

Different Family Forms

You must be able to:

- Explain the term 'family'
- Describe the different types of family in the UK
- Explain the work of Rapoport and Rapoport on family diversity
- Identify alternatives to the family.

Defining a Family and a Household

- The term **family** can be defined as a couple who are married, civil partners or cohabiting, with or without dependent children, or a lone parent with their child or children.
- A household contains either one person living alone or a group of people (for instance, a family or students) who live together.
- Alternatives to families include children's homes and residential care homes, as well as one-person households.

Different Family Types in the UK Today

Nuclear family	A two-generational family containing a heterosexual married or cohabiting couple and their child or children who live together.
Extended family	A group of relatives extending beyond the nuclear family. Classic extended family: three generations live together or nearby. Modified extended family: members live apart geographically but have regular contact and support.
Reconstituted family	A blended or step family in which one or both partners have a child or children from a previous relationship living with them.
Lone-parent family	A family in which one parent lives with their child or children.
Same-sex family	A family in which a gay or lesbian couple (married, civil partners or cohabiting) live together with their child or children.

Rapoport and Rapoport: Types of Diversity in Families in Britain

Based on their review of the existing literature, Rapoport and Rapoport (1982) identified five types of diversity in families in Britain.

1. Organisational diversity: families vary in their structures, the ways they organise their **domestic division of labour** and their **social networks** such as their links to their extended family. Family structures that illustrate this sort of diversity include conventional nuclear families, one-parent, reconstituted and dual-worker families.

Key Point

Some sociologists use the term 'families' rather than 'the family' to highlight the diversity or variety of family forms in the UK today.



An extended family.

Key Thinkers

Rapoport and Rapoport (1982)

Revise

Key Point

The Rapoports are key thinkers, so it is important that you are familiar with their work on **family diversity**, including their research methods. In this study, they drew on secondary sources in the form of research carried out by other sociologists.

2. **Cultural diversity**: families differ in their cultural values and beliefs. Different minority **ethnic groups** such as those of South Asian and Caribbean heritage illustrate diversity in beliefs and values. These different beliefs and values can affect people's **lifestyles** and ideas about **gender roles**, **child-rearing**, education and paid work.
3. Social class diversity: a family's social class position affects the resources available to its members, role relationships between partners, and childrearing practices such as how parents discipline their children.
4. Life-course diversity: the stage in the family life-cycle that a particular family has reached. Newlyweds without children, families with young children and retired couples in **empty nest families** are all at different stages in the life-cycle and have different lifestyles.
5. Cohort diversity: the particular period of time in which a family passes through different stages of the family life-cycle. For example, over time divorce has lost its **social stigma**, so younger couples may find it easier to get divorced today.



Life-course diversity – families at different stages in the family life-cycle.

Global Diversity in Families and Households

- **Cross-cultural studies** show that different family types exist in different cultures.
- In broad terms, a **commune** is a group of people who share living accommodation, possessions, wealth and property.
- A **kibbutz** consists of a group of people who live together communally, and value equality and cooperation between members.

Quick Test

1. Which research method did Rapoport and Rapoport use in their study of families?
2. What did they focus on in their study of families?
3. Conventional nuclear families and dual-worker families are examples of families that illustrate organisational diversity. True or false?

Key Words

family
nuclear family
extended family
reconstituted family
lone-parent family
same-sex family
domestic division of labour
social network
cultural diversity
ethnic groups
lifestyles
gender roles
child-rearing
empty nest families
social stigma
family diversity
cross-cultural studies
commune
kibbutz

The Functions of Families

You must be able to:

- Explain the functions of families
- Explain Parsons' functionalist perspective on the nuclear family
- Explain the criticisms of the functionalist view.

The Functionalist Approach to the Functions of Families

- There are different sociological approaches to the study of families. The functionalist approach focuses on the positive functions that the nuclear family performs for individuals and for society. Murdock (1949) identified four essential functions.

1. **The sexual function:** society needs to regulate sexual activity. The nuclear family regulates a married couple's sexual behaviour and helps to maintain their relationship.
2. **The reproductive function:** society needs new members if it is to survive over time. The nuclear family produces the next generation of society's members.
3. **The economic function:** society needs a way of providing people with financial support (for instance, food and shelter). Economic cooperation is based on a division of labour between the husband and wife within a nuclear family.
4. **The educational function:** society needs to ensure that new members learn its culture. This learning takes place through socialisation within the nuclear family.

