

The Family: Revision Guide



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The big 20 mark question is the essay answer question and will ask you to explain something using sociological knowledge.

What does the exam board expect me to know about the family?

You should know and understand:	<input type="checkbox"/>
- What the family is	
- What different types of family there are	
- How the family is different in different cultures	
- What roles the family fulfils	
- How the family structure has changed	
- Why the family structure has changed	
- What marriage is	
- What different types of marriage there are	
- What the roles of men and women have been traditionally	

- How the roles of men and women have changed	
- What a household is	
- What different types of household structure there is	

What is the family?

Introduction

The definition of the family is a difficult one – it can mean the relatives you live with – those who share a *household* with, it can also mean other close relatives who don't live with you but are still related.

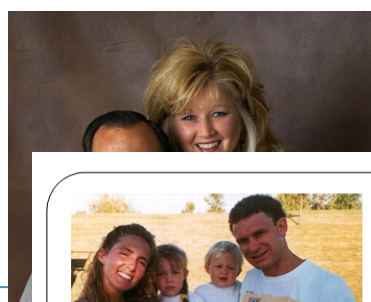
It can even sometimes mean people who you are linked with through marriage, fostering, adoption – and those friends of parents that you call aunt or uncle. It could even include people long since passed away, many generations ago.

It's ok though because sociologists have a load of terms to describe different types of family.

Try this....

What do you know so far? Look at the pictures below and write underneath or next to each of them the type of family that is being shown.

You can choose from nuclear family, extended family, horizontally extended family, vertically extended family, empty nest family, and reconstituted family.





Definitions of the family

Below this introduction bit are two tables. But one of them is empty. You need to take the definitions in italics from the first table and write them out with the correct term in the second table. Now how difficult can that be?

	<i>(grandparents, parents and children)</i>
	<i>children.</i>

Nuclear Family	
Extended Family	
Horizontally Extended Family	
Vertically Extended Family	
Empty Nest Family	
Lone Parent Family	
Matrifocal	

The family in different cultures

There are lots of key words to learn here about the different types of families there are in different cultures and some key examples / case studies you'll have to learn. These will be useful in short answer possible definition questions but might also be worth a small mention in an essay based answer.



Monogamy – Currently the law in the UK and other western countries where people are only allowed to be married to one person at a time.



Bigamy – Currently against the law in the UK and other western countries, a criminal offence where a person is married more than one person at the same time.



Serial Monogamy – One of those people who have several marriage partners one after another, but never at the same time.

Polygamy - Allowed in some countries and some religions – where people are allowed more than one marriage partner – there are two different sorts – which you can find about below.

Polygyny - Allowed by law in most of Africa, the Middle East and in parts of southern Asia – the name given to a man having several wives. In these countries most marriages are still monogamous – because having a wife is expensive so having several wives is a display of wealth.



Polyandry - Is actually very rare – but still worth knowing, and is the name given to a woman having several husbands. It normally happens when a woman marries two brothers – or where there are fewer women than men because of female infanticide – the killing of girl babies.

Have a go at this....

Stimulus Material

Read the following passage about a family in China.

~~to be doing in the business of the great-grandfather was of the old type of a wife~~
~~of the old type of a wife of the old type of a wife of the old type of a wife~~
Chang (1991:29) *Wild Swans*

Understanding the Stimulus

1. Why was the wife in China older than her husband?
2. How old was the great-grandfather when he married?
3. How old was the great grandmother when she became engaged to her husband?
4. What was the name of the author's great-grandmother?
5. What attitude did the Chinese have towards 'love'?
6. When did the marrying couple meet for the first time?
7. What name is given to this form of marriage?



Development and Revision

1. What name is given to marriages where people can have more than one partner at a time?
2. What does the term 'serial monogamy' mean?
3. List differences between the Chinese and the British attitudes towards marriage as shown in this passage.

The role of the family

Think about what your family does for you - you'll probably think of the obvious things like love, support, food and money! However sociologists have put their head together and come up with some reasons. You'll need to learn them and for A* / A answers it'd be worth learning the branch of sociology they come from. If there's any you don't recognise or you'd like some more information on – they'll be at the back of the booklet – just in case.

So in no particular order here they come:

An agent of socialisation

This is a *functionalist* view (you can find out more about them in the back) that the family provides and reinforces norms and values – or put a different way – expected ways of behaving. The family is called an agent of *primary socialisation* because it is the first type of socialisation you receive.

~~Controlled habit socialization in the household for the first time. It is the first type of socialization you receive.~~

To control behaviour of the young (formal social control)

By socialising you into a particular way of behaving *functionalists* believe that the family is a great controller of behaviour – it teaches you right from wrong, and so you never even think about behaviour inappropriately or incorrectly.

