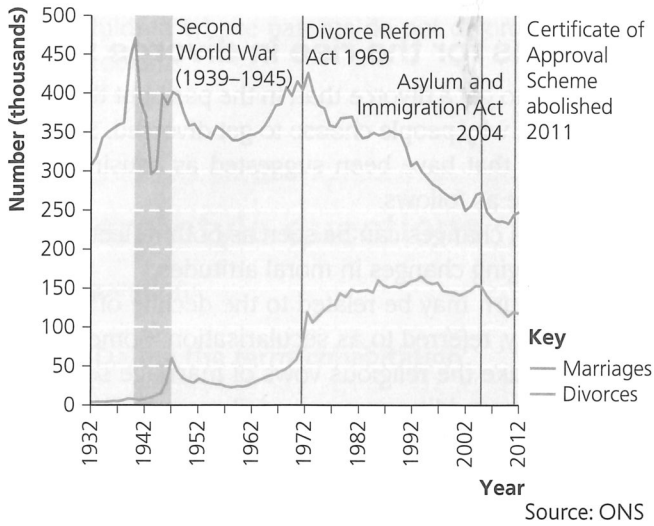
Section 4

Changing family patterns

The decline of marriage



Number of marriages and divorces, 1932–2012

Over the last 40 years there has been a significant fall in the number of marriages. The number of marriages fell from a post-war peak of more than 400,000 to just 250,000 in 2012. The proportion of people who are married has also fallen considerably. More people have been getting married later in life or never marrying at all or ending a marriage by divorce and not remarrying.

The traditional wedding in church is also in decline. Traditional weddings are expensive, formal and religious. Seven in ten of all weddings are now civil services rather than religious ones. Many people feel that remarriages (which make up a growing proportion of all marriages) should be small and low-key. Another reason for the decline in marriages is the expense; the average cost of a wedding is now over £20,000.

Feminists would attribute the fall in the number of marriages to women's growing dissatisfaction with the traditional patriarchal relationship, and the search for more fulfilling alternatives. Nevertheless the number of women (as well as men) who remarry suggests there is a continuing attraction; when a marriage fails, it seems that many see the problem in a relationship with a particular person rather than in the nature of marriage.


Fotolia

Marriage rates have fallen steadily over the last 20 years

Cohabitation

There are at least three different kinds of cohabitation:

- permanent or long-term relationships differing from marriage only in that a formal ceremony has not taken place
- short-term relationships without commitment
- 'trial marriages': living together before marriage

While the first type is prevalent in Scandinavia, it is the third type that seems particularly significant in Britain. Most couples cohabit before marriage. This suggests not a rejection of marriage, but a change in marriage practice. Marriages are delayed, perhaps for economic reasons: more people are in higher education in their twenties and may not feel they are financially independent enough for marriage for years. At the same time, there is less stigma attached to cohabitation and less religious pressure to get married. Women are more likely to have careers and less likely to need to marry for financial security.

Births outside marriage

Just as living together was considered to be 'living in sin', a social stigma was attached in the past to the 'illegitimate' child and her or his mother. Social disapproval was so great that in the last century there were cases of young

girls who became pregnant being committed to asylums. This situation has changed dramatically; almost half of all babies are now born outside marriage.

Much of this growth is related to cohabitation, with many babies being born to parents who are not married but are living together in a stable relationship and who may well marry in the future. This kind of family is arguably not very different from the nuclear family; the only thing missing is the legal bond of marriage. This is not however the whole story because many births outside marriage are to parents who do not live together. While this can be partly attributed to relationships breaking down during the pregnancy, it is also the case that more women are deciding to raise children on their own. The involvement of the father can range from no contact at all to regular visits and active participation in bringing up the child. This kind of family — the lone parent by choice — is arguably a new and significant development.

Divorce in the UK today

Key findings

- The number of divorces in England and Wales in 2012 was 118,140.
- About half of these divorces took place within the first 10 years of a marriage.
- 48% of couples divorcing had at least one child under 16 living at home with them.
- 65% of divorces were initiated by the wife, and the most common reason was the behaviour of the man.
- The number of divorces has been steady since 2009, after falling between 2003 and 2009.

