

FAMILIES AND HOUSEHOLDS KNOWLEDGE ORGANISERS

The information contained in this knowledge organiser pack is drawn from regularly-used research in material for the AQA A Level Sociology optional topic of Families and Households. The studies used in this pack align with the tutor2u Families and Households checklist. This constitutes neither compulsory studies that students must know, nor is it exhaustive: students may wish to use alternative sources relating to Families and Households.

The knowledge organisers cover material set out in the AQA A Level Sociology specification, that was first used for teaching in 2015 and reflects the following specification points:

3.2.2 Families and Households

Students are expected to be familiar with sociological explanations of the following content:

- the relationship of the family to the social structure and social change, with particular reference to the economy and to state policies
- changing patterns of marriage, cohabitation, separation, divorce, childbearing and the life course, including the sociology of personal life, and the diversity of contemporary family and household structures
- gender roles, domestic labour and power relationships within the family in contemporary society
- the nature of childhood, and changes in the status of children in the family and society
- demographic trends in the United Kingdom since 1900: birth rates, death rates, family size, life expectancy, ageing population, and migration and globalisation.

Functionalists see the family as one of the key institutions that maintain social order, stability, and consensus. They argue that the family performs crucial roles for both individuals and society. Each thinker focuses on slightly different aspects of the family's functions. The New Right sees the traditional nuclear family (married heterosexual couple with children) as the cornerstone of a stable society. They are strongly opposed to family diversity, especially lone-parent families and same-sex parenting.

George Murdock (1949) – The Universal Family

Murdock studied over 250 societies and argued that the nuclear family is universal. He believed it performs **four essential functions**:

1. **Stable satisfaction of the sex drive** – monogamous marriage reduces sexual jealousy and promotes stability.
2. **Reproduction of the next generation** – ensures society continues.
3. **Socialisation of the young** – the family teaches norms and values, helping integrate individuals into society.
4. **Economic support** – families provide food, shelter, and basic needs, especially in traditional societies.

Ronald Fletcher (1966) – The Modern, Evolving Family

Fletcher agreed that the family is essential, but he had a more updated view. He argued that the family continues to perform key functions in modern society, though some are now shared with state institutions. The family still plays a central role in **emotional support, education, and caring for members**. Fletcher emphasised **long-term commitment** and the **emotional bond** between parents and children as vital for well-being.

Talcott Parsons (1955) – Functional Fit and the Nuclear Family

Parsons believed the type of family structure changes to meet the needs of the society it exists in – this is known as the **“functional fit” theory**.

In **pre-industrial society**, the **extended family** was more common. **It helped with farming, childcare, and elderly care**. In **industrial society**, the **nuclear family** became dominant because it suits a society that needs a **geographically mobile and socially mobile workforce**.

Parsons identified **two irreducible functions** of the modern nuclear family:

1. **Primary Socialisation of Children** – teaching them society’s shared norms and values so they become integrated members.
2. **Stabilisation of Adult Personalities** – the family provides emotional support and acts as a release from the pressures of work (known as the **‘warm bath theory’**).

Robert Chester (1985) – The Neo-Conventional Family

Chester offered a moderate response to the debate about family diversity. He challenged the idea that the nuclear family is in serious decline. Instead, he argued that what has happened is the rise of the **neo-conventional family** – a nuclear family in structure, but with modern characteristics (e.g. dual-earner households where both spouses work). Most people still live in nuclear families or aspire to do so at some point. Many so-called alternative family types (e.g. cohabitation, lone parenthood) are **temporary stages** in the **family life course**.

New Right Perspective – Charles Murray (1989)

The New Right sees the traditional nuclear family (married heterosexual couple with children) as the cornerstone of a stable society. They are strongly opposed to family diversity, especially lone-parent families and same-sex parenting.

Murray’s Key Arguments:

The rise of **welfare dependency** has created an underclass – a group of people with no desire to work and who rely on benefits. **Lone-parent families**, especially those led by single mothers, are blamed for **poor socialisation**, especially of boys (who may lack male role models). The breakdown of the nuclear family is linked to increased crime, anti-social behaviour, and educational underachievement.

Exam Gold:

Functionalist arguments can be criticised by other sociological approaches, such as Marxism and feminism. They often agree on key functions of the family such as **socialisation and economic functions**, but differ on who these functions benefit. Be sure to make the links when evaluating these ideas.



Both Marxist and feminist theories are known as **conflict theories**. They reject the functionalist view that the family is a harmonious institution that benefits society as a whole. Instead, they argue that the family benefits powerful groups – either the ruling class (Marxists) or men (feminists) – and helps to maintain social inequality.

Marxism and monogamy:

Inheritance of Property

- Families pass on wealth, property and privilege through generations, helping to reproduce class inequality.
- **Engels (1884)** argued that the monogamous nuclear family developed to control women's sexuality and ensure property was passed to the rightful male heirs.

