

Contents

| | |
|---|---|
| Getting the most from this book | 4 |
| About this book | 5 |

Content Guidance

| | |
|--|----|
| Families and households | 6 |
| The family, social structure and social change: the economy and social policies | 6 |
| Family diversity, changing patterns of relationships, childbearing and the life course | 15 |
| Gender roles, domestic labour and power relationships within the family today | 21 |
| Childhood: changes in the status of children in the family and society | 25 |
| Demographic changes since 1900 and the impact of globalisation | 28 |
| Beliefs in society | 33 |
| Ideology, science and religion | 33 |
| Religion, social change and social stability | 42 |
| Religious organisations | 45 |
| Religious/spiritual organisations and social groups | 50 |
| The significance of religion and religiosity in the contemporary world | 54 |

Questions & Answers

| | |
|-----------------------------------|----|
| How to use this section | 63 |
| Examinable skills | 63 |
| Command words | 65 |
| The A-level examination | 66 |
| Test paper 1 | 66 |
| Test paper 2 | 77 |
| Knowledge check answers | 88 |
| Index | 90 |

Getting the most from this book

Exam tips

Advice on key points in the text to help you learn and recall content, avoid pitfalls, and polish your exam technique in order to boost your grade.

Knowledge check

Rapid-fire questions throughout the Content Guidance section to check your understanding.

Knowledge check answers

- 1 Turn to the back of the book for the Knowledge check answers.

Summaries

- Each core topic is rounded off by a bullet-list summary for quick-check reference of what you need to know.

Exam-style questions

Commentary on the questions

Tips on what you need to do to gain full marks.

Sample student answers

Practise the questions, then look at the student answers that follow.

Test paper 1: Families and households

Question 3

Item B

Some sociologists argue that social forces shape behaviour, for example, families socialising children into the values of society. Others however argue that this approach ignores the fact that people have free will. Some sociologists argue that we have moved into a new era of choice and this is the only way to understand family life today.

Applying material from Item B and your knowledge, evaluate the view that structural explanations of the family are no longer useful. (20 marks)

It is a good idea to identify who the 'some sociologists' are. The item is suggesting the debate for you, so use this as the basis of your essay structure. Remember to bring in other relevant material from your own knowledge. You need to decide what argument you are going to make before you start writing your essay, so that your argument is clear.

Question 1: Student A

The decreasing fertility rate has led to smaller nuclear families. ¶ As Sharpe found, women have become increasingly career-centred. In her research, using unstructured interviews in the 1970s and then again in the 1990s, Sharpe found that girls' aspirations had shifted from being married and having babies to having a career as the top priority. ¶ This has led to women having babies later, meaning less time to have children as well as perhaps reduced fertility. It is very difficult to have a demanding career and many children, so women today are choosing to have fewer babies so that their family is more geographically mobile and manageable. ¶ Stacey, a postmodernist feminist, sees this increased choice for women within contemporary global society as a very positive thing as women are not simply expected to have babies and stay at home. ¶ However, this is not true of all women: for example, non-British-born women have a higher fertility rate (they have on average 2.3 babies), meaning that not all families are smaller. ¶ Furthermore, another way that declining fertility rates have led to changing family structures is that there are more childless couples. ¶ One in four women now choose not to have children and are picking alternatives to the traditional nuclear family such as LAT, living apart together. ¶ This means that people may be in a relationship but not living together. ¶ As both partners now typically work and are more affluent, people may be able to afford two separate houses. In addition, globalisation has meant people need to be geographically mobile, as they are expected to work in different places. ¶ There is much less stigma today about women not conforming to becoming a mother, and feminists such as Oakley argue that the nuclear family

¶ A clearly started paragraph, with a way clearly identified. The student sticks to their point, successfully developing it using relevant material. ¶ Mentioning the methodology used in Sharpe's study is a good way to show analysis. ¶ Newly unpacked point: good analysis showing the effects of increased career-centredness, using sociological terms like 'geographical mobility'. ¶ Going further: deeper analysis with Stacey, showing deeper and broader knowledge. ¶ Good analysis here too, making clear the trend cannot be applied to all women. ¶ Clear second way, straight to the point. ¶ A useful statistic and use of concepts. ¶ The point is applied to the question and unpacked. ¶ Globalisation identified as one reason for the increase in childlessness: good focus. ¶ and ¶ Drawing on other perspectives here, showing good sociological knowledge and understanding. 10/10 marks awarded.