Source: Office for National Statistics
www.tinyurl.com/kwjrkp3

Other features of divorce today are:

- Those who marry young are more likely to divorce.
- Middle-class people are less likely to divorce than working-class people (this is a reversal of the situation in the past when only the well-off could afford divorce).
- People with strong religious beliefs are less likely to divorce; Catholicism still forbids divorce, and a divorced person cannot remarry in a Catholic church.

The law and divorce

The 1971 Divorce Reform Act made it easier to get a divorce by changing the grounds for divorce to 'irretrievable breakdown'. It was no longer necessary to prove charges (such as desertion, adultery or cruelty) against the spouse; divorce could be mutual agreement after a period of separation. A couple could get divorced after 2 years' separation if both agreed, and after 5 years if one partner did not agree. In 1984 it became possible to get divorced after only 1 rather than 3 years of marriage. Later the requirement to provide evidence of irretrievable breakdown of marriage was ended; divorce could happen after a statement of marital breakdown, meetings to see if reconciliation was possible and a wait of 9 months, or 15 months if children were involved. Divorce has come to be seen as acceptable, even the best option in some situations. This change in attitude has been helped by media coverage of divorces of famous people, including members of the royal family.

Reasons for the rise in divorce rates

It is easier to get a divorce than in the past, but this does not explain why people choose to get divorced. Some of the factors that have been suggested as causing more divorces are as follows:

- The legal changes can be seen as both reflecting and encouraging changes in moral attitudes.
- This in turn may be related to the decline of religion in society, referred to as secularisation. Some people do not take the religious vows of marriage seriously, and more weddings are now civil ceremonies.
- The lesser influence of religion can in turn be related to a wider decline of communities. In the past, when there was less geographical mobility, communities had informal controls to prevent people breaking social rules and conventions. Divorce no longer brings social shame and disapproval.

These reasons all fit in with a New Right view. Two other possible explanations, however, take a very different view, for the possibility of divorce can be seen positively as giving individuals greater freedom.

- Gender: feminists and others have argued that women now have confidence and belief in their ability to shape their own future. Fewer women than before are willing to put up with a marriage that does not live up to their hopes and expectations. Women are also far more likely to be able to support themselves after divorce than used to be the case; they have greater economic independence through working and having qualifications. This would explain why it is women who initiate most divorces. They are more easily able to escape 'empty shell' marriages.
- Class: in the past most divorces were of upper-class and upper-middle-class people but divorce is no longer as costly and complicated as it once was. It is now within everyone's reach so this can be seen as extending to everyone a freedom that was once only available to a minority.

Children and divorce

A survey of the findings of about 200 pieces of research carried out over many years found that children whose

parents were divorced or separated were more likely than those whose parents stayed together to:

- live in poverty
- do less well at school and gain fewer qualifications
- have a low income as an adult
- show behavioural problems as a child
- become a parent at a young age
- use drugs, and smoke and drink a lot

However, the majority of the children of divorced parents are not affected in these ways, and do not seem to suffer any long-term disadvantages. Conversely, some children whose parents do not divorce do suffer these problems.

Factors that may be important in deciding the effects of divorce include:

- income after the divorce — the divorced parent becomes a lone parent, often entailing a fall in income and perhaps even descent into poverty. The supposed negative consequences of divorce, as with those of being in a lone parent family can then be traced back to poverty
- the degree of conflict before, during and after the divorce
- how well parents cope with their new lives affects how well children adapt
- whether the divorce involves others, such as moving in with a step family
- how much contact children have with the parent who they are not living with

Exam-style questions

AS questions

1 **Define the term 'cohabitation'.** 2 marks

2 **Using one example, briefly explain how secularisation can affect marriage and divorce.** 2 marks

3 **Outline three reasons why the number of births outside marriage has increased.** 6 marks

4 **Outline three reasons why some couples choose to cohabit rather than get married.** 6 marks

A-level question

5 **Read the item below and answer the question that follows.**

In the last 50 years, there have been significant increases in both the divorce rate and in the number of cohabiting couples; at the same time fewer people are getting married, and those who do are marrying at an older age. Sociologists, including feminist sociologists, are interested in the causes and consequences of these changes.