Parsons' Functionalist Account of the Nuclear Family

- Parsons (1956) identified two basic and vital functions that all families perform in all societies: primary socialisation and the stabilisation of adult personalities.
 1. The nuclear family functions as an agency of primary socialisation. Through this process, children learn the culture of their society. The family is vital because it socialises children so that they learn and accept society's shared values and **roles**. This helps to maintain the stability of society.
 2. The nuclear family functions as an agency of personality stabilisation (the stabilisation of adult personalities). Everyday life outside the family can be stressful for adults and can put them under pressure. However, the husband and wife support each other emotionally and this relieves the pressure. (This is also known as the 'warm bath' theory.) In this way, the family is a safe haven and plays a key role in maintaining the emotional stability of adults. Also, by living with children, parents can act out the childish elements of their own personality. This also helps to keep adult personalities stable.

The functionalist approach saw the traditional nuclear family (made up of a married couple and their biological children) as a key part of society during the 1940s and 1950s. Today, however, many nuclear families are made up of cohabiting couples and their children.



Key Thinker

Parsons (1956)



Emotional support from a spouse may help to relieve the pressures of everyday life.

Criticisms of Parsons, Murdock and the Functionalist Perspective

- Critics see functionalist accounts as outdated, unrealistic and sexist.
- Parsons focuses on American middle-class families and ignores social class, and religious and **ethnic diversity**.
- Parsons ignores alternatives to the nuclear family (such as communes or **kibbutzim**) that could fulfil the two functions.
- **Idealisation** – Parsons gives an idealised view of families that does not match the reality. He ignores **dysfunctional families** in which there is conflict, emotional stress, child abuse and domestic violence.
- Marxists are critical of the nuclear family and see it as functional for capitalist society. In their view, one of its functions is to socialise children into accepting the values of capitalism. In this way, the nuclear family serves the interests of capitalism.
- Many feminists see the family as a major source of female oppression. Nuclear families imprison women in their own homes, where they are tied to childcare and housework.

How relevant do you think Parsons' ideas are today?

Key Point

Parsons is a key thinker, so it is important that you are familiar with his work on the functions of the family and the criticisms of his ideas.



Quick Test

1. Identify Parsons' theoretical perspective on the family.
2. In which decade did Parsons' work get published?
3. Parsons identified four basic and vital functions performed by all families in all societies. True or false?

Key Words

roles
ethnic diversity
kibbutzim
idealisation
dysfunctional families

The Marxist Perspective on Families

You must be able to:

- Explain the Marxist approach to families
- Describe the key ideas of Zaretsky
- Explain the criticisms of the Marxist view.

The Marxist Approach to Families

- The Marxist perspective is critical of the nuclear family and its role in maintaining the capitalist system.
- The nuclear family recreates inequalities between social classes over time. For example, members of the bourgeoisie (the owners of the means of production such as land and factories) can buy their children a privileged education and pass on their wealth to the next generation.
- Through socialisation within the family, working-class children learn to accept their lower position in an unequal society and to see the system as fair.



Members of the bourgeoisie can buy their children a privileged education. In this way, the family recreates social class inequalities over time.

Zaretsky's Account of the Family

- Zaretsky (1976) writes about the family from a Marxist perspective.
- He argues that, before the early 19th century, the family was a unit of production. For instance, during the early stages of the textile industry, all family members were involved in the production of cloth within the home.
- The rise of industrial capitalism and factory-based production led to a split between family life and work. So the family and the economy are now seen as two separate spheres: the private and the public sphere.

Key Point

The Marxist perspective on families is different from the functionalist perspective in important respects.

Key Thinker

Zaretsky (1976)

Revise

- With the separation of home and work, women became responsible for personal relationships and for family members' emotional well-being.
- The nuclear family has an **economic function** that serves the interests of capitalism. Women undertake unpaid labour within the home (such as child-rearing and cleaning) and maintain daily life. The system of wage labour relies on this unpaid domestic labour. Yet domestic labour is devalued because it is seen as separate from the world of work.
- Through the family, each social class reproduces itself over time. The bourgeois family transmits its private property from one generation to the next (through inheritance). The proletarian family reproduces the labour force by producing future generations of workers.
- The family is a vital unit of consumption for capitalism. Families buy and consume the products of capitalism and enable the bourgeoisie to make profits.
- Zaretsky believes that only **socialism** can end the artificial separation of family life and public life, and make personal fulfilment possible.