Topics in sociology (Families and households and Beliefs in society) 67

Commentary on sample student answers

Read the comments showing how many marks each answer would be awarded in the exam and exactly where marks are gained or lost.

About this book

This guide covers the topics of *Families and households* and *Beliefs in society* in the AQA A-level specification 7192. The content reflects the linear structure of the course, where students have spent 2 years developing their sociological knowledge. The guide indicates and briefly explains and discusses those things that you should know and understand about these topics, but is intended to complement, not replace, your textbooks and class notes.

This guide is designed to help prepare students to answer all question types on Paper 2, Topics in Sociology. The question structures for the two topics are identical. This student guide provides examples of all questions for both topics.

How to use the book

The first main section of the book is **Content Guidance**. It follows the sequence of topics as they occur in the AQA specification, but it is not necessary to read them in this order, provided you make sure that you cover them all.

In your study of these topic areas you should examine the two **core themes**. These are:

- socialisation, culture and identity
- social differentiation, power and stratification

These are not things to be studied separately — rather, in your study of *Families and households* and *Beliefs in society* you should be aware of the two core themes running through the topics.

You should also be aware of both the **evidence** for and the **sociological explanations** of the content of these topics. This means that you must study the relevant sociological theories, perspectives and methods associated with these topics, as well as the design of the research used to obtain any data under consideration, including its strengths and limitations. The specification states that you should be involved with the research process and you should experience your own small-scale research, which you can mention in your answers where appropriate. In addition, you should be aware of the importance of conflict and consensus theories, social structure and social action, and the role of values.

Each section of the Content Guidance contains exam tips, knowledge checks and definitions of some key terms. Knowing and understanding the meaning of sociological concepts is an essential part of the whole course.

The second main section of the book contains **Questions & Answers**. At the beginning of this section are the three assessment objectives against which your exam answers will be judged, with some guidance regarding how to display the required skills, and also a list of command words, with explanations. The questions provided are in the style of the AQA exam for these topics, and are divided into questions for each topic. Each question has two student answers, one from a student whose answer is at the level of an A grade, and one from a student whose answer is at roughly a C grade.

Remember the importance of noting the structure and mark allocations of questions. Throughout the student answers, you will find comments, explaining why what has been written is good and is scoring well, and where things have gone wrong or there is room for improvement. More detailed guidance on how to use the Questions & Answers section is given at the beginning of that section.

Content Guidance

Families and households

■ The family, social structure and social change: the economy and social policies

All sociologists agree that the family is a very important part of the **social structure**, but there are disagreements about the role that the family plays for individuals and for society today. One function of the family is to prepare people for their role in the economy. Another function of the family is **socialisation**.

There are many aspects of family life that you may be asked about, including roles, structures and relationships. The economy, or the world of work, may well affect all three of these areas in different ways.

Structural and social action theories of the family

Structural theories claim that social forces shape people's position, roles and relationships in family life. These theories include functionalism, Marxism and feminism. Structural theories argue that the individual is passive and lacks free will or the ability to shape or negotiate their position in the family.

In contrast, social action theories claim that, rather than being shaped by social forces, people select or negotiate their own family experiences, roles and relationships. Therefore social action theories are different from structural theories as they argue that individuals have free will.

These two approaches are reflected in the way that family life is researched, with structural approaches taking a more macro, large-scale approach while social action thinkers argue that a smaller-scale or micro approach should be taken in order to understand the meanings attached to family life.

Modern and postmodern views of the family

Modern theories of the family include functionalism and Marxism, while feminism and social action theories are considered late modern (this also includes the sociology of personal life). Modern theorists make a number of assumptions about family life and society more generally which affect their views on the nature of family life.