Ideological Function

- Families socialise children to accept hierarchy, authority and capitalist values.
- **Zaretsky (1976)** claimed that the family offers an "illusion of a haven" from capitalism – it seems like a place of comfort, but really just distracts workers from their oppression.
- **Althusser** – Claimed the family is part of the ideological state apparatus, transmitting capitalist values.

Unit of Consumption –

Families play a key role in keeping capitalism alive by consuming products and services. Capitalism needs people to keep buying things.

- **Pester Power** – Children are targeted by advertising and persuade their parents to buy branded goods. e.g. TV adverts for toys, clothing, or fast food.
- **Keeping up with the Joneses** – Families are pressured to match the lifestyle of their peers (e.g. buying the latest gadgets or designer clothes) to maintain social status.

This consumer culture leads to debt, stress, and competition – all of which benefit businesses, not families.

Marxist Feminism

Believes that women's oppression is caused by capitalism and patriarchy working together.

- Women's unpaid domestic labour benefits capitalism by keeping workers fed, healthy, and emotionally supported.
- Women serve as a **reserve army of labour**, brought in and out of work depending on economic needs.
- **Benston (1972)** – Women produce and maintain the workforce for free.
- **Fran Ansley (1972)** – "Women are the takers of shit" – they absorb the frustration caused by capitalism.
- **Arlie Hochschild (1983)** – Coined the term **emotional labour** to describe the invisible work women do managing family emotions and mental health.

Liberal Feminism

Liberal feminists believe inequality within the family is gradually improving due to changes in laws and social attitudes.

- **Legal changes:** Equal Pay Act, Sex Discrimination Act, Family Planning Act, Divorce Reform Act
- **Ann Oakley (1974)** – found that housework was still highly gendered, with little evidence of symmetrical roles in the 1970s. Even when women worked, they still did the majority of domestic labour – known as the **dual burden**.

Radical Feminism

Radical feminists see the family as a key site of patriarchal control. They believe men benefit from women's unpaid work, sexual services, and childbearing, and that the family is a place of female oppression and even violence.

- **Delphy and Leonard (1992)** – argue that men benefit from women's labour while giving little back. They see the family as male-dominated, where women do the work but men get the power.
- Radical feminists argue that the family normalises male dominance, and domestic violence is a major tool used to control women.

Comparisons with functionalist views:

- While functionalists see the family as a positive institution, conflict theories see it as a place of **exploitation** (particularly for women)
- Functionalists suggest family transmits social norms, but conflict theories suggest these are either **capitalist** or **patriarchal**.
- Economic function of family focuses on paid labour for functionalists, whilst Marxist and feminist views examine unpaid labour of women.
- More feminist ideas are discussed in gender roles and relationships

Social policy refers to laws and government actions that aim to improve or influence the lives of individuals – including those related to education, welfare, housing, employment and, of course, the family. Different sociological perspectives disagree on how and why the government gets involved in family life – and what impact this has. The main approaches are outlined below, with examples of specific social policies and how they directly or indirectly impact on family life.

Functionalist View:

Functionalists argue that social policies help families carry out their essential functions, contributing to the smooth functioning of society.

Key Ideas:

- Policies are a positive thing – they are designed to support the family.
- The family works in harmony with other institutions (e.g. education, health care).

Policy Examples:

- **NHS (1948)** – supports the family’s health care role.
- **Free education** – supports socialisation and meritocracy.

Research:

- Fletcher (1966) – argued that policies like health care, housing, and education have helped families perform their functions better than ever before.

Marxist View:

Marxists argue that social policies benefit the capitalist system, not families.

Key Ideas:

- The family reproduces labour and social inequality.
- Policies keep workers healthy and obedient but do not challenge exploitation.

Policy Examples:

- **Universal Credit** – supports working-class survival but keeps them in low-paid work.
- **Minimal childcare support** – working-class women struggle to work full time, reinforcing inequality.

Research:

- **Donzelot (1977)** – studied how the state uses policy to monitor and control families, not to support them. This reflects surveillance and control.

Feminist View

Feminists believe many policies are based on patriarchal assumptions and reinforce traditional gender roles within the family.

Key Ideas:

- The state favours the nuclear family and assumes women are carers.
- Policies often reproduce gender inequality, even when this isn’t the intention.

Policy Examples:

- **Maternity leave vs. paternity leave** – reinforces female caregiver role.
- **Childcare costs** – often unaffordable, pushing women out of full-time work.

Research:

- **Leonard (1978)** – policies appear to offer choice but assume women are the primary carers, reinforcing a gendered division of labour.

New Right View

The New Right is critical of policies that they believe have undermined the traditional family structure.

