

# 4 FAMILIES AND HOUSEHOLDS

## Example answers

### AS LEVEL

1 Define the term 'stabilisation of adult personality'.

[2 marks]

#### STUDENT RESPONSE

Stabilisation of adult personality means that the family provides adults with a loving environment where they can relieve the stress they have experienced throughout their working day.

#### TEACHER COMMENTS

Could you link this response to a theory group or a particular sociologist? No detail is required, however a quick link would add further substance to the answer.

2 Using **one** example, briefly explain why the number of one-parent families has increased in the last 50 years.

[2 marks]

#### STUDENT RESPONSE

According to New Right sociologists, single parent families have increased over the last 50 years because of the rise in divorce over the last 50 years.

#### TEACHER COMMENTS

What are your thoughts on this answer? Do you think it meets the demands of the question or not?

3 Outline **three** characteristics of the classic extended family.

[6 marks]

### STUDENT RESPONSE

Relations such as grandparents and their children and grandchildren may either live in the same house or live very close to each other and have frequent contact.

### TEACHER COMMENTS

How many characteristics do you think are identified in this answer? What could you add to develop the answer further?

4 Outline and explain **two** ways in which the ageing of the population has affected family life in the UK.

[10 marks]

### STUDENT RESPONSE

There has been an increase in the number of single-person elderly households. Most of these elderly single households are made up of widows as women tend to live longer than men.

Older relatives may have to move in with the families of their sons or daughters as they grow more dependent. However, this may put stress and strain on carers and their families, e.g. elderly relatives might be seen as an economic burden

### TEACHER COMMENTS

Outlining the ways in which the ageing of the population has affected family life in the UK is only part of the question. Answers need to include detail to each example, potentially referring to research studies if relevant to back up their claims. Could you add detail to both of the examples included in the above response?

5 Read **Item A** and answer the question that follows.

## ITEM A

Some sociologists argue that family life is becoming more egalitarian in that spouses are more likely to share decision-making, housework, childcare and leisure time. However, the idea that equality is the norm in marriage and that a caring, sharing 'new man' has appeared is strongly opposed by feminist sociologists.

Applying material from **Item A** and your knowledge, evaluate the contribution feminists have made to our understanding of family roles and relationships.

[20 marks]

## STUDENT RESPONSE

As Item A says, some sociologists have argued that family life is more egalitarian. This means that the nuclear family today is symmetrical. They claimed that conjugal roles are now joined which means as Item A says that husbands are now more likely to share childcare, housework, leisure time and decision-making with their wives.

However, as Item A indicates, feminist sociologists strongly oppose the idea that modern marriages are characterised by equality. Oakley's study of housewives in the 1970s found that most men do not participate in housework. More modern studies show men today do more around the home than their fathers or grandfathers did, but women are still doing most of the housework, even when they have full-time jobs. Even when men are unemployed and women are working, wives are still doing more than their husbands.

Feminists have also highlighted problems which are sometimes found in family roles and relationships such as domestic violence. Two women a week die at the hands of their male partners in the UK, and domestic violence is reckoned to make up one third of all violence. Child abuse, which is mainly carried out by men is also a problem.

On the whole, the evidence supports the feminist case that equality within marriage is rare. It is clear that because of the amount of housework that women do, along with the amount of domestic violence in the family, that there are power struggles within family units.

## TEACHER COMMENTS

To add substance to your essays, make every effort to avoid statements like 'a sociologist said' and refer to specific research studies that can illustrate your knowledge. Feminism is also quite a diverse group, can you identify the types of feminists that could be included in this response and then include them specifically? Finally, the above response mentions that some sociologists have argued that family life is more egalitarian, can you think of examples of different theory groups who believe this and add them to this response?

## A-LEVEL

- 6 Outline and explain **two** social policies which the New Right claim have undermined the nuclear family.

[10 marks]

### STUDENT RESPONSE

One social policy that the New Right claim has undermined the nuclear family would be the state response to female employment in the 1970s. The New Right believe that these Acts may have distracted women from their 'natural role' as a mother. Furthermore, they believe there are few taxes or benefits which encourage women to stay at home with their children. These roles, as men and women, are in confusion and this is leading to conflict between the sexes. This causes divorce and consequently the increase in the number of single-parent families. It is also causing problems like juvenile delinquency because often mothers are out at work when their children get home from school.