Analyse two ways in which feminist sociologists would interpret recent changes in patterns of marriage, cohabitation and divorce. 10 marks

AS and A-level question

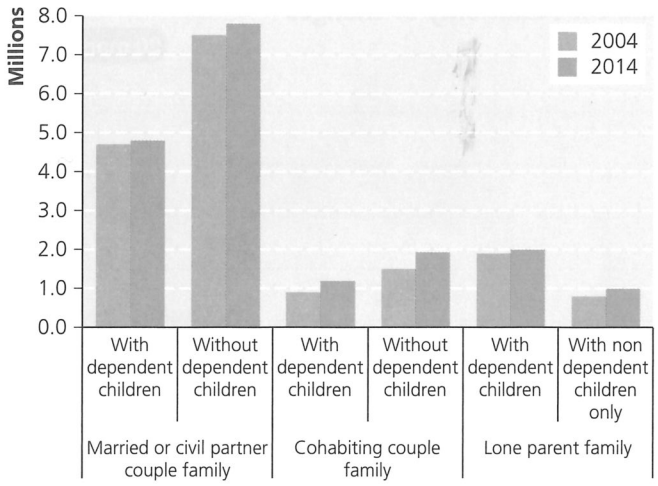
6 **Read the item below and answer the question that follows.**

The divorce rate rose sharply in Britain in the 1970s, peaked in the early 1990s and has fallen only slightly since then. One reason for this rise in divorce is changing social attitudes, perhaps linked to the decline of religious influence; for example, being divorced no longer carries a stigma. Sociologists have suggested other reasons for the rise in divorce.

Evaluate the view that changes in divorce rates are the result only of changes in attitudes towards marriage and divorce. 20 marks

Section 5

Contemporary family diversity



Source: Labour Force Survey, ONS

Families in the UK: by family type in 2004 and 2014

Diversity

The idea that there is a single dominant type of family is still common in the media and in our culture. The typical family, sometimes called the 'cereal packet family' because it is often used in advertising for cereals, shows a nuclear family of a married couple, following fairly traditional gender roles, with their one or more children.

Remarriage and reconstituted families

Divorce has contributed to a rise in the number of families that are, in effect, put together from other families that have broken up — reconstituted, or blended, families. These do not have to involve remarriage, since the new couple may be cohabiting. The term 'reconstituted families' is one that points to these families as a sign of the continuing importance of family life. The older similar term 'stepfamilies' on the other hand can seem to imply that these are somehow not 'real' families.

Children may be in a wide variety of situations, living with other children with whom they share one natural parent, or to whom they were not related before the remarriage, who may be much older or younger than they are. Reconstituted families are in many ways not a single phenomenon, and their growth is a major contributor to the greater diversity of family life in Britain today.

Singlehood

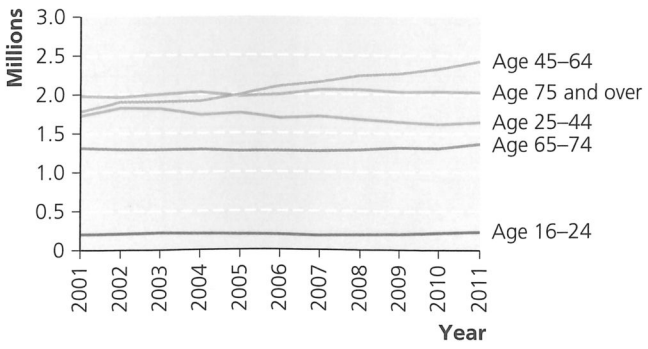
Over a quarter of all households are now single-person households; this represents a considerable increase in recent years, and it is a trend that is expected to continue. New houses need to be built, not because the total population is rising (it is, but slowly) but because the average number of people in each household is falling.

One reason why more people live alone is that they choose to do so, but sociologists would want to probe deeper and ask why this should be. In the past, many people moved out of their parental home when they got married. Today, many people live alone for some years, marrying later. University students have often moved away from home and become used to looking after themselves; this can set a pattern that continues after finishing university. However, another reason for the growing number of people living alone is increased life expectancy. Many elderly widows and widowers live alone.

Research has suggested that men and women in their thirties and forties who live alone have very different experiences. Single women have strong friendships, are involved in a wide range of activities and take responsibility for their physical and mental health. Men, on the other hand, are often isolated and lonely.

A growing number of people have partners, but do not live with them — they are 'living apart together'. This can be the result of choice or of constraints such as cost.