Key Point

Zaretsky (1976) is a key thinker, so it is important that you are familiar with his work on the role of the family under capitalism and the criticisms of his ideas.

Criticisms of the Marxist Approach to Families and Zaretsky

- Marxists ignore the fact that many people are satisfied with family life and **marriage**.
- Feminists argue that Marxists work with the traditional model of the nuclear family – that of the male breadwinner and female housewife. Marxists ignore family diversity.
- Some feminists see female oppression as linked to patriarchy rather than to capitalism.
- Marxists tend to focus on negative aspects of the nuclear family but functionalists see it as meeting the needs of individuals and society. Parsons, for example, saw the nuclear family as a safe haven that provides spouses with emotional support.



Critics argue that Marxists overlook people's satisfaction with marriage and family life.

Quick Test

1. Identify one function of families, according to the Marxist perspective.
2. In Zaretsky's view, why is domestic labour devalued?
3. Identify one difference between the Marxist and functionalist perspectives on the family.

Key Words

economic function
socialism
marriage

Feminist and other Critical Views of Families

You must be able to:

- Explain feminist approaches to the study of families
- Describe the ideas of Delphy and Leonard
- Explain the criticisms of feminist views
- Outline different criticisms of families.

Feminist Approaches to Families

- Feminist perspectives focus on gender relations. They are generally critical of the role of the family in society and its negative impact on women.
- Families actively contribute to the construction of gender differences through primary socialisation processes, for example by dressing girls in pink and boys in blue.
- The term **canalisation** describes the way parents channel their children's interests into toys, games and other activities that are seen as gender appropriate. Through gender socialisation, the family helps to reproduce gender inequalities over time.

Delphy and Leonard's Account of Families and Marriage

- Delphy and Leonard (1992) are radical feminists who argue that the family is patriarchal.
- Family relationships involve economic exploitation. In other words, men benefit from the unpaid work of women within families.
 - Wives are exploited in terms of the way their labour is used by their husbands; their work not being valued; and their financial dependence on their husbands.
- The family is based on a hierarchy – with the husband at the top and other family members in subordinate positions. The husband provides for his wife's upkeep and gets to control her labour for his own use. Even when women have well-paid, full-time employment, they still do most of the domestic work and childcare.
- Families maintain men's dominance over women and children. In this way, the **patriarchal family** maintains the patriarchal nature of society.



Gender socialisation in action.

Key Thinkers

Delphy and Leonard (1992)

Key Point

Delphy and Leonard (1992) drew on existing research in their article on exploitation within families and marriage.

The term **matriarchal family** refers to a family in which power is held by a female (who may be referred to as a **matriarch**).

Criticisms of Feminist Approaches

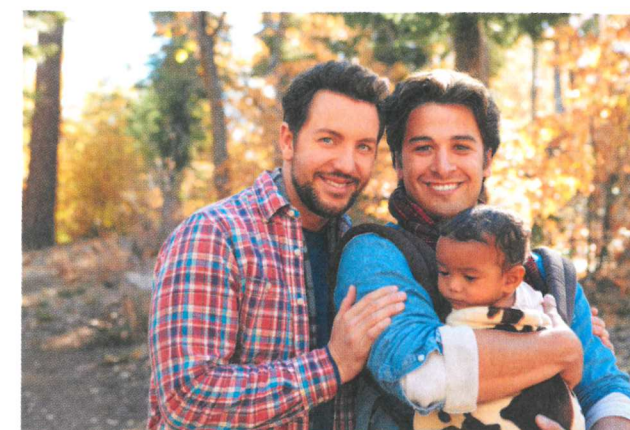
- Delphy and Leonard do not consider **egalitarian** families that share power between their members.
- Marxist approaches link inequalities within families to capitalism rather than to patriarchy.
- Functionalists see the family as meeting the needs of individuals and society.