Modern social theorists usually agree that:

- the family is generally stable and often nuclear
- identity is generally fixed and predictable
- religion plays a role in shaping people's attitudes towards family life

Social structure The social institutions in a society (e.g. the education system, religious organisations) and also the patterns of social relationships between people and groups (e.g. the class structure, kinship networks).

Socialisation The internalisation of norms and values, with primary socialisation taking place before a child starts school and secondary socialisation taking place throughout life.

- family life can be understood through structural forces (functionalists, Marxists and feminists) or through meanings (social action theorists)
- people are likely to conform in part to what is expected as a social norm, in terms of expectations regarding family life

However, other sociologists believe that contemporary society is now in a postmodern stage, where these assumptions are no longer useful. Postmodern theorists argue that in order to understand family life in a globalised world, alternative theoretical ideas are necessary. Postmodern sociologists argue that family life today is generally characterised by the following:

- more fluid and complex identities
- the availability of an increasing range of choices in relation to family roles, relationships and structures
- a greater variety of family structures and forms emerging as a result of more rapid globalisation (increasing interconnectedness)
- a tendency for people to be more individualistic, placing their own needs and wishes above what is expected by others, so that individuals are less likely to conform to particular traditional ideas

Functionalist views of the family

Functionalists take a structural view, which means that they believe social forces shape human behaviour. They argue that institutions such as the family work together in a similar way to organs working together in the body, which they call an organic analogy. Functionalists claim that the family benefits the individual and society. They accept that at times the family is dysfunctional, or fails to function, but they see this as being rare.

George Murdock

In 1949 the functionalist George Murdock published research from his study of a sample of 250 societies, from less developed and developed countries, including America. He concluded that even though there were variations, the 'nuclear family' was universal. The nuclear family was characterised by:

- common residence
- economic cooperation
- reproduction

Murdock also believed that the nuclear family performed four basic functions for society. These were sexual, reproductive, economic and educational, with the educational function including socialisation within the family.

Talcott Parsons

The American sociologist Talcott Parsons, writing in the 1950s, claimed that the nuclear family had become more specialised and had shed some of its earlier functions, which were now taken over or shared by other bodies in society, such as the education system. Parsons argued that modern nuclear families performed two essential functions for society. The first was the primary socialisation of children. The second was the stabilisation of the adult personality — this meant that families

Knowledge check 1

If primary socialisation takes place largely within the family, where does secondary socialisation take place?

provided a safe haven for adults, helping them to cope with the stresses and strains of modern living.

Parsons was interested in how tasks were divided between male and female partners, also known as the division of labour. He believed that the male and female should play what he saw as their 'natural' roles, which complemented each other and ensured stability in society. The male role was the **instrumental role**, by which he meant being the breadwinner. The female role was the **expressive role**, caring for and nurturing the children and looking after the home.

Exam tip

It is important to acknowledge that many functionalist ideas are now considered less relevant to society today. There have been many significant social changes since functionalists developed their ideas.

Evaluation

- + Draws attention to the importance of the family as an institution in society.
- + Shows how the family links to the economy.
- + Shows the positive side of family life for individuals and for society.
- – Fails to recognise alternative family forms — the nuclear family is no longer the dominant family structure.
- – Model based on traditional white middle-class family.
- – Sees the division of labour between the sexes as 'natural' rather than learned behaviour.
- – Ignores negative effects of the family such as domestic violence, subordination of women.

New Right views of the family

New Right views are primarily political, rather than sociological, and have had a significant influence on British social policies on the family introduced under Conservative and coalition governments.

Charles Murray

Like other New Right thinkers, Murray (1984) is concerned with what he sees as the negative effects caused to individuals and to society by the breakdown of the so-called traditional nuclear family. This breakdown is evidenced by issues such as the rising rates of cohabitation, divorce and single parenthood, and the growth of a **culture of dependency** which is passed down through the generations. Murray believes that too-generous welfare benefits are largely to blame for many of society's ills.