To relieve the stress of modern day living

Functionalists also came up with this warm bath theory – imagine a warm bath, relaxing, taking all those stresses and strains away. That’s what the *functionalists* believe the family does – it provides a relaxing environment away from the stressful world of work.



The dark side of the family

Not everybody thinks the family is a great thing – some sociologists think it’s an institution within society that exploits or uses people. You need to learn all of this too I’m afraid.

Reproduces social inequality

This is a *Marxist* idea and believes that through the socialisation of children those who are working class are taught to accept their poor status, and worse than those with money. The family also reproduces social inequality through wealth being passed down from rich parents to rich children. Funny that.



Exploitation and abuse of women

A *feminist* idea this one – which is particularly critical of the *warm bath theory* because it puts forward the idea that men have the economic power, and that the rosy picture of the family that *functionalists* paint actually disguises complex issues like domestic violence.

Other than marriage...

This section is quite an important one – it talks about the decline of the family and could easily be a ten mark essay based question. There are lots of things to get through so expect lots of subheadings and lots of questions. It's in your best interests to do them.

So what reasons are there that the family is in decline? Here they come – in no particular order:

1. Cohabitation

Cohabitation is the name given to a man and a woman who live together without being married. You need to understand a few things about cohabitation. The first is that is used to socially unacceptable – known as living in sin, especially if there were kids involved. But now it's much more acceptable and there are three different sorts you need to know about.

A – The most common is a trial marriage – where a couple live together to see if they can manage it as man and wife! The intention is to get hitched in the end. Cohabitation is a step towards marriage not an alternative!



B – The other type is virtually exactly the same as marriage except that no ceremony has taken place. Within the relationship there is a commitment to a permanent, lasting, loving relationship.

C – Some types of cohabitation involve short term relationship without commitment.

The first point is really important – cohabitation is a step towards marriage not an alternative. Many couples do it because it gives them time to save for a wedding, or their own house. Rather than ignoring marriage – people are just delaying it.

Either way the *New Right* certainly don't like it. They say it has contributed to the decline of the family – and the traditional values that it represents. There's more about them at the end of the booklet on the branches of sociology.

2. Decline in popularity of church weddings (secularisation)

There's an argument in sociology that the number of weddings is going down because people are being put off marriage. This decline in popularity of church weddings means an increase in cohabitation. But why are people not a fan of church weddings anymore? Well they're expensive, formal and religious – some people are getting married in registry offices, but some people are just not getting married and so less people are getting married.

3. It's easier to get a divorce now

One of those other sociology arguments is that marriages are on the decrease because it's now easier to get a divorce. Confused by that? Think of it this way – people get married, they find out it's not as perfect as they thought it would be. So they get divorced – which is now much easier (*there's more about this in the increase in divorce section*). It's argued that the process of divorce puts people off marriage altogether – or at least delays remarriages.

4. Feminists' views

They would argue that because women have more equal rights than men that we are going to work and focusing more on our careers, therefore not choosing to get married until later, or in fact, not at all.

Why has divorce increased?

There's no getting away from the small fact that divorce is on the increase – around 170,000 a year and around 1 in 3 marriages will end in divorce.

In 1971 the divorce act made it easier for marriages to be ended, and since 1971 the number of divorces increased with women two and half times more likely to start divorce proceedings than men.

But there are other reasons why the divorce rate has increased apart from the simple explanation that it's now easier to do so. The box below shows how divorce has been easier because of the 1971 divorce act – the other four reasons are underneath that box – and you need to know them.

Before 1971

- The partner who wanted divorce had to provide evidence of grounds for divorce.
- Reasons were cruelty, desertion or adultery **NOT** because they wanted to or because they felt marriage had failed.
- A number of couples stayed married but the marriage had broken down – in sociological terms this is known as an '*empty shell marriage*'.

After 1971

- It became possible to have a divorce – after an ‘irretrievable breakdown’ of marriage after a trial period of separation.
- It is no longer necessary to provide evidence or give a specific reason.
- Divorce increased shortly after 1971 – a number of empty shell marriages who were waiting for the chance of an easier divorce – got their chance.

Change in attitudes to divorce

Previously divorce meant social disapproval – women who were divorced were treated badly because they couldn’t have kept hold of their husbands. But now there has been a change in attitudes – it’s now much more acceptable – sometimes divorce is even seen as the best thing to do. An example it’s seen as better for children to divorce than remain together in a loveless marriage.