Criticisms of Families

- Many sociologists are critical of families.
- Feminists are critical of:
 - the patriarchal nature of families
 - the status and role of women in families
 - the family's role as an agency of gender socialisation.
- Marxists are critical of:
 - the economic function of the nuclear family under capitalism
 - the family's role in reproducing **social inequality** over time
 - the family's role as a unit of consumption for capitalism.

Other Criticisms of Families

- Other sociologists and commentators are critical of or concerned by one or more of the following.
 - The decline in traditional family values, such as the idea that a normal family type is made up of a married couple bringing up their biological children.
 - Social changes such as the increase in marital breakdown, **divorce** and single-parent families. These changes undermine the functions of the family. If the family cannot fulfil its functions (for example, socialisation), this threatens the stability of society as a whole.
 - The **isolation** (or separation) of the nuclear family from the wider **kinship** networks and its loss of contact with the wider family.
 - The loss of traditional functions (such as education and economic production) that families once carried out but which have now been transferred to other structures of society, such as the education system.
 - The functionalist perspective's unrealistic idealisation of the nuclear family. This ignores dysfunctional families in which domestic violence and abuse are found.



Quick Test

1. Which research method did Delphy and Leonard use in their study of families?
2. What did they focus on in their study of families?
3. Identify one similarity between the Marxist and feminist perspectives on the family.

Revise

Key Point

The feminist perspective on families is similar to the Marxist perspective in some respects and different in others.

Key Words

canalisation
patriarchal family
matriarchal family
matriarch
egalitarian
social inequality
divorce
isolation
kinship

Conjugal Role Relationships

You must be able to:

- Explain the difference between joint and segregated conjugal roles
- Outline Young and Willmott's views on the symmetrical family
- Outline Oakley's views on conventional families
- Describe how power is distributed in conjugal relationships.

Joint and Segregated Conjugal Roles

- There are two types of **conjugal roles**: **segregated conjugal roles** and **joint conjugal roles**.

Segregated conjugal roles and relationships	Joint conjugal roles and relationships
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A clear division of domestic labour – tasks are divided by gender. • The couple spend little of their leisure time together and have separate interests. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No rigid division of household tasks into male and female jobs. • The couple share much of their leisure time and have few separate interests.

- During the early 20th century, conjugal roles were segregated. Generally, married women were responsible for domestic labour and men were the main **wage** earners.
- Parsons (1956) argued that the man takes the more **instrumental role** as breadwinner. The woman takes the more **expressive role** as housewife and mother. He explains this in terms of biological differences between the sexes.



Parsons argued that men take the instrumental role as family breadwinners. Remember that he adopts a functionalist perspective.

Young and Willmott's Account of the Symmetrical Family

- Some sociologists suggest that conjugal roles are becoming more joint (**integrated conjugal roles**).
- Young and Willmott (1973) argue that the **symmetrical family** is typical in Britain. Symmetrical relationships are opposite but similar. The spouses perform different tasks but each makes a similar contribution to the home.
 - Decision-making, including financial decisions, is more shared.
 - Family members are now more home-centred, sharing much of their leisure time.

Reasons for the Move to Symmetry

- The rise of feminism since the 1960s influenced women's attitudes and led them to reject the housewife role.
- Legal changes such as the Equal Pay Act (1970) and the Sex Discrimination Act (1975) gave women more equality and status within the workplace.
- More effective birth control enables women to combine motherhood with paid work.
- Technological developments create opportunities for sharing home-based leisure activities such as computer games, so men now spend more time at home.

Key Thinkers

Young and Willmott (1973)

Young and Willmott's ideas are influenced by the functionalist perspective.

Key Point

In their research, Young and Willmott (1973) used a questionnaire survey delivered as a face-to-face, structured interview.

Criticisms of Young and Willmott's Account

- Feminists reject the idea of symmetry. For example, Oakley found that women in paid work still had the main responsibility for housework.
- Although attitudes to gender roles may have changed, people's behaviour has not altered much. Many women now work a **double shift**, combining paid work with housework. In practice, the **new man** is hard to find.