The New Right believe that individuals should take responsibility for themselves, with the minimum of state intervention. Murray is known for his development of the concept of 'the underclass', a group characterised by what he saw as deviant attitudes towards parenting, work and crime. New Right ideas can be seen in the policies of the Conservative government from 2010, with the shrinking role of the state and reductions in welfare benefits.

Knowledge check 2

To what extent do you think there is evidence to support the idea that the instrumental and expressive roles for males and females are 'natural'?

Culture of dependency An alleged set of values brought about by over-generous welfare benefits, leading recipients to rely on 'handouts' from the state rather than finding work and providing for themselves and their children.

Evaluation

- + Draws attention to some of the negative effects of family breakdown for individuals and society.
- – Sees all changes to the traditional nuclear family as negative.
- – Fails to recognise other factors that can cause family problems and breakdown, such as domestic violence, unemployment, low wages, poor housing, racism.
- – No evidence for existence of ‘underclass’.

Marxist views of the family

Marxists take a structural view and claim that the family plays an important part in maintaining the capitalist system, a system based on pursuing profit and private ownership of property.

Friedrich Engels

Engels (1884) believed that family structure evolved over time, and the monogamous nuclear family developed with the emergence of a class society based on private property. Engels argued that the wealthy wanted to make sure they passed down their money to the next generation and therefore the idea of a **monogamous nuclear family** emerged, with a male head and a female wife who would bear only his children and who also provided the emotional support.

Eli Zaretsky

Zaretsky, in his book *Capitalism, the Family and Personal Life* (1976), focused on the family as a refuge for individuals, particularly workers, from the alienation caused by capitalism. His argument was that as it provided much-needed relief and comfort to people, the nuclear family acted as a major prop to capitalism. In other words, the family performed an ‘ideological function’. The family also served capitalism in other ways: through the (unpaid) domestic work of women, through the reproduction of the labour force and as an important unit of consumption.

Louis Althusser

Althusser (1971) saw the family as one of the ideological state apparatuses, that is, those institutions that served capitalism by socialising people into accepting that capitalism and an unequal class society were ‘normal’ — for example, by teaching children to accept authority.

Evaluation

- + Shows a link between family structure and the economy.
- + Takes a critical look at the family.
- + Shows how the family is part of the ideological state apparatus.
- – Links everything about the family to the capitalist economic structure — economic determinism.
- – Ignores other reasons for marriage, such as romantic love.
- – Focuses on the negative aspects of the family.
- – By focusing only on capitalism, ignores other forms of oppression, e.g. patriarchy.

Monogamous nuclear family

In Engels’ view, a family type which supports the emergence of capitalism: a heterosexual married couple, with children who inherit wealth from their parents.

Knowledge check 3

What is meant by monogamy?

Feminist views of the family

There are various feminist views of the family, but most of them take a highly critical look at how the family affects women. They argue that the family is patriarchal, or male-dominated.

Marxist feminists

Marxist feminists view women as being dually exploited by the family and by capitalism: as well as carrying out unpaid housework, women are expected to absorb men's frustration with capitalism and raise children to accept capitalist ideology.

Radical feminists

Radical feminists see relationships in the family as damaging for women and believe that huge changes are necessary to overcome **patriarchy**. They believe that women are oppressed and experience domestic violence, control by men and a lack of power in the family.

Liberal feminists

Liberal feminists are optimistic about women's position within the family, due to changes in attitudes and laws which have led to greater equality. They believe, however, that women are still often expected to do many mundane and repetitive jobs while working in paid employment at the same time.

Difference feminists

Difference feminists believe that women's experience of patriarchy varies from woman to woman and cannot be generalised to 'all women'. They believe that much has to be done to address the current position of women in the family, exploring differences in class, ethnicity and location. Difference feminists can also argue that men and women are inherently different, and that we should accept this difference and try to understand it rather than attempting to maintain equality.

Patriarchy Male-dominated society, or a set of ideas which support the idea that men are more powerful than women.

Evaluation

- + Challenges the traditional view that gendered roles are 'natural'.
- + Focuses on patriarchy as inbuilt into society's institutions, including the family.
- + Shows the negative side of family life, especially for women.
- – Some views fail to recognise the diversity of family life.
- – Tends to assume that all women are oppressed within the family, and ignores the positive aspects of family life for women.