Key Ideas:

- Welfare encourages **dependency culture**.
- Policies should support marriage and personal responsibility.

Policy Examples:

- **Child Support Agency (1993)** – forced absent fathers to contribute financially.
- **Benefit caps and cuts** – aimed to reduce reliance on the state.

Research:

- **Charles Murray (1989)** – argued that excessive welfare has created an underclass with no incentive to work or form stable families.
- **David Marsland** – claimed that the welfare state has weakened moral responsibility and encouraged a “culture of dependency”

Social Democratic View

Support state intervention to reduce inequality and improve the lives of families.

Key Ideas:

- Policies should promote equality of opportunity.

Policy Examples:

- **Sure Start (1998)** – early years support for disadvantaged children.
- **Working Families Tax Credit** – supported low-income parents who work.

Research:

- **Julia Brannen (2003)** – argued that policies like childcare support help parents balance work and family life, which is essential for dual-earner families.
- **The Joseph Rowntree Foundation** – has shown that early intervention policies can improve long-term outcomes for low-income families.

Over the past century, a wide range of UK social policies have shaped and reshaped family life, either directly by targeting family structures or indirectly by influencing work, welfare, and gender roles. These policies reflect different political ideologies and have had varying impacts on family diversity, gender equality, child welfare, and economic stability. Sociologists analyse these policies through different theoretical lenses to understand their role in shaping the modern family.

Beveridge Report / Welfare State (1942- enforced 1945)

Birth of welfare state in the UK to tackle 5 giants (**want, ignorance, squalor, disease and idleness**) - led to creation of state benefits, social housing, full employment, education reform and NHS.

Creation of NHS (1948)

Provided free healthcare for all as part of greater welfare state. This improved child and maternal health and reduced infant mortality.

Family Planning Act (1967)

Provided contraception to all women increasing choice over reproductive rights. Followed shortly by **Legalisation of Abortion** in same year. Impacted on fertility and birth rate in subsequent years as women gain control over how many children they could have.

Divorce Reform Act (1969)

Allowed divorce on grounds of irretrievable breakdown. This increased divorce rates from 1970 onwards leading to more lone-parent and reconstituted families over next generations.

Equal Pay Act (1970) and Sex Discrimination Act (1975)

Former provided equal pay for equal work between men and women, latter banned discrimination based on sex and employment and education. These led to greater career aspirations and opportunities for women.

Section 28 (1988)

Banned promotion of homosexuality in schools and marginalised same-sex couples and the LGBTQ community, as reaction to liberal attitudes to sexuality and relationships.

Marital Rape Criminalised (1991)

Recognised rape within marriage as a crime and acknowledged dysfunctional nature of some relationships. Feminists argued major step against patriarchal control.

Child Support Agency (CSA)(1993)

Enforced maintenance payments from non-resident parents. This supported lone-parent families, often headed by women and support New Right ideas of parental responsibility.

Sure Start (1998)

Social democratic approach of early intervention, providing parental support in deprived areas. Policy found to have improved outcomes for children from deprived background but was cut in 2010 and since replaced with **Family Hubs** by Conservatives in 2022 on smaller scale.

Working and Child Tax Credits (1999)

Provided financial support for low-income families, including help towards childcare costs and in-work benefits, encouraging people to return to work. Replaced by **Universal Credit** under Conservatives in 2013.

Adoption and Children Act (2002)

Allowed same-sex and single people to adopt which broadened different forms of family. Increased family diversity in the UK and laid foundations for civil partnerships and same-sex marriage.

Civil Partnership Act (2004) and Same-Sex Marriage Act (2013)

Civil Partnerships introduced legal recognition of same-sex relationships, with equal rights granted under Same Sex Marriage Act 9 years later, due to cross-party support in House of Commons.

Equality Act (2010)

Combined previous anti-discrimination laws and provided greater protections for marginalised families.

Triple Lock Pensions (2010)

Pension rises guaranteed by highest of 3 measures. Supports elderly couples and lone pensioners and reflects the ageing population.

Troubled Families Programme (2011)

Targeted intervention for families with multiple problems. Seen as policing the family, particularly working-class families.

Two-Child Benefit Cap (2017)

Limits child benefits to 2 children. Impacts on larger families (often low-income or religious groups)

30 hours free childcare (2017)

Free childcare for working parents of 3-4-year-olds. Helped parents (especially mothers) return to work.

Over recent decades, family forms have transformed dramatically. Researchers have examined these shifts, arguing that declines in conventional marriage and increases in diverse family forms reflect deeper social changes. These changes are explained in terms of processes such as secularisation, individualisation, shifting attitudes toward relationships, economic restructuring, and extended life courses.

