and after divorce

How well the parents cope with their new lives as this will affect the children's ability to adjust too.

Whether divorce involves changes such as moving in with a step family

How much contact children have with the parent they are not living with

**Shared households**

Households where people who are not related live together, e.g. students or a group of young friends (Remember Friends the TV series).

**Are people dissatisfied with marriage?**

Many divorced people remarry. Divorce shows dissatisfaction with a partner not marriage itself. Having more than one marriage partner is called serial monogamy. Men are more likely to remarry than women. In 2004 it was estimated that one in four families were put together from families that had broken up. These are known as **reconstituted families**.

**Singlehood**

29% of households are single person households and consist of:

Elderly; often widows or widowers.

Divorced and separated people

Young adults living alone

# Roles in the family

## Husbands and wives



### Traditional roles in the family

Men have traditionally been the breadwinner and women have taken responsibility for the home and children. This is known as **segregated conjugal roles**. In such roles there are unequal power relationships with the man controlling money coming into the household. Feminist sociologists suggest that relationships are patriarchal and women and children suffer.

Sociological research suggests that today couples share housework, parenting and both work in paid employment. These more equal (egalitarian) role are known as **joint or integrated conjugal roles** which create **symmetrical families** because:

Women have children younger and have time and want to go out to work.

Men work shorter hours and work is less physically demanding

The home and children are becoming the central focus of adult lives.

There is a more equal **division of domestic labour** although women usually do more housework

Men want to help more and be more involved with the home and family. Such men have been called New Men. These men still go out to work unlike househusbands who do not do paid work but choose to take responsibility for the home and family instead.

### The future of the family?

It may change beyond all recognition with couples choosing to screen foetuses to have designer babies that are perfect in looks, ability and health. However, techniques used may be dangerous and expensive. There may also be a reaction against high divorce rates and a drive to preserve the nuclear family

## Grandparents



Grandparents are now living longer and can help their children and grandchildren but also need support themselves. Kinds of help include:

Economic support – giving and lending money, gifts.

Accommodation – some older people live with their children

Personal care – older people need help from their children, usually daughters.

Looking after children – nearly a quarter of pre-school children are looked after by grandparents.

Emotional and moral support – listening, talking and giving advice; often mothers ask their own mothers for advice about childcare.

### How has the family changed?

Functionalist sociologist stated that the nuclear family suited modern society where they need to move to find work so it was thought that the extended family suited pre-industrial society. This was not the case as people did not live beyond their thirties so few people had living grandparents; therefore the nuclear family was the norm for pre-industrial England. During the Industrial Revolution people moved to towns and cities to find work in factories. They often moved in with extended family members for support to help them to find a job and help in times of sickness and poverty. Therefore the main change with the industrial revolution was that work was carried out outside the home and people went out to work making many women housewives. Easy travel and communication such as telephones have strengthened extended family ties today.

# Check your learning

## Answers for these questions will be found on page 1 of the revision guide

23. What is a family?
24. What does the term family diversity mean?
25. What is a traditional nuclear family?
26. What percentage of the population lives in a nuclear family?
27. Why is it often called a cereal packet family?
28. Why does the New Right think that the nuclear family is needed?
29. List five changes that the New Right believes have brought about a decline in the nuclear family.
30. Why do functionalist sociologists believe that the nuclear family is perfect for modern society – give four reasons.

## Answers for these questions will be found on page 2 of the revision guide

31. What is an extended family?
32. What are the two ways in which a family can be extended?
33. What is a reconstituted family?
34. What is a lone parent family?
35. What percentage of children in Britain live in a lone parent family?
36. Why do functionalists argue that children need two parents?
37. Why do other sociologists argue that children do not need two parents in their family?
38. What is a same sex family?
39. What is an empty nest family?
40. What is a mean pole family?
41. What is the life course of a family?
42. What are the four stages that most families go through in their life course?

## Answers for these questions will be found on page 3 of the revision guide

43. What do the following terms mean:
  - Marriage
  - Monogamy
  - Bigamy
  - Polygamy
  - Polygyny
  - Arranged marriage
  - Divorce

1. Look at the graph on page two of this guide and make a note of the main trends in marriage, divorce and remarriage since the 1950s.
2. Why do only 36% of people get married in church these days?
3. What percentage of marriages are remarriages?
4. Give five reasons why marriage is less popular.
5. What are the three types of cohabitation?
6. What percentage of children were born outside wedlock in 2004?
7. Why has this increased in recent years?
8. What percentage of unmarried mothers do not live with the father of their child?
9. What are the two main reasons why the mother does not live with the father of her child?

## Answers for these questions will be found on page 4 of the revision guide

10. What percentage of marriages ends in divorce?
11. Give five reasons why the divorce rate has increased in recent years.
12. What evidence is there that suggests that people are not dissatisfied with marriage but rather divorce because they are not satisfied with their relationship with their husband or wife?
13. What are the effects of divorce for the husband or wife?
14. What are the effects of divorce for the children?
15. What factors help to decide whether or not divorce is bad for the children?
16. Give three alternatives to the family.

## Answers for these questions will be found on page 5 of the revision guide

17. What are the traditional roles of husbands and wives in the family?
18. What are segregated conjugal roles?
19. Give five reasons why the roles of husbands and wives in families are more equal today.
20. What is a symmetrical family?
21. Give five examples of the kind of help do grandparents give to modern families?
22. What are the main changes that have taken place in the family since industrialization?