Living alone



Source: Labour Force Survey, ONS

People living alone by age group 2001–11, UK

The graph shows the trends in the number of people living alone by age group between 2001 and 2011. The largest change is in the 45–64 age group, where the number of people living alone increased by more than 30% between 2001 and 2011. This is partly due to the increasing population aged 45–64 in the UK over the last decade, as the 1960s baby boom generation has been starting to reach this age group. The increase in those living alone also coincides with a decrease in the percentage of those in this age group who are married, and a rise in the percentage of those aged 45–64 who have never married, or are divorced.

Same-sex relationships

More homosexual and lesbian couples live together in long-term relationships than in the past, and more of them are married or in civil partnerships. More same-sex couples are bringing up their own or adopted children. In the past many people thought that this would be damaging for the children. Lesbian couples are more likely to be accepted as parents than male homosexuals, because of the perceived importance of the mother to her children. However, even with male couples, there is a growing opinion that at least in some cases this may be the best available option for the children.

Lone parent families

Much of the popular writing assumes that lone parent families are a recent phenomenon, but there have always been lone parent families and they have not always been assumed to be a social problem. Queen Victoria, for example, was a lone parent after the early death of her husband Albert. What have changed are the reasons for the existence of lone parent families. In the past, parents were left to raise children alone, usually through the death of the other parent. Fewer lone parent families in the past than today resulted from the break-up of a marriage because divorce was difficult to obtain.

Today most children in lone parent families have two living parents, and may have regular contact with the parent they do not live with. Some can be said to have two homes (or to live in a bi-nuclear family). The amount of contact children have with a parent they do not live with can vary enormously, from every day to never. The amount of support, financial or otherwise, that an absent parent gives also varies. This makes it difficult to generalise about lone parent families.

There were 3 million children living in lone parent families in 2013, out of a total of 13.3 million children (www.tinyurl.com/o65ta6m).

Sociological theories and lone parent families

- Functionalism: the lone parent family was seen as a 'broken family', damaged by the absence of one parent, and therefore dysfunctional, sure to create problems for both the children and society.
- The New Right: Charles Murray argued that the growth of lone parent families was encouraged by an over-generous welfare state. Teenage girls in particular, he said, did not see pregnancy and raising a child as problems; they knew that they would get welfare to support them. For Murray, it is a greater problem if a boy, rather than a girl, is being brought up by a lone mother. Society needs men who will be breadwinners, able to support a family and show loyalty and commitment to wife and children. Boys who do not grow up seeing men behaving as they should will be unable to be good husbands and fathers themselves. This damaging pattern of behaviour is passed on from one generation to the next, creating a cycle that is difficult to break, and contributes to the growth of an underclass.

Questioning the negative view

How important is it for a child to have two parents? A lone parent may be supported by family members, neighbours and friends, and be able to support the children both economically and emotionally (by providing a loving, nurturing family environment). This may even be better for the children than remaining with two parents in an 'empty shell' marriage characterised by arguments and bad feeling.

Second, the evidence that children of lone parents are more likely to suffer a range of problems can be interpreted differently. It has been suggested that the main factor involved is not the type of family, but poverty. A whole range of social problems is associated with poverty, and lone parents in Britain are more likely to be in poverty than two parent families.

Feminists tend to emphasise the negative aspects of the conventional nuclear family for women and for children. They are more favourably inclined towards women bringing up children on their own; this breaks the dependence of women on a man. It also frees women from threatened or real violence by the man. Feminists would therefore reject the idea that a lone parent family must be dysfunctional. The rise in the number of lone parent families will be seen as partly the result of more women recognising the oppressive nature of patriarchal families, and deciding to raise children without a man.

Beanpole families

Beanpole families are those with fewer children but more generations. Family trees showing living members are now less likely to be 'bushy' with lots of lateral branches, with several brothers and sisters meaning aunts and uncles for the next generation. Instead the family tree is tall and thin. More children have no siblings, but at the same time they are more likely to know their grandparents and great-grandparents than were earlier generations.