Changing Social Attitudes & Secularisation

- Society has become more secular, meaning religious views on marriage (e.g. its sacredness and permanence) have weakened.
- People no longer feel social pressure to marry to live together or have children.
- Furthermore, people's attitudes towards relationships have changed.
- **Beck** introduced the concept of individualisation, demonstrating how modern societies empower people to redefine personal lives and family structures outside of traditional norms.
- **Beck-Gernsheim** explored the transformation of intimacy, showing how relationships become fluid and contingent on personal fulfillment, leading to a diversity of family forms.
- **Giddens** argued that "pure relationships"—formed for emotional satisfaction rather than social obligation—are increasingly replacing conventional marriage, thereby contributing to diverse family arrangements.

Rise in Cohabitation

- Cohabitation is now often seen as a normal step before or instead of marriage.
- Couples may see it as more flexible, less risky, and less costly than formal marriage.
- Some couples choose cohabitation as a way of testing compatibility before committing.
- **Chester (1985)** – while he noted the nuclear family remains dominant, he recognised the growth in cohabitation as part of the **neo-conventional family**.

Legal Changes

Divorce has become easier, quicker, and cheaper due to key legislative reforms.

- **The Divorce Reform Act (1969)** allowed couples to divorce on the grounds of "irretrievable breakdown," without needing to prove fault.
- **No-fault divorce introduced in 2020** further simplified the process.

Fletcher (1966) argued that while divorce increased, this could reflect higher expectations of marriage, not a rejection of it.

Exam Gold: Application of research findings to support your point shows more sophisticated knowledge and understanding of issues in sociology.

Greater Opportunities for Women

- Women are more likely to be financially independent and less economically reliant on their partner.
- More women are in paid work and can support themselves after divorce.
- Feminism has empowered women to leave unsatisfying or unequal marriages.

Sharpe (1994) showed that girls increasingly prioritised careers and independence over marriage.

Cooke and Gash (2010) found that women in employment are no more likely to divorce than those not working, suggesting employment enables women rather than causing divorce.

Feminist Explanations

- Many women still experience the dual burden (paid work + domestic labour), leading to dissatisfaction in marriage.
- Unequal roles in the home remain a key cause of divorce.

Oakley (1974) found that housework and childcare were still primarily women's responsibilities, even when they worked outside the home causing strain on relationships.

Bernard (1976) suggested that rising divorce reflects women's growing awareness of and resistance to patriarchal oppression in marriage.

Demographic and Life Course Changes

- People are living longer, which makes long-term marriages more difficult to sustain.
- People are marrying later in life, after establishing careers or personal independence.

Allan and Crow (2001) said marriage is less of a social necessity and more of a personal choice, making it more fragile when it doesn't work out.

Over the past 50 years, the UK has seen significant shifts in childbearing patterns, including, having children later in life, more children born outside of marriage, an increase in childlessness and a general decline in fertility and birth rates. These changes are shaped by wider social, economic and cultural factors, many of which link to the changing role of women and family structures.

Falling Fertility and Birth Rates

- **Fertility rate = average number of children per woman** (now less than 1.6 in the UK, below replacement level of 2.1).
- **Birth rate = number of live births per 1,000 people per year** (steadily declining since the 1960s).

Fewer children are being born overall, and families are typically smaller.
Harper (2012) argues that as the position of women improves (education, careers), their priorities shift, leading to fewer and later births.

Increased Contraceptive Use and Reproductive Choice

- **The Family Planning Act (1967)** gave women greater access to contraception.
- Improved contraception and legal access to abortion (**Abortion Act 1967**) gave women more control over when and whether to have children.

Giddens (1992) highlights how reproductive control contributes to the individualisation of life choices, allowing people to delay or forgo parenthood.

Rising Cost of Childrearing

- **Children are now seen as a financial commitment rather than an economic asset (as in pre-industrial societies).**
- **Costs of housing, childcare, and education discourage large families.**

Beck (1992) linked this to the “**risk society**” – people are more cautious and strategic about life decisions, including when (and whether) to have children. **CPAG (2024)** estimate the cost of raising a child at £260,000 over a lifetime for a couple and £290,000 for a lone parent.

Women Having Children Later in Life

- The average age of first-time mothers in the UK is now over 30.
- Women are more likely to delay childbirth to focus on education and career.

Sharpe (1994) found young women were increasingly prioritising education and work over marriage and motherhood compared to the 1970s.

McRobbie (2008) linked the rise in female ambition to media and cultural shifts promoting female independence and success.

More Births Outside Marriage

- Around 50% of children are now born to unmarried parents.
- Reflects the rise in cohabitation and changing norms around parenting.

Beck-Gernsheim (2002) suggests these trends reflect greater choice and acceptance of diverse family forms, like cohabiting or same-sex parents.