Social action theories of the family

Another approach comes from social action theories of the family, sometimes known as interpretivist theories of the family. This approach claims that rather than family life being shaped by structural forces, as functionalists, Marxists and feminists claim, in fact individuals have agency and can negotiate their position in the family.

This approach argues that it is important to take a micro or small-scale approach in order to understand the meanings that people attach to family life. For example, by exploring marriage on the small scale, the interpretivist Clarke (1991) argues that there is not one type of marriage but many types, all of which take on different meanings and are negotiated by the individuals involved.

Unlike postmodernists, who claim we act in terms of our own individual needs and wishes (individualism), social action theorists argue that people today are still very much part of sets of important relationships.

The sociology of personal life

One branch of social action theory that has recently emerged is known as 'the sociology of personal life'. This approach argues that to understand family life it is necessary to explore the meanings people attach to relationships within and beyond the family, including for example pets and **fictive kin**, or people who are regarded as family but who may not be formally part of family life. Carole Smart (2007) argues that it is better to use the words 'personal life' rather than 'families' to describe relationships today because we can no longer assume that people choose traditional family models. Rather, Smart argues that people choose to negotiate their own particular forms of relationships.

This approach involves new methods of understanding family life, for example through looking at the particular memories people have of family events and what they choose to remember, and exploring changes to relationships over time rather than just looking at family structures. Nordqvist and Smart (2014) argue that biology and marriage-based relationships are less significant today than they have been in the past, so this approach is useful since it acknowledges the importance of other significant relationships in people's lives.

Postmodern views of the family

Postmodern views, which developed more recently from the 1980s onwards, believe that the 'metanarrative' or grand, overarching explanations of the modern period, such as Marxism and science, are no longer sufficient to explain and make sense of contemporary family life. Rather, they see postmodern families as characterised by fragmentation, diversity, individualism and choice.

There is no longer any single ideal family type. Individuals decide for themselves whether they wish to marry, cohabit or remain alone, whether to have children or not, and what kind of relationship(s) they wish to have. Evidence of this is the increasing diversity of family and household structures found in Western societies.

Ulrich Beck

Beck (1992) saw the family in postmodern society as being characterised by 'risk', meaning that there was a much higher chance of divorce and other types of family breakdown and instability.

Fictive kin People who are seen as part of the family but who are not related by blood, birth or marriage.

Judith Stacey

Stacey (1996), a postmodernist feminist, carried out research into family life in Silicon Valley, California, in the USA. She found that women in particular benefit from the increased choice that people have today about how to organise family life and what sorts of relationships to have in a global postmodern society. She claims that women have not been in a position to enjoy such choices until now.

Evaluation

- + Draws attention to diversity of family structures.
- + Links changes in families to wider changes such as globalisation and fragmentation of class structure.
- – Overemphasises the degree of choice in people's lives, particularly for some women.
- – Ignores the fact that most family patterns remain fairly traditional or close to this structure.

Knowledge check 4

What is meant by a metanarrative?

The changing family and the economy

Some sociologists, such as Talcott Parsons, have linked the nuclear family structure to industrial society. The suggestion was that in preindustrial societies the extended family was the dominant structure, but that with urbanisation and the growth of industry, the nuclear family became the norm. This is because before industrialisation, the family was a unit of production, making goods together to sell, whereas in industrial society, the family becomes a unit of consumption, earning a wage and buying goods and services. Parsons calls this process the 'theory of fit'. The family, therefore, responds to changes in society by making particular adaptations to make it 'fit' better.

Peter Willmott and Michael Young

Two other writers who saw a link between family structure and composition and the economic structure were Willmott and Young (1974). They saw the family in industrial society as symmetrical — the welfare state had taken over many of the functions previously performed by families. The family consisted of a married couple whose roles mirrored each other, sharing household responsibilities as well as paid work.

Evaluation

- + Important to look at the relationship between the family and other institutions in society, particularly the economy.
- – Fails to recognise the importance of class to family and household structure.
- – The 'fit thesis' is not borne out by evidence; many suggest that there has always been family diversity.