Ethnicity and diversity

Another source of diversity of family types and roles comes from Britain's ethnic diversity. Statistics show that Black Caribbean and Black African people in Britain have high proportions of lone parent families, almost always headed by the mother. Some writers trace this to the legacy of slavery, which prevented men from taking the instrumental role of supporting a family, while others point to the high value Black women place on their independence, to the high levels of support lone mothers receive from their own mothers and others, or to the possibility that the father is playing a significant role in the family even though not living with them.

Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Indian families are larger than those of other ethnic groups, and extended family ties are often strong. About 14% of all families from these ethnic groups live in multi-generational households; the average for all households is less than 4% (www.tinyurl.com/o65ta6m).

The life course

The greater choice people have about their families and relationships means that to understand families we now need to focus on individuals and the choices they make. This is called 'life course analysis'. The life course for previous generations was more fixed and allowed less scope for choice; according to functionalists, people passed through the stages of a life cycle — childhood, adulthood and old age — with clearly defined roles and status at each stage. Life course analysis, on the other hand, studies the choices individuals make and the meaning they give to them, recognising the range of possibilities that people now face.

Sociology of personal life

Postmodernists argue that society today is increasingly fragmented, with greater diversity of cultures and lifestyles and of identities to choose from. Families are no longer central in everyone's lives. People create networks of relationships with other people, and make choices about how to live their lives. These networks and choices may involve families, but it is no longer possible to make generalisations about 'the family'.

Exam-style questions

AS questions

1 **Define the term 'life course'.** 2 marks

2 **Using one example, briefly explain how families may differ between ethnic groups.** 2 marks

3 Outline three reasons for the greater diversity of family types in Britain today. **6 marks**

A-level question

4 Outline and explain two consequences of the increase in the number of lone parent families. **10 marks**

AS and A-level questions

5 **Read the item below and answer the question that follows.**

Compared to the mid twentieth century, when the nuclear family was seen as the dominant type of family, there is now a wide range of types of families and households. Some sociologists have seen this as a negative development arising from a decline in moral standards, while others have suggested other causes and consequences.

Evaluate sociological interpretations of the increasing diversity of types of families in Britain today. 20 marks

6 **Read the item below and answer the question that follows.**

In the mid twentieth century, the nuclear family was seen as the most common and also most desirable family type. Since then there have been many changes to families and households in Britain and a greater diversity of family types, so that some sociologists now argue that there is no longer a single dominant type of family.

Evaluate the view that there is no longer a single dominant type of family in Britain today.

20 marks

Section 6

Roles and power within families

Relationships: the rise of the couple

In the past, the married couple was just one part of a wider family; marriage was about having heirs and transmitting property to the next generation of the family. Marriage relationships were unequal; women were often considered to be the property of their husbands or fathers.

Giddens has argued that we are experiencing a fundamental shift in the meaning of the family. It is no longer based on the legal tie of marriage. Today, in the West, marriage is less important than the relationship between two people, so much so that marriage is sometimes seen as not essential. The relationship is no longer based on the man's domination but on equal rights and mutual respect.

For Giddens, families have had to become more democratic because societies have done so. It is no longer possible for any institution, including the family, to remain based on traditional inequalities; people will not accept it any more.

Relationships today are supposed to be based on deep mutual understanding and knowledge, which outsiders do not share; Jamieson calls this 'disclosing intimacy'. She argues, however, that the reality does not live up to this 'story'. Relationships between men and women continue to be unequal, whatever the intentions of the couple, because their roles continue to be different and unequal; for example, responsibility for bringing up children still falls most heavily on women. Her view of recent changes is therefore more reserved than that of Giddens. Relationships are not yet based on true equality.

Husbands and wives: the domestic labour debate

According to familial ideology, the nuclear family is most successful when there is a clear separation of gender roles: the man should go out to work and be the breadwinner, the woman should look after home and children. For functionalists, a gendered division of labour is natural and desirable. For feminists, this leads to a narrowing of opportunities for women and a situation from which men benefit and women do not.

The housewife role

The idea of a housewife is not a universal one; rather, it belongs to Western industrial societies in the last 150 years or so. In pre-industrial societies there was no conception of 'going out to work'. All members of a family contributed to producing what the family needed. Different societies divided tasks by gender in different ways. With industrialisation, the home became separate from the place of work, and the family became a centre of consumption rather than production. Women gradually became more associated with the home, the domestic sphere, men with the public sphere of paid work and politics. The idea that a woman should concern herself only with domestic affairs began in the upper and middle classes and spread downwards. Gradually the idea spread that any kind of paid work outside the home was undesirable for women. This was helped by trade unions arguing for a 'family wage' as a way of increasing wages; that is, that men needed to be paid enough to support a wife and children. Many women in poorer families, however, had no choice but to continue to work, yet as women they could no longer expect to be paid as much as a man. Although working, they would also be expected to care for home and family, bearing a 'double burden'.