Increased Childlessness

- More people are choosing not to have children, either voluntarily or due to lifestyle and career priorities.

Hakim (2010) identifies different lifestyle preferences among women – some prioritise career over motherhood especially in post-industrial societies.

Exam Gold

Changes in the patterns of child-bearing has many synoptic links to other aspects of Families and Households including childhood, gender roles and relationships and the changes to the form and function of families. These are often asked in 10 mark Outline and Explain questions on paper 2, so be aware of how these changes link to other areas.

Changing Social Norms and Family Types

- Greater acceptance of single parenthood, same-sex parenting, and blended families.
- Parenthood is no longer only associated with the nuclear family.

Smart (2007) and the **personal life perspective** argue that parenthood is now shaped more by individual choice and emotional connections than by traditional norms. Individuals have more choice over what they define as family, with some seeing pets as being like children.

Policy and Welfare Support

- Policies such as maternity leave, free childcare hours, and child benefits can encourage childbearing.
- However, policies like the two-child benefit cap may discourage larger families, especially among low-income groups.

Land (1978) warned that some social policies may be based on a traditional nuclear family model, which can disadvantage other family types.

Family life in the UK has become far more diverse and flexible since the 1970s. A range of social, economic, legal, and cultural changes have led to the growth of new family and household types, challenging the traditional view of the nuclear family as the dominant model. Below are some of the key changes to family forms with sociological research to support the reason for change.

Nuclear Family

Traditionally seen as the ideal by functionalists like **Parsons (1955)**, who argued the nuclear family was suited to modern industrial society. Over time, the nuclear family has declined in dominance, although it still exists and remains an aspiration for many. **Chester (1985)** suggests that while family structures have changed, the **neo-conventional family** (a dual-earner version of the nuclear family) has replaced it as the norm.

Reconstituted/Blended Families

- Families where one or both partners have children from previous relationships.
- Make up about 10% of families with children.
- Rise linked to divorce and remarriage.

These families often face challenges such as conflict between step-siblings and issues around parental roles. **Allan & Crow (2001)** argue that these families are more diverse and negotiated than traditional families.

Cohabiting Couples

- Cohabitation has risen sharply; over 3 million couples now cohabit in the UK.
- Seen as an alternative to marriage or a **trial before marriage**.

Reflects changing social attitudes and a decline in the importance of marriage. **Bejin (1985)** argues cohabitation may represent a more equal and negotiated relationship, especially among young people.

Lone Parent Families

Now make up about 1 in 4 families with dependent children.

- Increase due to **higher divorce rates, changing social attitudes, and more women choosing to have children independently**.
- 90% of lone-parent families are headed by women.

New Right thinkers like **Murray (1990)** argue this leads to dependency on welfare and a lack of male role models. While feminist sociologists argue lone parenthood can be a sign of women's independence and control over family life.

Same-Sex Families

Increasing visibility and legal recognition, especially after:

- **Civil Partnership Act (2004)**
- **Gay Marriage Act (2013)**
- Once heavily stigmatised (**e.g. Section 28 in the 1980s**), now more accepted in mainstream society.

Weeks (1999) sees same-sex families as "chosen families," based on emotional connection rather than legal ties. **Dunne (1999)** found that lesbian couples were more likely to share housework and childcare equally than heterosexual couples.

LATs – Living Apart Together

Couples in a relationship who do not live together.

- Often chosen for reasons such as independence, care responsibilities, or previous failed relationships.

Haskey (2005) found that around 1 in 10 adults in the UK are in a LAT relationship.

Lone Person Households

- Massive growth in people living alone, especially those aged 65+ and young professionals.
- Linked to **longer life expectancy, delayed marriage, and greater personal independence**.

Reflects individualisation, a key concept from **Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (1995)**, where people pursue personal goals rather than traditional family roles. Also Giddens (1992) and greater reflexivity and the existence of the pure relationship, as people wait longer to enter into committed relationships.

Beanpole Families

Families with strong intergenerational links but fewer children per generation (tall and thin structure).

- Linked to **longer life expectancy and lower birth rates**.

Brannen (2003) found that such families are increasingly common, particularly among middle-class families, and offer support across generations. Increasing due to costs of housing, childcare and eldercare in contemporary society.

Family life in the UK is now highly diverse, and sociologists debate whether this reflects greater personal choice and equality, or signals a breakdown of traditional family values and functions. This diversity spans across class, ethnicity, age, gender, and lifestyle. Let's explore the key types of diversity and the debate surrounding them.

Rapoport and Rapoport (1982) – Family Diversity Identified five types of family diversity:

1. **Organisational diversity** – variations in family roles (e.g. dual-worker, segregated vs. joint conjugal roles).
2. **Cultural diversity** – differences based on ethnicity and religion (e.g. extended families in South Asian communities).
3. **Social class diversity** – family structures and child-rearing styles differ by class.
4. **Life cycle diversity** – families vary by stage (e.g., newlyweds, retired couples, empty-nesters).
5. **Cohort diversity** – generational differences shaped by social changes (e.g., divorce reform, same-sex marriage).