Oakley's Views on the Conventional Family

- Oakley (1982) defines the **conventional family** as a nuclear family comprising a married couple and their children who live together.
 - Women are expected to do unpaid work inside the home while men are expected to do paid work outside the home.
 - The man's economic power is linked to his income from paid work.
 - The woman's dependence on the man's wages is one aspect of inequality.
- Statistically, the conventional family is no longer the norm but the idea of conventional family life is powerful. People expect it to bring them happiness but, in reality, it can be stressful.
- In Oakley's view, some groups, particularly among the educated **middle class**, are exploring other ways of living – both in families and without them. Dual-worker and lone-parent families are increasing.
- However, norms are not changing across all social groups because conventional families are self-perpetuating over time – they set the pattern for the next generation of parents.

Key Thinker

Ann Oakley (1982)

Key Point

In her analysis of the conventional family, Oakley (1982) drew on research carried out by other sociologists.

Oakley's feminist perspective on families is different from Young and Willmott's functionalist approach.

Power within Conjugal Relationships

- One way of studying the distribution of power in **conjugal relationships** is by examining financial decision-making. Young and Willmott (1973) identified an increase in shared decision-making, including financial decisions, within symmetrical families.
- Pahl (1989) found that more couples share decisions on household spending compared with 30 years ago. However, husbands are still likely to dominate decision-making.
- Sociologists see domestic violence as a form of power in which one family member attempts to control others.
- Some feminists link women's oppression to patriarchy (male power) within families.

Quick Test

1. Which research method did Young and Willmott use in their study of families?
2. Identify one difference between functionalist and feminist perspectives on conjugal roles.
3. Explain one difference between joint and segregated conjugal roles.

Key Words

conjugal roles
segregated conjugal roles
joint conjugal roles
wage
instrumental role
expressive role
integrated conjugal roles
symmetrical family
double shift
new man
conventional family
middle class
conjugal relationships

Changing Relationships Within Families

You must be able to:

- Explain changes in authority relationships between parents and children
- Discuss changes in people's relationships with their wider family
- Explain Young and Willmott's principle of stratified diffusion
- Outline contemporary family-related issues.

Changing Relationships Between Parents and Children

- During the 19th century, children's experiences varied according to their age, gender and social class. Poverty may have prevented many parents from sending their children to school.
- After the introduction of the Education Act 1918, all children had to attend school until the age of 14. Young and Willmott argue that **childhood** was officially recognised as a separate stage in human life at this point.



Contemporary Parent-Child Relationships

- One view is that relationships are now less authoritarian and there is more emphasis on children's rights. Research suggests that middle-class families are more likely than working-class families to involve their children in decisions.
- Relationships are generally more child-centred and focus on children's needs. The average family size is smaller today than 100 years ago, so children get more individual attention from their parents.
- Young people are now financially dependent on their family for a longer period of time. This can potentially lead to conflict within families.
- Some children contribute to childcare and housework, help out in family businesses and provide emotional support.

People's Relationships with their Wider Family

- Some sociologists suggest that the wider family is becoming less important and family ties are weakening.
- Young and Willmott (1957) found that the extended family flourished in Bethnal Green in London during the mid-1950s and family ties were strong. However, in later research, they discovered that the nuclear family had become more isolated from the extended family.
- One view is that increasing **geographical mobility** and women's involvement in full-time paid work mean that family members see each other less often.
- An alternative view is that geographical distance affects the type of support between family members but does not eliminate it altogether. Support at a distance takes the form of visits, phone calls and financial help.



Geographical separation does not necessarily eliminate support between family members.

The Principle of Stratified Diffusion

- Young and Willmott (1973) developed the **principle of stratified diffusion** as a guide to changes in family life.
- According to this principle, many social changes (for example, in values and attitudes) start at the top of the social class system and work downwards. Changes in family life filter down from the middle class into the **working class**.

Contemporary Family-Related Issues

The Quality of Parenting

- The quality of parenting is one of the main factors affecting children's well-being.
- Research suggests that the quality of parent-child relationships is associated with children's educational achievements. Children's reading ability is linked to the reading environment around them.
- The quality of parent-child relationships is also associated with children's social skills and their relationships with peers. Parental warmth, lack of conflict and parental control seem important in developing children's social skills.

Relationships between Teenagers and Adults

- One view is that some parents cannot control their teenage children, and delinquent teenagers have been inadequately socialised into society's norms and values by their parents.
- Another concern is that a minority of teenagers are themselves parents.