The symmetrical family

Willmott and Young have argued that in the second half of the twentieth century a new and more equal division of domestic labour, based on joint rather than segregated conjugal roles, emerged. While there was still a clear division of labour by gender, both husband and wife were contributing equally to the family — hence the term 'symmetrical'. The family was becoming more egalitarian, more democratic.

Feminists and others have challenged this optimistic view. Feminists see the domestic division of labour within the context of a patriarchal society and thus that the position of women within the family is inevitably a subordinate one. Wives almost always depend economically on their husbands. The familial ideology is widely accepted and provides 'common sense' ideas about how things should be, for example, that men should not do or cannot do housework. This ideology is even widely accepted by women.

One of the first feminists to challenge Willmott and Young's account of the rise of the symmetrical family was Ann Oakley. Oakley, a feminist, studied women's domestic work in the same way as earlier male sociologists had studied men's paid work in factories and other places of work, using concepts such as alienation and job satisfaction. She pointed out that even when men were doing some domestic tasks, this was seen as 'helping'; the main responsibility was still the wife's. She questioned the evidence that Willmott and Young had produced, suggesting that the way they framed questions produced figures that exaggerated how much housework men were doing.

Fotolia

Are men sharing the housework equally with their partners, or just helping out?

Researching the domestic division of labour

Research in this field has several difficulties. It is not clear exactly what tasks should be covered, or how they should be measured. It is also important who is asked about housework; a husband and wife may give completely different accounts of who usually does what. In many families, studying housework would involve more family members than just husband and wife. Children may be expected to do some household tasks, as may other family members (grandparents, for example, may help with childcare). Some families, of course, also pay for some household tasks to be done by others.

When couples are asked about domestic work (for example, whether they or their partner do a task more often) they may give contradictory answers, either to give a favourable impression or because they perceive the situation differently.

While there is still clearly a division of labour by gender, its exact shape is constantly changing. New technologies may reduce the amount of work (or create more), and may affect the sexes unequally. For example, one of the chores that men do often take on is washing the dishes, but in many households this has been replaced by loading a dishwasher. New types of task also emerge; in recent years barbecues have become popular, and cooking on barbecues (unusually for food preparation) is seen as men's work.

Domestic violence and abuse

Statistics on domestic violence and abuse understate the true extent of the problem. Many victims are reluctant to report it to the police, and the police and other agencies are less likely than with most other offences to get involved.

Radical feminists interpret the levels of domestic violence and abuse as demonstrating the patriarchal nature of society. Men use violence and the threat of violence to preserve their dominant position in the family and in society. Although violence is an extreme form of power, all men benefit from the way it reinforces patriarchy. However, most men are not violent towards their partners and would condemn such violence, and violence and abuse by women against male partners is more common than is usually assumed.

The role of the mother

Society has clear expectations of what mothers should be like. Mothers are expected to devote themselves to their children (while also taking care of the child's father). It is often assumed that there is a 'mothering instinct', meaning that a woman will always want children and be willing to raise them.

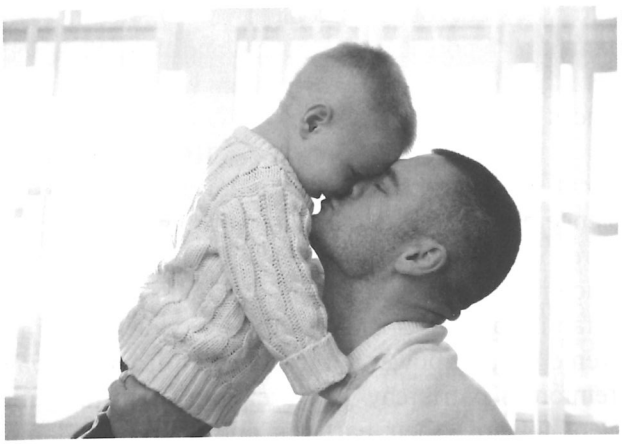
In fact, motherhood is a social construction; that is, it is society that decides what a mother should be like (and stigmatises those who do not conform, for example by being too young or too old). In other societies it is not always taken for granted that the biological mother will raise the children. For example, grandparents or other close kin may adopt the children of a young, unmarried mother. Who cares for children and brings them up varies even in our society.