They argued that diversity is the norm, not the exception.

New Types of Family and Relationships

- **Living Apart Together (LATs):** Couples in committed relationships who live in separate households. Reflects greater individual autonomy.
- **Chosen Families:** Particularly relevant to LGBTQ+ communities (Weeks, 1999), where support networks are chosen rather than biological.
- **Visiting Relationships:** Common among Afro-Caribbean families – romantic relationships where partners live separately.

Cultural and Ethnic Diversity

- **Berthoud (2001) and Modood (1997):** South Asian families (particularly Pakistani and Bangladeshi) tend to be larger, more traditional, and more patriarchal.
- **Bhatti (1999):** Strong emphasis on family honour in South Asian families, shaping gender roles.
- **Qureshi et al (2014):** Ethnic diversity also intersects with immigration policy, affecting family patterns like transnational families.
- **Reynolds (2005):** Black Caribbean families often feature matrifocal households—headed by mothers—with strong extended kin networks. This isn't necessarily due to dysfunction, but resilience and adaptive support.

Barrow (1991): Argued against seeing lone Black mothers as a sign of family breakdown; they are often part of a wider supportive extended family.

Connectedness Thesis (Carol Smart, 2007)

- Challenges individualisation theory.
- People remain socially embedded in relationships. Family choices are shaped by obligations, past relationships, and social networks. E.g., lone parents may co-parent or rely on extended family—not completely "free" to choose.

Interactionist View (Morgan, 1996)

Argues we should look at what family means to people, not just its structure.

Social Class Diversity

Family structure and relationships vary by class background:

- **Middle-class families:** More likely to adopt a negotiated, child-centred parenting style.
- **Working-class families:** May rely on extended kin and exhibit more traditional role expectations.

Haskey (1996): Found class is a strong predictor of cohabitation and marriage patterns.

Murray (1990) (New Right): Criticised the "underclass," arguing that dependency on welfare and lone parenting weaken social stability.

Postmodernist/Individualisation Thesis

- **Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) and Giddens (1992):** Argue we live in an age of individualisation. Traditional norms are weakening, and people make their own relationship choices based on personal fulfilment.
- **Result is greater diversity** – same-sex families, LATs, blended families, etc.
- **Criticism:** Assumes everyone has the same freedom. **May (2013)** argues it ignores social structures like gender and class.

Exam Gold

These ideas are useful in applying to debates around social action and structure and postmodernity vs modernity for Paper 1 and 3 Theory and methods

The debate surrounding gender roles and relationships in families has been a central issue in sociology, exploring how tasks and responsibilities are shared between men and women, and how these roles have evolved over time. Sociologists examine whether family life reflects gender equality, or if traditional gender roles still persist in practice.

Functionalist View: Parsons (1955) Instrumental and Expressive Roles

- **Instrumental roles:** The role of the breadwinner, typically performed by men.
- **Expressive roles:** The role of the homemaker and emotional caregiver, typically performed by women.

Parsons argued that these roles were complementary, with men providing for the family and women ensuring emotional stability.

Joint and Segregated Conjugal Roles (Bott, 1957)

- **Segregated roles:** Traditional division of labour where men and women have separate tasks (e.g. men work, women manage the home).
- **Joint roles:** More modern arrangements where partners share domestic tasks, leisure activities, and decision-making.

Bott's work highlights that working-class couples tend to have more segregated roles, while middle-class couples are more likely to share roles.

Symmetrical Family (Wilmott & Young, 1973)

Symmetry refers to families where roles are shared more equally. Wilmott and Young argued that the **nuclear family had become more symmetrical** due to social changes, including women's increasing participation in the workforce.

Domestic Division of Labour (Oakley, 1974)

Oakley critiqued the idea of a symmetrical family, asserting that despite women's increased paid employment, the division of labour within the home remains unequal. She found that although men might help with some housework, the majority of domestic tasks (e.g. childcare, cleaning) were still carried out by women. Even when women were employed, they had a **dual burden** of paid employment and domestic responsibility.

Dual-Earner Families

- In dual-earner families, both partners contribute to household income. Despite this, gender inequalities persist, as women often still take on the bulk of domestic chores.

Gershuny (1994) argued that women's increasing participation in paid work leads to a **"lagged adaptation"**, meaning men's participation in housework tends to increase later.

Childcare and Emotional Work

- Women often take on childcare responsibilities and **emotional labour** (e.g. managing the emotional wellbeing of family members).