Care of Elderly People

- **Life expectancy** has increased and the UK has an **ageing population**. Some people, particularly women, care for family members from different generations.
- Older people are often seen as **dependent family members**. However, research indicates that an older person's social class, gender and ethnicity affect their independence.

Arranged Marriage

- A marriage may be built on mutual attraction between two partners and it may also be arranged. An **arranged marriage** is based on consent and the partners' right to choose.
- It is important not to confuse arranged and forced marriage. In a forced marriage, one or both partners withhold their consent but the wedding still goes ahead. Forced marriages are illegal in Britain and forcing someone to marry can result in imprisonment.

Quick Test

1. Young and Willmott (1973) study the family from a feminist perspective. True or false?
2. Identify one difference between an arranged and a forced marriage.
3. What is meant by life expectancy?

Revise

Key Point

Young and Willmott (1973) are key thinkers, so it is important that you understand their work on the symmetrical family and the principle of stratified diffusion.



Key Words

childhood
geographical mobility
principle of stratified diffusion
working class
life expectancy
ageing population
dependent family members
arranged marriage

Changing Family and Household Structures

You must be able to:

- Describe and explain changes in family and household structures
- Describe and explain changes in patterns of fertility.

Changes in Family and Household Structures

- Since the mid-1970s, there have been significant changes in family and household structures. These include:
 - a decrease in the proportion of children living in conventional nuclear families headed by a married couple
 - an increase in the proportion of children living in families headed by a cohabiting couple
 - an increase in families headed by a same-sex couple
 - a significant increase in one-person households.

The Decrease in Reconstituted Families

- The number of reconstituted or **blended families** in England and Wales fell from 631 000 to 544 000 between 2001 and 2011, according to census data (Office for National Statistics).
- One reason for the decrease is that the average age at which women have their first baby is increasing. Babies are now more likely to be born to older couples, who are less likely to separate. This may reduce the chances that the babies will become step-children later on.
- Lone parents may be more likely to make up one half of a couple who live apart. 'Living apart together' relationships (the partners are in a committed relationship but live apart, because, for example, they work in different cities) do not count as blended families in the census data.

The Increase in Dual-Career Families

- As a result of the increasing proportion of married or cohabiting women in employment, there are more **dual-career families**.
- Some people (particularly women) may experience **role conflict** if the demands of their roles as a parent and an employee (or employer) clash.

The Increase in Lone-Parent Families

- The proportion of dependent children living with one parent in the UK has increased markedly since the 1970s. More recently, the proportion has remained fairly stable.
- The rise in lone-parent families is linked to the increase in divorce.
- The increase is also related to changing views on the family and marriage.
 - People now have more freedom of choice in their relationships.

Key Point

The functionalist perspective sees the decline in conventional nuclear families as a problem for society.



Women in dual-career families may experience role conflict.

Key Point

Some approaches such as functionalism see the changes in family and household structures as a problem for society. Other sociologists see them as part of a move towards greater freedom of choice in relationships.

- It is now more socially acceptable for single women to have children without a partner (for example, to become single mothers by choice through sperm donation).
- Some commentators link the rise in fatherless families to a decline in society's moral fibre and a **culture of dependency**. They see fatherless families as part of an **underclass** that depends on **welfare state** provision.

The Increase in One-person Households

- Over the last 30 years, the number of one-person households in the UK has increased significantly.
- This increase is partly due to the changing age structure of the population. People are living longer so there are more elderly, one-person households that typically contain widows.
- The growth is also linked to the increase in solo living among younger people. These households may comprise single people, divorcees, international migrants and people who 'live apart together'.

Changes in Patterns of Fertility

- The term 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 (and at a later age) than 30 years ago. So there is a trend towards smaller families.

Reasons for the Changing Patterns of Fertility

- Economic factors:** during the 19th century, childrearing among poor families was motivated partly by economic factors. This is no longer the case today.
- Labour market uncertainty:** during global recessions when there is uncertainty about the job market, people may delay having children.
- Later marriage:** the trend since the 1970s is for people to get married at an older age. Some women who marry later will also delay having children.
- Women's increased participation in higher education and paid employment:** females have more options in addition to (or instead of) motherhood today.
- Effective birth control methods:** women now have greater control over their fertility.