The role of the father

The traditional functionalist view of the father was as head of the family and as breadwinner. The father's role as breadwinner meant that he was away from the home. His main role with regard to his children, after providing materially for them, was to discipline them when required.

The limits of the father's role were set by men but supported by many women. Changing nappies and feeding a baby were seen as not men's work, and it would be a disgrace for a man to be seen pushing a pram. Men who liked taking care of children might be thought of as effeminate. This created a real dilemma for men who wanted to have a strong relationship with

their children. Those who broke these restrictions faced being stigmatised by other men if it became known that they did 'women's work'. The alienation of fathers from their children was increased by the requirement that they act as a disciplinarian, imposing punishment.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Many fathers are keen to be involved with their children

The position of men in society has changed in recent years, and this has had a number of effects on how men behave as fathers. Some of the changes involved in this shift are:

- the decline of manufacturing industry, causing male unemployment, which has affected the working class particularly
- the abuse of women and children within families by men has become much better publicised and widely condemned
- the importance of men within families is questioned — more women can support families alone; divorce laws have been used mainly by women to divorce their husbands
- fathers are now expected to be involved with children more often and in more ways than before and at the same time they are expected to continue being the main provider in economic terms

One mother summed up her husband's struggle to sustain different aspects of his paternal identity by drawing a parallel with the figure of the 'supermum' media stereotype who expertly juggles multiple roles. Dads, these days, she said, are expected to be 'superdads' (*Fathers, Work and Family Life*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, June 1999).

The role of grandparents

It is a new development for several generations of a family to be alive at the same time; life expectancy until the middle of the twentieth century prevented this. There are possibilities for relationships, support and transfer of property between generations that did not exist before. To some extent, then, the role of the grandparent — especially the active, healthy grandparent — is a new and newly important one.

The range of support grandparents offer to both their children and grandchildren, and the support they receive, has been described by Finch. These are all aspects of intergenerational relationships in general; the flows are not always from older to younger, and support from grandparents to grandchildren is difficult to separate from support for the middle generation:

- Economic support — including giving and lending money, gifts.
- Accommodation — about 6% of people aged 65 and over live with their children.
- Personal care — this is the form of support most likely to involve grandparents as receivers of support. Children, especially daughters, are a major support for their elderly parents.
- Practical support — about a quarter of pre-school children with working parents are looked after by their grandparents.
- Emotional and moral support — listening, talking and giving advice. In particular, many mothers rely on their mothers for advice about childcare.

In the current economic situation, and because of the cost of full-time nursery care, more parents are turning to their own parents for help with childcare. Many grandparents who have chosen to retire or who have reached retirement age are carers for their grandchildren. They can be described as a 'reserve army of labour', called into service because of the situation their adult children are in. Much of the support given by grandparents is highly gendered; it is more likely to be the grandmother giving the support.

Exam-style questions

AS questions

1 **Define the term 'symmetrical family'.** 2 marks

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2 Define the term 'segregated conjugal roles'. 2 marks

3 Using one example, briefly explain how families today may be unequal. 2 marks

4 Outline three problems that may be encountered in carrying out research on the domestic division of labour. 6 marks

A-level question

5 Read the item below and answer the question that follows.

The traditional role of the husband and father in the conventional nuclear family was the instrumental or breadwinner role which restricted time spent in the family home and with family members. Today fathers are more likely to share conjugal roles; for example, to do more of the domestic work than in the past and to spend more time with their children.

Analyse two reasons why the roles of fathers in families have changed. 10 marks

AS and A-level question

6 **Read the item below and answer the question that follows.**

Some sociologists have claimed that roles and relationships in families are becoming more equal; for example, they say there has been a move towards symmetrical families. Other sociologists suggest that these claims are exaggerated, and that there is still a strong division of labour with women responsible for most domestic work.

Evaluate the view that couples are becoming more equal. 20 marks