Duncombe and Marsden (1995) argued that women experience a **"triple shift"**, carrying out both paid work and the majority of unpaid domestic and emotional work.

Gender Pay Gap

- The gender pay gap reflects broader societal gender inequalities that affect how much men and women earn for similar work.
- Pahl (1997)** highlighted that in many households, the financial decision-making is still male-dominated, even in dual-earner families.

Power Relationships and Decision-Making

- Research has shown that men tend to hold more power in decision-making within the family, especially in financial matters.
- Vogler et al (2008)** examined the pooling of resources and found that when men and women pool their incomes, men tend to have more control over the family finances.

Domestic Violence and Abuse

- Domestic violence and abuse often reflect gendered power imbalances, with women being the primary victims.

Walklate (2004) argues that gendered violence is a direct result of patriarchal structures in society. Abuse in intimate relationships is an extreme expression of inequality and domination.

Gender Scripts

Gender scripts refer to the expected behaviors or roles for men and women. **Vogler et al. (2008)** argued that traditional gender scripts still persist even in families with dual earners.

Sociologists argue that childhood is socially constructed, meaning it is not a fixed, universal stage of life, but one that is shaped by society, culture, time, and social factors such as class, gender, and ethnicity. How childhood is viewed and experienced varies across societies and has changed over time.

Social Construction of Childhood

- **Wagg (1992)** argues that there is no single universal childhood experienced by all; rather, childhood is constructed differently in different cultures.
- What is considered appropriate behaviour, responsibility, or even innocence for children varies across societies.

Childhood and Innocence

- In modern Western societies, children are often seen as innocent, vulnerable, and in need of protection and nurture.
- This idea has led to the separation of childhood from adulthood, with a clear distinction in roles, behaviour, and spaces.

Modern Childhood and Child-Centredness

- **Pilcher (1995)** says a key feature of modern childhood is separateness—children have a distinct legal status, lifestyle, and set of rights.
- The modern family is now more child-centred: smaller families, increased parental involvement, and higher spending on children's needs.
- **Womack (2011)**, however, argues that despite appearing child-centred, British children are some of the unhappiest in the developed world, often due to inequality and consumer pressures.

Cultural Variations of Childhood

- Anthropologists have found that in some societies, children take on responsibilities at an early age, challenging Western ideas of childhood.
- In less industrialised countries, children often work or care for siblings, blurring the lines between childhood and adulthood.

Historical Construction (Philippe Aries, 1962)

- In *Centuries of Childhood*, Aries argued that in medieval Europe, childhood did not exist as a separate stage of life.
- Children were seen as mini adults, working, dressing, and behaving like adults once physically capable.
- The concept of modern childhood, he argues, is a relatively modern invention, emerging in the 19th century with schooling and child protection laws.

Age Patriarchy – Control Over Children

- **Gittins (1998)** coined the term age patriarchy to describe how adults dominate, control, and oppress children.
- Parents often control children's time, space, and bodies, reflecting power inequalities within the family.
- Some argue children are becoming more empowered, but others believe this control remains strong.

Impact of Social Policy on Childhood

- Laws banning child labour, protecting children from abuse, and introducing compulsory education have helped to construct the modern view of children as vulnerable and dependent.
- Policies like the **Children Act (1989)** and **Every Child Matters (2003)** aim to promote child welfare and rights.

Inequalities in Childhood

a) Social Class Differences

- **Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG)** highlights that children in lower-income families are more likely to suffer poor health, lower educational achievement, and reduced life chances.

b) Gender Differences

- Girls often face more restrictions due to fears around safety, showing how gendered expectations shape childhood experiences. (**McRobbie 1978**)

c) Ethnic Differences

- **Bhatti (1999)** found that Asian parents were more likely to be strict, especially towards daughters, reflecting cultural values around family honour and responsibility.
- **Brannen (1994)** found that Asian girls in particular faced tighter controls, linking gender and ethnicity in shaping childhood.

One of the key debates in the sociology of childhood is whether childhood is disappearing due to social and technological changes, or whether it is actually being extended, with young people remaining dependent on their parents for longer.

Neil Postman (1994) – “The Disappearance of Childhood”

- Postman argues that childhood is disappearing as a distinct stage of life.
- In the past, adults had control over access to information (especially around adult topics like sex, death, violence).
- The rise of television and digital media means children are now exposed to adult knowledge from an early age, eroding the boundaries between childhood and adulthood.
- As a result, children increasingly behave, dress, and speak like adults.

Sue Palmer (2007) – “Toxic Childhood”

- Palmer claims that modern society is causing a toxic childhood.
- Factors such as junk food, testing in education, excessive screen time, and the decline of play are damaging children's development.
- She links this to issues like poor mental health, obesity, and reduced attention spans.

