

## 2. AQA: Topics in Sociology: Families and Households

**The relationship of the family to the social structure and social change, with particular reference to the economy and to state policies.**

### **Introduction to Key Families and Household concepts**

It is useful to begin our exploration of the relationship between the family, kinship and social structure by examining some of the common terms used by theoretical perspectives on the family.

- **Kinship** is a concept that generally refers to the system of family relationships between people in a society or cultural group who are biologically related by blood and descent or have attained the status of relatives via marriage, cohabitation, adoption or fostering. Kin normally enjoy legal rights such as those relating to the inheritance of property. Moreover, they may feel obliged to offer other kin material and emotional support.
- **The nuclear family** - traditionally, this has been defined as a two- social group – two parents and one or more children – who share a common residence. It is generally accepted that this is the most common or typical form of family found in Western societies.
- **The extended family** -In addition to the nuclear family grouping, kin such as grandparents, uncles, cousins and so on may share common residence or proximity and/or mutual support. This type of family is particularly common in working-class and ethnic minority communities in the UK and is often the main type of family found in non-Western societies. There are three types of extended family:
  - (a) **The vertical extended family** in which three generations of kin – grandparents, parents and their children – live under the same roof.
  - (b) **The horizontal extended family** in which brothers and their wives and children live under the same roof. These are mainly found in Sikh communities.
  - (c) **The attenuated extended family** in which extended kin live in close proximity to each other and contact between them which is shaped by a strong sense of duty and obligation is frequent and based on offering each other mutual support.
- **Households** - All families that share a common residence are households. However, there are also household set-ups that are not families. For example,

a single person who lives alone, a couple of friends who share a flat, students who share a house or a kitchen in a student hall of residence and old people who live in sheltered housing are all examples of non-family households. . In the USA in the 1960s and 1970s some members of a youth counter-culture known as ‘hippies’ as well as members of religious sects such as the Moonies, set up types of households known as **communes**. **Communes** are self-sustaining collectives based on sharing property and responsibilities, for example, for raising children. In Israel, communes, known collectively as **kibbutzim** and based on socialist values such as economic cooperation and equality, are popular. In 2016, it was estimated that 150,000 people lived in 274 kibbutzim.

- **Monogamy** – legally in many societies, men and women can only be married to one wife or husband at any one time. For example, **bigamy**, that is, being married to more than one wife or husband at the same time is illegal in the UK.
- **Polygamy** – marriage to more than one partner at the same time – is a common global phenomenon. There are two types:
  - (a) **Polygyny** is the term used when a religion or culture allows a man to take more than one wife. For example, Khan (2014) estimates that there may be as many as 20,000 polygynous Muslim marriages in the UK. Technically, polygyny is against the law in the UK. However, no Muslim man has ever been prosecuted for it.
  - (b) **Polyandry** is the term used when cultures allow a woman to take more than one husband. It is less common than polygyny but Starkweather and Hames (2012) have identified nearly 80 cultural groups worldwide that practise it.
- **Serial monogamy** – in the past, it was common for a person to be married to the same person for their whole life. However, for a variety of reasons, the availability of divorce and longer life-spans, it is becoming increasingly common for people to have a series of monogamous marriages and relationships throughout the course of their life.