The family and social policies

It is important to remember that social policies transmit ideas and values. Social policies on the family may both respond to social problems (such as a high divorce rate) and offer a model of what those in power think families *ought* to be like.

Right-wing views on the family

Right-wing ideology tends to be associated with the New Right and (in Britain) with the Conservative Party, who believe that the state, or government, should play a smaller role in family life. They argue that the individual should take responsibility for their family. Since coming into office in 2010, the Conservative Party has made significant cuts to welfare spending on supporting poorer families. They believe that the nuclear family is the ideal family structure.

Examples of recent right-wing social policies include the following:

- Private ownership of housing in response to the housing crisis — the government aim to build 300,000 homes a year by the mid-2020s (2019).
- The reintroduction of married persons' tax allowance (2015).
- The Welfare Reform Act (2012) — this introduced universal credits, a replacement welfare support policy with much stricter application criteria and a stronger emphasis on getting people back to work.
- Substantial cuts to the Legal Aid budget (2013), meaning less free legal advice for vulnerable groups such as women in abusive relationships.
- Troubled Families (2011) — a policy designed to tackle families with significant problems such as dependency issues, worklessness and crime.

Left-wing views on the family

Left-wing ideology tends to be associated with the Labour Party, who believe that the state, or government, should play an important role in family life. They argue that although the nuclear family is ideal, alternatives to it should be supported and valued.

Examples of left-wing policies between 1997 and 2010 include the following:

- Paternity Rights (2003) — this extended maternity rights to fathers, including two weeks of unpaid leave.
- The New Deal (1998) — this helped lone parents to re-enter employment by assisting with childcare and education costs.
- The Adoption and Children Act (2002) — this act allowed same-sex couples to adopt. It also ensured that the views and wishes of children were heard.
- The Civil Partnership Act (2004) — this allowed same-sex couples to be publicly and legally recognised as being partners.

There are different theoretical perspectives on social policies and the family, as outlined below.

The functionalist view

Functionalists see a stable family as very important for society. The 'march of progress' theory sees developments in education, health and working practices as helping families to fulfil their important functions of the appropriate socialisation of children and providing a safe and stable environment for adults.

Exam tip

Remember that you may be asked about the effects of social policies on family structures, roles or relationships. You may also be asked about the effects of social policy on the experience of childhood.

Exam tip

Remember that, although some policies from the left and right reflect the different views of the respective governments, there are some policies which reflect changes in society more generally, such as equality legislation.

The Marxist view

Marxists view all state social policies as designed to serve the interests of capitalism. Therefore family policies — such as supporting parents or making it easier for women to join the labour force — are all designed to ensure that capitalism has the workforce that it needs. Policies promoting ‘family values’ such as obedience and respect for authority are designed to ensure an obedient and compliant future workforce.

The New Right view

New Right thinkers do not approve of too much state intervention in people’s lives, including the family. They are against what they see as too-generous benefits to ‘deviant’ households such as those with lone parents and non-working households. Their argument is that such benefits lead to a ‘culture of dependency’, which makes people over-reliant on the state and robs them of the incentive to find work. There is evidence of these views in the Conservative government which since 2010 has been shrinking the role of the state in family life to save money, under an ‘austerity’ programme.

The feminist view

Feminists are against policies which they see as upholding patriarchy, such as different entitlements for female and male employees following the birth of a child (note that there are now new policies on this), policies that penalise lone parents, most of whom are women, and policies that reflect the view that mothers are primarily responsible for their children’s behaviour. They support policies that benefit women, such as those allowing abortion, making divorce easier, punishing domestic violence and giving legal rights to same-sex partnerships. Feminists are highly critical of recent New Right policies which have reduced welfare spending, known as ‘austerity’ policies, since they particularly affect women, who already tend to be poorer.

Evaluation

- + Sociologists highlight how reductions in state spending have increased inequalities in society, for example significant levels of child poverty.
- – Some policies seem to be strongly focused on the traditional nuclear family, to the detriment of other types of family structure.

