

Sociology GCSE

Course plan

This plan shows the structure of the course and gives an outline of the contents.

Getting Started

Introduction

Sociology GCSE Course guide

Section 1 The sociological approach

Topic 1 What is sociology?

Topic 2 What makes the sociological approach different?

Topic 3 Central terms and concepts in sociology

Assignment 1

Section 2 The sociology of families 1

Topic 1 The functions of families

Topic 2 Forms of family

Topic 3 Conjugal roles

Assignment 2

Section 3 The sociology of families 2

Topic 1 Changing relationships within families

Topic 2 Criticisms of families

Topic 3 Divorce

Assignment 3

Section 4 Sociological research methods

[Topics to come]

Assignment 4

This relates to the following part of the specification: 3.7
Sociological research methods

Section 5 The sociology of education 1

[Topics to come]

Assignment 5

This relates to the following part of the specification: 3.4 Education

Section 6 The sociology of education 2

[Topics to come]

Assignment 6

This relates to the following part of the specification: 3.4 Education

Section 7 Crime and deviance 1

[Topics to come]

Assignment 7

This relates to the following part of the specification: 3.5 Crime and
deviance

Section 8 Crime and deviance 2

[Topics to come]

Assignment 8

This relates to the following part of the specification: 3.5 Crime and
deviance

Section 9 Social stratification 1

[Topics to come]

Assignment 9

This relates to the following part of the specification: 3.6 Social
stratification

Section 10 Social stratification 2

[Topics to come]

Assignment 10

This relates to the following part of the specification: 3.6 Social stratification

Sample of the GCSE Sociology Course from Section 2

Topic 2

Forms of family

Introduction

In this topic we will consider some of the main types or forms of family in the UK.

As well as the nuclear family we met in Topic 1, we will examine lone parent families, blended families, single-sex families and extended families.

We will also introduce an important piece of research that was carried out into family diversity in modern society.

You will probably need 2-3 hours to complete this topic.



Objectives

When you have completed this topic you should be able to:

- identify, describe and explain various family forms
- outline the Rapoport's' research into family diversity.

A range of types of family

Today's society includes a range of different family types.

Activity 1

Think of a few families that you know well. In what ways are they different?

It's likely that you could think of several differences – for example:

- whether the family includes a single adult or a couple
- whether there are any children and, if so, how many
- whether partners are married, in a civil partnership or living together (cohabiting)
- whether partners are heterosexual, gay or lesbian
- whether other people, such as grandparents live in the family.

As we saw in Topic 1, some sociologists define a family in narrow terms, focusing on a husband, wife and their children who live together. Other sociologists criticise this definition because it overlooks diversity or variety in family structures. They prefer a broader definition using the plural term 'families' to include a diversity of family structures including nuclear families, lone-parent families, blended (or reconstituted) families, single-sex families, and extended families. We will look at these in turn.

Nuclear families

As we saw in Topic 1, a nuclear family contains a mother, a father and their **dependent children** (those aged under 16 or aged 16–18 and in full-time education or training) – all of them sharing a home. A nuclear family has just two generations – parents and children. In the traditional nuclear family favoured by functionalists, the parents are married. Often however, the parents may be cohabiting instead of, or before, getting married.

Lone-parent families

A **lone-parent family** contains one parent and his or her dependent child(ren), living together in the same home. The parent is likely to be widowed, divorced or separated from their partner.