Change in moral attitudes

This change in attitudes to divorce is part of a wider change in moral attitudes. Put simply – people now have different priorities. They would much rather put their own happiness first over the old ‘til death do us part’.

Empowerment of women

This is a *feminist* idea this one. They say that women now realise they have greater power within society and they don’t have to put up with a marriage which does not live up to what they expect and want. Also women are more likely to be able to support themselves in the world of work and so can live without a husband, previously seen as being a provider for them – so divorce is increasing as it’s an escape route from a marriage that doesn’t work for them.



It’s now cheaper

Last but not least – divorce is now much cheaper and is now within everyone’s reach. There’s an argument that previously only the rich could afford to divorce and that’s why the divorce rate was lower. Even more recently the internet has answered the call with www.quickie-divorce.com which can get rid of that useless partner of yours online for just £69.

Sociological views on divorce

Feminists

A two sided coin here – *feminists* see divorce as a possible good thing – it has the potential to free women from potentially loveless and dangerous marriages easily. However it can also be seen as a bad thing – divorce can mean that women are painted as unfit mothers or wives, and in some cases can mean women are left poor and significantly worse off than before.



New Right

The *New Right* are dead against divorce – remember they're strictly traditional family values – and things like cohabitation and divorce are causing the decline in the traditional nuclear family. They then go onto say that it's because of this decline there is a crisis in the family and in society with increased crime rates and drug use.

Family types...(other than nuclear)

One thing you will need to know about is the types of family created by divorce – there are two main types: lone parent families and reconstituted families.

Lone parent families

There are around 1.6 million of these in the UK, around 1 in 5 children in the UK now live in one, and put simply is where there is just one parent. This could be because of divorce or separation, but could also because of death of a partner or the choice to raise children alone.

Reconstituted families

Many divorced people remarry; statistically men are more likely to than a woman, which shows that people aren't unhappy with marriage, more the partner they married.

Where people remarry after a divorce and two families are put together the term given to that new family is a *reconstituted or blended family*. It used to be called a step family but this is now seen as an unacceptable term.

Alternatives to the household

There are three alternatives to the family household and you'll need to know about them! Obviously so – sub headings at the ready. Here we go.

Shared Households

The most common alternative to the family related household is a *shared household* – and is a group of people who are unmarried and unrelated sharing a house. The best example is a group of students like the Young Ones.

Shared households are not motivated by religious beliefs unlike *communes* (see final sub heading) and are normally small in number, and temporary in nature. For example students will move out of shared households once they have completed their degree.



Singlehood

Over a quarter of households are now made up of just one person and there are three types of singlehood households. Ready?

1 – Elderly people – often widows or widowers – who have been left alone because of the death of a partner – this is increasing as the life expectancy within the UK has increased.

2 – Divorced and separated people – We've done about divorce so this should be easy – but a good example would be of a recently divorced man who has not won custody of his children. These are often temporary in nature as many men go onto remarry.

3 – Young adults living alone – many more young people are living alone now than has been in the past – this is because of:

- Greater economic independency (put simply they can now afford to live alone and don't have to stay with parents).
- More young people going to university and living in that area after university.
- Young people are choosing to get married later and so have time in their lives in which to live alone.

Gender roles.....

Another important thing you need to know is all about gender roles. These are tightly linked with the family – you'll see why in a second and in households.

Gender roles focus on the division of labour (or work) in a household and until the middle of the 20th century there were pretty clear cut. Men were expected to be the provider – to go out and work, to provide for the family. Whereas women were expected to be a housewife and mother, to care for the children and look after the home.



These type of roles are known as segregated conjugal roles – there are clear expectations of men and women. See what sort of expectations or roles you can think in our next activity!

Separate conjugal roles

Male / Husband	Female / Wife

Joint conjugal roles

In the 1970s two sociologists called Willmott and Young believed they had found evidence that there was a new type of sharing domestic roles which was more equal. Hurray! They called this joint conjugal roles and referred to this family type as a symmetrical family. Give exmaples below

- 1
- 2
- 3

Stimulus materials



Understanding the stimulus

1. Describe what is happening in the cartoon in your own words.
2. Identify one gender stereotype in the picture.
3. What is a conjugal role?
4. Describe a conjugal role shown in the picture.
5. What is the child in the picture learning about gender behaviour from the actions of the people?
6. How could you change the picture to make the people seem to be equal in status?
7. This type of family arrangement is known as a cereal packet family. What is a cereal packet family?

Development and Revision

1. Explain and give an example to show that you understand the meanings of the following words which are different ways in which children learn how to behave as adults:

Imitation, peer group pressure, role model, expectation