Key concepts

social structure; primary socialisation; nuclear family; extended family; domestic division of labour; underclass; capitalism; ideological state apparatus; patriarchy; industrialisation

Exam tip

Remember that you may be asked how useful a particular theory is in understanding family life in contemporary society. Think about which theory you believe is most useful and why.

Knowledge check 5

What is the role of the state according to New Right thinkers?

Exam tip

Remember that there is no single ‘feminist view’, although there are some shared beliefs. Showing your knowledge of different types of feminism could gain you additional marks.

Knowledge check 6

What is the difference between radical and liberal feminist views on social policy for the family?

Summary

- All sociologists agree that the family plays an important role in society.
- There are consensus and conflict theoretical ideas about the exact relationship between the family and the wider social structure.
- Changes in the family both lead to and reflect changes in the wider social structure.
- The family remains an important focus of social policy, though sociologists disagree about the purpose, desirability and effects of different social policies.

Questions & Answers

How to use this section

In this section you will find two sets of exam-style questions. Each set comprises three questions for each section, i.e. three for *Families and households* and three for *Beliefs in society*. These are laid out as you will find them in Paper 2 of your exam.

Each question is followed by a brief analysis of what to watch out for when answering it. Each question has two student answers, one at about an A grade (Student A) and the other at about a C grade (Student B), with comments on the answers throughout.

Remember that there is no single perfect way of answering an exam question — the highest marks can be gained by taking different approaches, especially in the higher-mark questions. However, the comments should help to show you the kinds of approach that would do well and some of the pitfalls to avoid.

As a general point, you should always read through the whole question before starting to write. When you come to answer the question that is based on an ‘item’, read the item particularly carefully, as it will contain material that is essential to answering the question.

Examinable skills

AQA sociology examination papers are designed to test certain defined skills. These skills are expressed as assessment objectives (AOs). There are three AOs and it is important that you know what these are and what you have to be able to do in an exam to show your ability in each. Further guidance on each of the AOs is given in the comments on the sample questions and answers. In practice, many answers to questions, particularly those carrying the higher marks, will contain elements of all three AOs.

Assessment objective 1

Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of:

- **sociological theories, concepts and evidence**
- **sociological research methods**

Your exam answers will have to demonstrate clearly to the examiners that your knowledge is accurate and appropriate to the topic being discussed and that you have a clear understanding. It is not enough simply to reproduce knowledge learned by rote; you must be able to use this knowledge in a meaningful way to answer the specific question set. This means that you must be able to *select* the appropriate knowledge from everything you know and use only the knowledge that is relevant to, and addresses the issues raised by, the question.

Assessment objective 2

Apply sociological theories, concepts, evidence and research methods to a range of issues.

The A-level examination

The topics of *Families and households* and *Beliefs in society* are examined in Paper 2 of the A-level examination, Topics in Sociology. The *Families and households* questions appear in Section A of Paper 2, as one of four options. The *Beliefs in society* questions appear in section B, as one of four options.

The *whole* exam lasts for 2 hours, carries 80 marks and is worth one third of the A-level qualification. The *Families and households* questions make up one half of the exam and carry 40 marks; *Beliefs in society* is also worth 40 marks. You should therefore allow about an hour for answering the *Families and households* questions and an hour for answering the *Beliefs in society* questions. Allow 25–30 minutes for the last question for each topic, which carries 20 marks. Try to manage your time so that you have time to read through the whole paper at the end.

Test paper 1

Section A: Families and households

Question 1

Outline and explain two ways in which changes in the fertility rate have led to changes in structures in the family.

(10 marks)

Be careful not to write about reasons for the decreasing fertility rate. The question is asking you about the impact of decreasing birth rates on family structures, meaning types of families.

Question 2

Item A

Recently, some sociologists have begun to explore who has control in relationships in the family. This is a complex and sensitive area of family life to research. While some sociologists have explored decision making, others have explored conflict or control of finances.

Applying material from Item A, analyse two reasons why power relations in the family remain unequal.