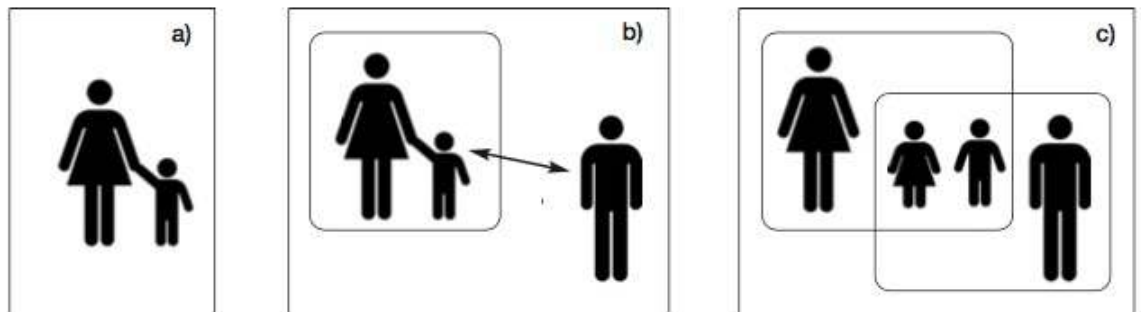
Many sociologists argue that terms such as lone-parent families or lone parenthood are not always appropriate descriptions of the way people live their lives. For example, a child may live with their

mother, have regular contact with their father and have a close and warm relationship with both parents.

Alternatively, a child may live with one parent for part of the week and with the other for the rest of the week. We could describe such arrangements as based on **co-parenting** (or joint parenting) rather than on single parenting.

Activity 2

Which picture best represents a family based on co-parenting or joint-parenting?



You will find the feedback to this activity at the end of the topic.

Blended (or reconstituted) families

In a **blended** (or reconstituted) **family**, at least one of the two partners has a child or children from a previous relationship living with them. The majority of blended families are made up of a biological (or natural) mother, her child or children and their stepfather, all living together in the same home. So, although the stepfather is not the children's biological father, he is their social father in that he helps to bring them up.

A reconstituted family could contain different types of siblings (brothers and sisters):

- full siblings – where brothers and sisters share both biological parents
- half-siblings – where they share just one biological parent
- stepsiblings – where they are not related to each other by blood but have one biological parent in a relationship together.

Activity 3

Use your own ideas to complete the table on the next page. Try to include at least two separate points under each heading.

Blended families could be viewed positively because:	Blended families could be viewed negatively because:
■	■
■	■
■	■

You will find the feedback to this activity at the end of the topic.

Single sex families

A **single-sex family** contains a gay or lesbian couple and their child or dependent children, all sharing a home together.

We can identify several factors to explain why society has become more accepting of single-sex relationships:

- Increased freedom of expression and acceptance of diversity (or differences) between people regarding sexuality.
- Positive representations of same-sex relationships within the media can be seen as resulting in an increase in the acceptance of homosexual relationships. If people become more familiar with the idea of same-sex relationships, they may be less likely to be intolerant of them.
- Some religions view gay and lesbian relationships negatively, but the decreasing influence of religion in society has gone hand in hand with an increase tolerance towards homosexuality. This decline in the social influence of religion is referred to as the **secularisation process**.
- Gay-rights groups have also raised awareness about the civil and human rights of gay and lesbian people. These groups have exerted pressure to influence legislation that affects gay and lesbian rights and relationships.

- Laws and social policies regarding gay relationships have changed significantly since the 1960s. This table shows some key changes in English and Welsh law:

Year	Policy change
1967	Homosexual acts legalised for those aged 21 and over
1994	Legal age of consent for homosexual acts reduced to 18
2001	Legal age of consent for homosexual acts reduced to 16
2002	Adoption and Children Act allows same-sex couples to adopt
2004	Civil partnerships for gay couples recognised in law
2014	Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act recognises gay marriage

Extended families

The term **extended family** includes more **kinship relationships** than the nuclear family. This usually involves vertical extension where three or more generations (such as children, parents and grandparents) live together or close by. By contrast, horizontal extension involves two generations such as children, their parents and an aunt or uncle living together or close by.

If people live some distance away from members of their extended family group but still keep in regular contact with them, this is referred to as a modified extended family. Such contact could be by telephone, email or visits.

There can be cultural differences in around extended families. In 2001, 10 per cent of Bangladeshi and Pakistani households, 3 per cent of black Caribbean households and 2 per cent of white British households contained a multigenerational extended family.