Diana Gittins (1998) – Age Patriarchy

- Gittins argues that adults control children through an age patriarchy, which is being challenged as children gain more access to adult spaces and information, supporting the idea that childhood may be changing or disappearing.

The Extension of Childhood “Boomerang Children” / “KIPPERS”

- **KIPPERS = Kids In Parents' Pockets Eroding Retirement Savings**
- Many young adults remain financially dependent on their parents well into their 20s or 30s, returning to live at home after university or due to housing costs.
- These patterns suggest an extension of dependency and a delayed transition to adulthood, supporting the idea that childhood (or youth) is being prolonged.

Chris Jenks (2005) – Postmodern Childhood

- Jenks argues that in today's postmodern society, with increasing family instability (e.g. higher divorce rates), childhood is seen as more precious and protected.
- Parents are now more anxious about children's safety and invest heavily in their emotional wellbeing, which may contribute to an intensification or extension of childhood.

Philippe Ariès (1962)

- Ariès argued over time, laws, schooling, and changing attitudes led to the development of a separate stage of life called childhood and that society is now child-centred.

Frank Furedi (2001) – Paranoid Parenting

- Argues that parents have become overly concerned with children's safety, leading to over-regulation of childhood.
- Fear of strangers, danger, and failure has led to children being more closely monitored, losing their independence and freedom.
- This paradoxically contributes to both extension (children dependent longer) and a loss of traditional childhood freedoms.

Brooks (2011)

- Shows that transitions to adulthood are delayed, with young people facing extended periods of education and uncertain job prospects.
- The line between childhood and adulthood is blurring, but dependence remains strong due to structural and cultural expectations.
- Young people are both constrained by parental expectations and restricted by economic pressures, reinforcing the extension of childhood.

Exam Gold:

You may be asked to link childhood experiences to other aspects of family life such as gender roles, changing forms of family or demography. Practise linking these areas to the experience of children in the UK today.

Demography is the study of population changes and trends. It includes patterns in birth, death, migration, and ageing – all of which shape UK family life, social policy, and public services. Sociologists examine the reasons for these changes and how they impact on other areas of family life.

Key Terms and Trends in Demography:

Birth Rate

The number of live births per 1,000 of the population per year.

- UK birth rates have generally declined over the past century, with temporary rises like the 1960s baby boom.

Fertility Rate

Average number of children a woman is expected to have in her lifetime.

- UK fertility rate in 2023 was around 1.6 (below the replacement level of 2.1).

Death Rate

Number of deaths per 1,000 people per year.

- Long-term decline due to improvements in healthcare, nutrition, and hygiene.

Infant Mortality Rate

Number of deaths of infants under 1 year per 1,000 live births.

- Dramatically fallen in the UK due to better neonatal care and welfare services.
- McKeown (1972) argues improved nutrition and living standards (more than medical advances) were key to reducing death rates.

Life Expectancy

The average number of years a person can expect to live.

- In the UK, life expectancy has risen (currently around 81 years) but has recently plateaued for some groups.

Ageing Population

The UK has an increasing proportion of people over 65.

- **Hirsch (2005):** This creates challenges for pensions, health care, and housing.
- Leads to a smaller working population supporting a growing dependent elderly group.

Impacts on Public Services

- Increased demand on the NHS and social care.
- Growth in adult social work, specialist housing, and geriatric services.

Impacts on Family Structure

- Rise of beanpole families (multi-generational but vertically thin).
- Grandparents often provide childcare (“time-rich, money-poor” generation).
- More intergenerational dependence.

Social Policy Impacts

- Retirement age has increased.
- Debates around funding pensions and the NHS as the dependency ratio shifts.
- Changes in housing policy (downsizing incentives, support for carers).

Impacts of Globalisation on Migration

- More diverse migration flows, not just colonial links.
- Hybrid identities and multicultural family forms increase.
- More temporary and return migration, especially among younger adults.

Migration

Immigration

The movement of people into the UK.

- Driven by globalisation, job opportunities, education, family reunion.
- Since 2004, EU expansion led to increased immigration (e.g. from Poland).

Emigration

Movement of people out of the UK.

- Often younger workers seeking jobs abroad.
- Emigration fluctuates with political and economic conditions (e.g. Brexit).

Net Migration

The difference between immigration and emigration.

- Since the 1990s, the UK has had positive net migration, boosting population growth and labour supply.

Impacts of Migration on Family Structures

- Multi-generational households more common in some cultures.
- Rise in matrifocal families among some Caribbean groups (**Barrow, Bhatti**).
- **Bhatti (1999)** also noted emphasis on family honour and tight control over daughters in British Asian families.
- **Spijker & McInnes (2013)** noted migrants often have younger age profiles, helping offset the UK’s ageing population.
- Increased lone person households due to skilled migrant workers in metropolitan areas.