Another social policy which the New Right sees as undermining the family is the decriminalisation of homosexuality and the legalisation of same-sex marriage.

### TEACHER COMMENTS

As the question asks for two examples of policy, try to stick to the demands of the question and provide detail that just focusses on your chosen policies within a two paragraph format. The above response seems to include many different examples of policy however there is a distinct lack of depth to explain them. Read through the answer above and select two of the policies highlighted by the student, can you write a detailed paragraph about each one?

7 Read **Item B** below and answer the question that follows.

## ITEM B

The social historian Philippe Aries [1962] suggested that childhood is a recent social invention. He claimed that in pre-industrial society, childhood as we know it today did not exist. The 20th century saw the emergence of a child-centred society. Childhood and adolescence were seen as separate categories from adulthood. Children were seen as being in need of special attention and protection.

Applying material from **Item B**, analyse **two** ways in which childhood may have changed over time.

[10 marks]

## STUDENT RESPONSE

One way childhood has changed over time is through the role they play. In Item B, it states that childhood did not exist as it does today. According to Aries, only 200 hundred years ago, children were seen as mini-adults and were sent out to work in very harsh conditions, e.g. in factories and mines. Childhood was not a special or protected time of life. Children spent most of their childhood working rather than playing or going to school. Many died before they reached adulthood. However, today, childhood is seen as a very special experience focused on both play and education. Childhood is seen as a very distinct experience and is separated from the adult world.

There were very few laws protecting children from harm until the 20th century. In the 19th century children were often found working in very harmful conditions and there were few laws to protect them from child abuse. For example, there was no age of consent until late in the century and many female children worked on the streets as prostitutes. The 20th century has been described as the century of the child because the government brought in many laws and social policies to protect children from bad parenting, sexual predators, disease and exploitation by employers.

## TEACHER COMMENTS

Compare this response to the previous question, what are the strengths of this answer in comparison? To enhance the response further, the student may want to add some further substance to the second paragraph through including another research study other than Aries in order to illustrate their knowledge. Can you think of a study that would be appropriate?

8 Read **Item C** below and answer the question that follows.

## ITEM C

Functionalists believe that the family functions to benefit society as a whole as it promotes the values needed for social order. However not all sociologists agree with this statement. Marxists and feminists may suggest that more powerful groups benefit from the family structure through the exploitation of some of its individual members.

Applying material from **Item C** and your knowledge, evaluate the view that the family functions to benefit society as a whole.

[20 marks]

## STUDENT RESPONSE

As the item suggests, functionalists believe that the family functions to benefit society as a whole because it maintains social order. They believe that the family promotes key values and relaxes each member so that they can go back to work/school the next day and therefore fulfil their status in society. Functionalists believe that everybody lives in a nuclear family and that this is the most beneficial family structure.

Marxists, on the other hand disagree with functionalists by stating that the family only functions to benefit the capitalist system by passing down the ideology of the ruling class. By being in a family, parents feel under pressure to buy things for their children which in turn will make them more likely to conform to the demands of their bosses at work. Also, some Marxists say that some family members will take out their frustrations of being exploited in the work place on their families when they get home. Therefore, Marxists believe the family does not benefit society as a whole, only the capitalist system.

Feminists also disagree with the functionalist claim that the family functions to benefit society as in their opinion, family life only benefits men. Radical feminists discuss the impact of domestic violence that happens in families that is clearly ignored by functionalists and therefore cannot be seen as beneficial to society as a whole.

Finally, postmodernists would suggest that functionalists are too generalised as the family cannot benefit society due to each individual being different in today's postmodern world. Each family is now unique and therefore family diversity is now the norm.

To conclude, the view that the family functions to benefit society as a whole is held by functionalists although as the item suggests, Marxists and other sociologists disagree.

## TEACHER COMMENTS

A strength of the above response is how it links directly to the question in each paragraph. One of the most effective ways of achieving this is to use the exact phrase in the question, this draws the reader's attention specifically to the central theme of the essay and helps you keep on track too. Another strength is the variety of theoretical views that have been included which illustrate some evaluation. However, the clear lack of detail limits its impact. Each paragraph could benefit from the use of specific concepts and research studies that would improve the standard of knowledge and analysis as well as developing the evaluation of the response. Can you think of at least one research study that could be included in each paragraph? Also which concepts could be included for each theory that would improve the level of detail?