Activity 4

The following extract outlines some of the reasons why people may live in an extended family. Complete the text by filling in the gaps with the following words:

- | | |
|---------------------|--------------|
| a) split up from | d) cheaper |
| b) care and support | e) financial |
| c) grandparents | f) widowed |

- People may choose to live in an extended family for 1 _____ reasons; living costs are increasing and living with more people can work out 2 _____.
- People who are divorced or separated from their husband or wife or who 3 _____ a cohabiting partner may have nowhere else to go – they may have to live in an extended family.
- In some circumstances, extended kin such as 4 _____ may move in with a nuclear family because they need 5 _____ or because they can provide this. They may also move in after becoming 6 _____.

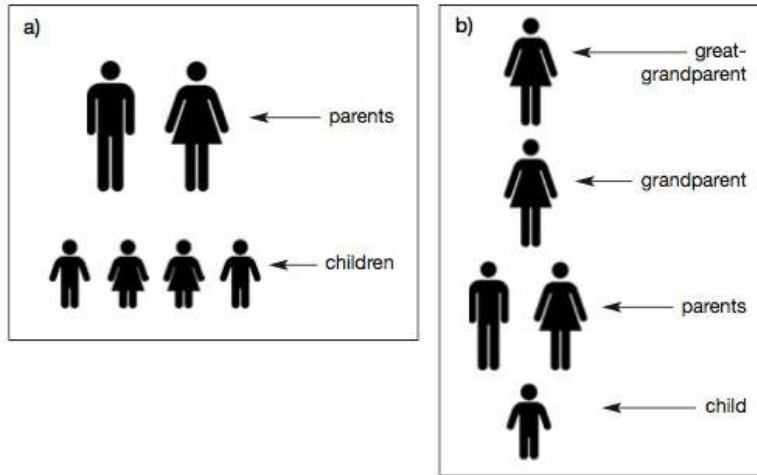
You will find the feedback to this activity at the end of the topic.

Beanpole families are another example of families that involve extended kinship relationships. A beanpole family is multigenerational in that it can consist of four (or more) generations. However, it only has a small number of people in each generation. For example, a beanpole family could consist of a child, parents, a grandparent and a great-grandparent.

The beanpole family is referred to as 'beanpole' because if you drew a picture of the family's structure, it would look long and thin like a beanpole. By contrast, if you drew a picture of a mother, father and their four children, it would look shorter and wider.

Activity 5

Which figure better represents a beanpole family?



You will find the feedback to this activity at the end of the topic.

Focus on research: the Rapoports' study of family diversity

Rhona and Robert Rapoport (1982) were pioneering family researchers who argued that society had moved away from the traditional nuclear family to more pluralistic cultures and lifestyles. They identified five types of family diversity:

- Organisational diversity, which includes different patterns of work both within the family (the domestic division of labour) and outside (such as dual career families).
- Cultural diversity – the beliefs and values of different cultural, religious and ethnic groups may influence family structures.
- Class diversity – how the family's position in the social class system affects both the income and resources available, and the socialisation and education of children.
- Life course diversity refers to different stages in the family life cycle – see below.
- Generational (or cohort) diversity – the differences between families from different periods such as the Great Depression, the Second World War or the post-war 'baby boomers'.

Families over a lifetime

One aspect of family diversity identified by the Rapoports is life course diversity – the different types of family that people may experience over the course of their life. If you consider that many

people now live into their 70s, 80s or beyond, then it is not surprising to find that many of us will live in different family and non-family settings during our lifetime.

For example, an individual could be born into a nuclear family; their parents could divorce and they could become part of a lone-parent or co-parenting family. They could then move in with their grandparents for emotional and financial support. As a young adult, they could go to university in a distant city and live with friends in a shared house. After university, they might move to a new town for career reasons and live alone in a single-person household. They might later move in with a partner to become part of a cohabiting couple. They may get married and live with their spouse (husband or wife) for several years before divorcing and living alone again. They may eventually get remarried to someone who has a child, forming a blended family. In this way, particular individuals may move between various family and non-family households during their lifetime.