Quick Test

- Since the 1970s, has the proportion of children living in conventional nuclear families headed by a married couple increased or decreased?
- Identify one reason for the increase in lone-parent families since the 1970s.
- Family size has increased, on average. True or false?

Key Words

blended families
dual-career families
role conflict
culture of dependency
underclass
welfare state

Marriage and Divorce

You must be able to:

- Describe different forms of marriage
- Outline the changing patterns of marriage in the UK
- Outline and explain the changing patterns of divorce
- Explain the consequences of divorce.

Different Forms of Marriage

Monogamy	In the UK, marriage is based on monogamy – being married to just one person at a time.
Bigamy	Marrying when already married to someone else – a criminal offence.
Serial monogamy	When a divorced person enters into a second marriage, then divorces, remarries, divorces, remarries, and so on.
Polygamy	The practice of having more than one spouse at the same time.
Polygyny	When a man has two or more wives at once.
Polyandry	When a woman has two or more husbands at once.

Changing Patterns of Marriage in the UK

The Decline in the Annual Number of Marriages

- The number of marriages in the UK peaked in 1972 at 480 000. Since then, the overall number has fallen, and in 2011 just over 286 600 marriages took place.

People are Getting Married Later

- Compared with the early 1970s, people now put off marriage until they are older. This is linked to increased educational and employment opportunities, particularly for women.
- It is also related to changing attitudes towards premarital sex, which is now generally considered more acceptable.

The Introduction of Civil Partnerships and Same-Sex Marriages

- Since 2005 in the UK, same-sex couples aged 16 years and over can have their relationship legally recognised as a civil partnership.
- Marriages of same-sex couples were introduced in 2014.

The Increase in Cohabitation

- The proportion of people **cohabiting** in Britain has more or less 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.
- The **secularisation** process has weakened the religious barrier to cohabitation: living together is much less likely to be seen as 'living in sin' compared to the 1940s.
- The high cost of weddings may also put people off marriage.

Key Point

There is global diversity in the forms of marriage.



The Increase in Births outside Marriage

- During the 1960s and 1970s, the number of births outside marriage in the UK increased. However, many of these babies were born to cohabiting couples.
- Births outside marriage are no longer stigmatised.

Changing Patterns of Divorce

- A divorce is the legal ending of a marriage. In general, the number of divorces per year in England and Wales has risen since 1945, although there have also been decreases. The number peaked in 1993.
- Statistics on divorce reveal nothing about the extent of empty shell marriages.

Reasons for the Increase in Divorce

- Legal changes have made divorces cheaper and quicker to obtain.
- Changing attitudes since the 1960s mean that divorce is now more socially acceptable.
- The secularisation process has weakened the religious barrier to divorce.
- Women in unhappy marriages are less tied to their husbands through economic dependence.
- The media's emphasis on 'romantic love' encourages couples to have high **expectations** of marriage. If these expectations are not met, it may result in an increase in divorce.

The Consequences of Divorce for Individuals and Society

- Rising divorce rates have contributed to an increase in one-person households, and lone-parent and reconstituted families.
- Living in a reconstituted family may create problems for some family members who have to adjust to different expectations of behaviour. On the other hand, more people may be available to provide attention and support.
- Conflict between the former spouses may continue after they divorce due to disputes about parenting and property.
- Some children lose contact with a parent or with members of their extended family following their parents' divorce.
- Divorced people, particularly men, may experience loss of emotional support if their friends and social networks change.
- Divorce can lead to loss of income for the former partners. After divorce, lone-parent families with dependent children may face financial hardship.

Quick Test

1. Polygamy describes the practice of having more than one wife at once. True or false?
2. Identify one reason for the increase in cohabitation in Britain over the last 20 years.
3. Identify one possible consequence of parental divorce for children.



Divorce is now more socially acceptable compared to the 1960s and some people throw divorce parties today.

Key Point

The functionalist perspective sees some of the social changes described here as having negative consequences for individuals and for society.

Key Words

monogamy
bigamy
serial monogamy
polygamy
polygyny
polyandry
cohabitation
changing social attitudes
secularisation
expectations