

SAMPLE

NATURE and SCOPE OF FAMILIES

AIM:

Describe family diversity in terms of a variety of factors including structure and function.

FAMILY TYPES

What is a family? It is usually a group of people who live together forming a social group. It usually consists of the parent(s) and their children, living together. The members of the group are usually related by marriage, blood or adoption. However, in modern society, there are many different variations of family, to represent the different ways that families and society have changed. The family is still the basic unit within society.

Before considering the different types of families, let us consider WHY the family structure has changed –

1. State education has meant that people tend to be more well-educated and knowledgeable and may want a better standard of living.
2. The role of women has changed in that they have become better educated, more independent and able to leave home without necessarily being married.
3. Families have generally become smaller – this is on average – of course there will always be families with larger numbers of children.
4. People are more mobile in terms of their willingness to move to be nearer their jobs.
5. People are more likely to work, which makes them more independent financially and able to afford their own homes.
6. Family planning and contraception has meant that people can decide when or if to have children.
7. Improved transport has meant that people can move away from their families.

Some Interesting Facts

The American Organisation, the Children's Defense Fund found the following statistics about American children –

- 50% will live in a single parent family at some point in their life.
- 1 in 3 is born to unmarried parents.
- 25% live with only one parent.
- 1 in 8 is born to a teenage mother
- 1 in 25 lives with neither parent.

The Nuclear Family

This is a family consisting of parents and their children. It is still a common form of family in most Western cultures. Historically, one person would work and one would stay at home caring for the children. This has obviously changed, but the basic structure stays the same. The parents will usually bring up their children with little or no help from their family, but they may use nurseries, day care and so on. They are basically a separate household unit.

The Extended Family

The extended family are the other members of a family who may live close by or with the family. They consist of uncles, aunts, cousins, grandparents, brothers and sisters. This form of family is the norm within some cultures.

An extended family can be horizontally extended – where cousins, aunts and uncles live with the family. A vertically extended family is where grandparents live with the family.

Why are there fewer extended families?

There are many reasons, these are some suggestions –

- Increased opportunities in care have meant that there are other opportunities for older relatives rather than living in the family home.
- The increase in divorce and relationship breakdowns has meant that children may lose contact with members of their own extended family.
- Families are more mobile, so move within a country and from country to country, again losing contact with their own extended family.
- Grandparents are healthier, so may live longer and remain independent for longer, so will live longer in their own homes.
- There has been an increase in female employment, so women, who were traditionally the carers of children, are more likely to work. This means that grandparents are not necessarily available to care for grandchildren, resulting in parents using paid childcare.
- Women may have children later, which can mean grandparents are older and less able to help out with childcare.

Extended families are still common in some cultures, for example, families from Bangladeshi and Pakistani origin, but they are not necessarily the norm in cultures where they once were, such as the UK, America etc.

Matriarchy

A matriarchy is a form of society, where the women and mothers of a community take the leading role. This form of society is very rare and even evidence from the past which has been used to support the existence of these forms of cultures has been limited or discredited.

Patriarchy

This is where the family unit is based on a man as the father figure. It also refers to the role of men in society as a whole, where they take the responsibility for the welfare of the community. Patriarchy is the dominant mode of organisation in society throughout history.

The Modified Family

Nowadays, many families do not necessarily fit neatly into these categories anymore. These families are known as modified families, in that they are structured differently to the traditional nuclear family. There has been an increase in the number of modified families, due to single parent families and reconstituted families (to be discussed shortly).

Step Families or the Reconstituted Family

Reconstituted families are known more commonly as step families, where two separate parents (alone due to divorce, bereavement, separation etc.) may start a new relationship with another parent. This means that the two parents may marry or cohabit forming a new family. A stepfamily will exist when a child is the biological offspring of one parent, but not the other. For example, a man with a son marries a woman with a daughter. The girl would be the father's stepdaughter. The son would be the mother's stepson.

Belonging to a step family can lead to issues for the children involved in the family –

- They have to come to terms with another parent in their life. They may still have contact with their biological parent but not actually live with them anymore. E.g. they may live with their mother and her new partner (their step-father), but still see their biological father. This means they have to come to terms with another parental figure living with them.
- This can lead to difficulties if there are differences in ideas of child rearing between the parent and step parent.
- There may be jealousy between step-siblings.

- There may be animosity between step-siblings.

This is not to say that step-families are always negative situations. A new family may mean a new, and positive, start for the family members, the parent has an adult relationship and may feel happier, the children have two adult role models, they may have a better quality of life etc.

Single/Lone Parent Families

This family usually consists of one parent and their children. The majority of adults in single parent families are women, but this is not always the case. People can become lone parent's due to divorce, separation, bereavement, choosing to remain single, illness or prison.