Self check

- 1 A nuclear family is:
 - a) a family with a single parent
 - b) a two-generation family
 - c) a family with aunts and uncles living together.
- 2 An extended family may be made up of:
 - a) a family that includes step-parents
 - b) a family comprising parents and children
 - c) a three-generation family.
- 3 A blended family may be made up of:
 - a) a mother, her biological children, her partner and his children
 - b) a mother and her biological children
 - c) a divorced man, his children and his parents.
- 4 Cohabitation describes a situation in which:
 - a) there is more than one child in the family
 - b) an unmarried couple live together
 - c) a married couple separate.
- 5 A beanpole family:

- a) is long and thin in shape with multiple generations
- b) contains only one generation
- c) contains at least two generations.

You will find the feedback to self checks at the end of the section.

Summary

- There is no single definition of a 'family' that all sociologists agree with, so definitions vary. Some are narrow in focus while others are much broader.
- In the UK today, there is diversity (or variety) in family structures. This diversity includes nuclear families, extended families, lone-parent families, gay and lesbian families, and blended families.
- Rhona and Robert Rapoport identified five types of family diversity: organisational diversity, cultural diversity, class diversity, life course diversity and cohort diversity.
- Over a lifetime, an individual is likely to live in several family types. Events like childbirth or marriage may lead to changes in the family situation that a person lives in.

References

Allan, G and Crow, G (2001) *Families, Households and Society*, Palgrave

Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2009) *Social Trends No 39*, Palgrave Macmillan

Rapoport R and Rapoport R N (1982) 'British families in transition' in Rapoport *et al.* (eds), *Families in Britain*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul

Feedback to activities

Activity 2

The third picture best represents co-parenting or joint parenting.

The first picture depicts a lone-parent household; the second picture shows a lone-parent household where one parent brings up

the child while the second parent makes only a limited contribution to the child's upbringing.

Activity 3

Blended families could be viewed positively because:

- Blended families are similar to nuclear families, which many commentators see as the 'best' type of family structure.
- Blended families often need less financial support from the state than lone-parent families.
- In blended families, children have two adult role models.
- The fact that blended families exist shows that people value the importance of a family, even if they had negative experiences in a previous relationship.

Blended families could be viewed negatively because:

- There can be tensions between members of a blended family – for example, a non-biological or step-parent (as they are sometimes known) might not know how to handle their relationships with their stepchildren.
- Blended families could have a negative effect on children – children may not feel comfortable living in their new family structure.
- The structure of blended families can be complex, and people living in them can be unsure of their status or role within their family.

Activity 4

- 1 e) financial
- 2 d) cheaper
- 3 a) split up from
- 4 c) grandparents
- 5 b) care and support
- 6 f) widowed

Activity 5

The second figure better represents a beanpole family. The first figure represents a nuclear (or blended) family.

Glossary

beanpole family: extended family with four (or more) generations, e.g. a child, parents, a grandparent and great-grandparent

blended (or reconstituted) family: where at least one of the partners has a child or children from a previous relationship living with them

co-parenting: where a child may live with one parent for part of the week and with the other for the rest of the week

dependent children: children aged under 16 or aged 16–18 and in full-time education or training

extended family: includes more kinship relationships such as children, parents and grandparents than the nuclear family

kinship relationships: relationships based on blood or marriage such as children, parents, aunts, uncles and grandparents

lone-parent family: one parent and his or her dependent child or children, living together in the same home

secularisation process: the decline in the social influence of religion

single-sex family: a gay or lesbian couple living with their dependent child or children

What next?

We hope this sample has helped you to decide whether this course is right for you.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact us using the details below.

If you are ready to enrol, you have different options:

- **enrol online** – for many courses you can enrol online through our website. Just choose your course, click 'enrol now' and then checkout
- **enrol by telephone** – just call our course advice team free on 0800 389 2839 and we can take your details over the telephone
- **pay in full** – you can pay in full with a credit or debit card
- **pay in instalments** – if spreading the cost would be useful, we can arrange that for you. Just call our course advice team to organise this.

Contact us

There are many ways to get in touch if you have any more questions.

Freephone: 0800 389 2839

Email us: info@nec.ac.uk

Website: www.nec.ac.uk

You can also find us [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [LinkedIn](#)