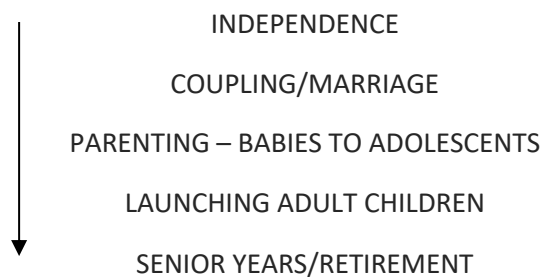
More Statistics

- 68.7% of American youth live in non-traditional families.
- 4.4% live with their biological father.
- 23.3% live with their biological mother
- 1% live in foster families
- 30% live in Step-families

THE FAMILY LIFE CYCLE

Families move through a life cycle, the same as individuals. In each stage, a family faces changes and challenges. Not all families pass easily through stages; there may be difficulties, such as death, divorce and so on.

The family life cycle stages are –



Independence Stage

This is a critical stage in the life cycle of a family. As a child enters young adulthood, they begin to emotionally separate from their family. They will seek to support themselves – financially, socially, physically and emotionally. They will begin to develop their individual identity. The person will develop their career goals and other interests. They become responsible for their own health – nutrition, exercise, safe sex and so on.

Coupling

At this stage, the person may commit to another person and a new way of life. This can be marriage or living with someone, but involves building relationships and adapting. By joining another family through marriage, a new family system is formed which include your relationships, ideas, values and expectations with your original family and those of the new family – the family of your spouse.

Parenting – Babies to Adolescents

In this stage, the couple first make a decision to have a baby, or they become pregnant accidentally. This is a challenging phase of the family life cycle. The two individuals in the relationship have to learn new skills that they may not possibly have learned in previous stages. The individuals now have three roles – individual, spouse and parent. After the baby is born, the parents need to develop and adapt as the children grow and develop from babies to adolescents.

'Launching' Adult Children

When the children leave home, there can be negative consequences and positive consequences. The children need to be free to handle the challenges of their own life, but the parents left behind may choose to change their own career goals, have a break from everyday parenting and so on.

Retirement

At this stage, the family is developing, perhaps adding new members, such as grandchildren. There may be marriages and divorces and remarriages within the family. Upon retirement, there will be other challenges, e.g. Adapting to not working, maintaining their marriage and so on. People may also experience declining physical and mental health and maybe reduced finances.

Family Roles

The roles within the traditional family have changed over recent years. For example, in the early 1900s, a man tended to be seen as the breadwinner, whilst the woman stayed at home to care for the children. This was not always obviously the case, but these are generalisations. Family roles have changed due to

- Changes in child care, meaning that more options are available for the woman to work.
- Legislation in many countries has given equal rights to women and men.
- Children now have access to state education.
- Maternity leave in some countries have meant that people can take time off work and still receive some income.
- Perceptions of women and men working have changed and so on...

Family roles have changed, but it would be highly unlikely for a family to "fit" perfectly

It may be that they are a mixture of both. It would be unusual for a family to fit ideally into one type or another. These are obviously just generalisations.

Traditional Family Roles	Modern Family Roles
<p>The male tended to –</p> <p>Be in control of finances.</p> <p>Be the breadwinner.</p> <p>Spend time in pubs, which sometimes resulted in violence towards women and children.</p> <p>Women –</p> <p>Cared for the children.</p> <p>Had many children.</p> <p>Did housework and cooking.</p> <p>May have had menial jobs to provide additional income.</p> <p>These roles varied according to class, as upper and middle-class women would lead a different life – having a nanny, cleaner and not being expected to work.</p> <p>So, the gender roles were affected by – class, attitudes, traditions, education, status and money.</p>	<p>Parents tend to share childcare.</p> <p>Parents tend to share housework.</p> <p>Both parents will work.</p> <p>Families will eat out together.</p> <p>Boys and girls both have access to education.</p> <p>Fathers have closer, warmer relationships with children.</p> <p>Both parents are involved in home improvement.</p> <p>Parents will be educated and expect a better standard of living.</p> <p>Labour saving devices will be used.</p>

SET READING

Refer to, and read any reference material you have access to that relates to the aim of this lesson.

This may include any of the following:

- Books in your own possession, or which you find in a library
- Periodicals you have access to (i.e. Magazines, Journals or newspapers)
- Web Sites (e.g. search for things such as “understanding ageing, ageing theories, etc.)

Spend no more than 2 hours doing this.

SET TASK

Interview someone from a different cultural background to your own, or whose parents are from a different cultural background to your parents. If you cannot find someone, perhaps you know someone whose parents come from different backgrounds that you can interview. Try to find out as much as possible about how their family values, beliefs, and structures both differ and are similar to your own. Make notes.

If you have accessibility problems (e.g. due to an isolated location, or perhaps a disability), you may investigate someone with a different cultural background by reading an article in a publication or on the internet, which recounts the experiences of someone who has parents with a different cultural background to the culture in which they live.

Spend between 1- 3 hours undertaking this task.