(10 marks)

For 'analyse' questions you need to choose two 'hooks' from the item. Base each paragraph on one of these hooks, considering carefully what you are going to say about each before you begin writing.

Question 3

Item B

Some sociologists argue that social forces shape behaviour, for example, families socialising children into the values of society. Others however argue that this approach ignores the fact that people have free will. Some sociologists argue that we have moved into a new era of choice and this is the only way to understand family life today.

Applying material from Item B and your knowledge, evaluate the view that structural explanations of the family are no longer useful.

(20 marks)

It is a good idea to identify who the 'some sociologists' are. The item is suggesting the debate for you, so use this as the basis of your essay structure. Remember to bring in other relevant material from your own knowledge. You need to decide what argument you are going to make before you start writing your essay, so that your argument is clear.

Question 1: Student A

The decreasing fertility rate has led to smaller nuclear families. ^a As Sharpe found, women have become increasingly career-centred. In her research, using unstructured interviews in the 1970s and then again in the 1990s, Sharpe found that girls' aspirations had shifted from being married and having babies to having a career as the top priority. ^b This has led to women having babies later, meaning less time to have children as well as perhaps reduced fertility. It is very difficult to have a demanding career and many children, so women today are choosing to have fewer babies so that their family is more geographically mobile and manageable. ^c Stacey, a postmodernist feminist, sees this increased choice for women within contemporary global society as a very positive thing as women are not simply expected to have babies and stay at home. ^d However, this is not true of all women: for example, non-British-born women have a higher fertility rate (they have on average 2.3 babies), meaning that not all families are smaller. ^e

Furthermore, another way that declining fertility rates have led to changing family structures is that there are more childless couples. ^f One in four women now choose not to have children and are picking alternatives to the traditional nuclear family such as LAT, living apart together. ^g This means that people may be in a relationship but not living together. ^h As both partners now typically work and are more affluent, people may be able to afford two separate houses. In addition, globalisation has meant people need to be geographically mobile, as they are expected to work in different places. ⁱ There is much less stigma today about women not conforming to becoming a mother, and feminists such as Oakley argue that the nuclear family

^a A clearly started paragraph, with a way clearly identified. The student sticks to their point, successfully developing it using relevant material.

^b Mentioning the methodology used in Sharpe's study is a good way to show analysis. ^c Nicely unpacked point: good analysis showing the effects of increased career-centredness, using sociological terms like 'geographical mobility'. ^d Going further: deeper analysis with Stacey, showing deeper and broader knowledge. ^e Good analysis here too, making clear the trend cannot be applied to all women.

^f Clear second way, straight to the point. ^g A useful statistic and use of concepts. ^h The point is applied to the question and unpacked. ⁱ Globalisation identified as one reason for the increase in childlessness; good focus. ^j and ^k Drawing on other perspectives here, showing good sociological knowledge and understanding.

10/10 marks awarded.

can be oppressive for working women, with the dual burden (the strain placed on women through having childcare, housework and paid work) actually discouraging women from motherhood. ¹ On the other hand, Beck argues that increased choice in family structures results in increasing risk and instability in family life. ²

Question 1: Student B

The fertility rate is the number of babies a woman has in her fertile years. ¹ This has dropped considerably since 1900 for a wide range of reasons including contraception, fewer babies dying due to infectious diseases and women having careers. ² This means that there are fewer children in society which leads to an ageing population. This leads to a range of problems including women having to take care of elderly relatives and their grandchildren. ³ Fewer babies being born means that the roles in the family are changing, with women going to work and men having to do more as a result. ⁴

There are more single-parent families in society nowadays. ⁵ Women can choose their own family structures, so some women are choosing to leave their husbands and raise their children on their own. This is more possible if there are fewer children. ⁶ Dennis and Erdos, who are New Right thinkers, argue that fatherless families lead to problems in society. ⁷

¹ It is useful but not always necessary to put a definition of a rate in. This definition is not complete, however. Make sure you use accurate definitions.

² The question is not asking about reasons for changes in the fertility rate, so this point lacks focus on the question. ³ The question is not asking about the consequences of changes in fertility rate for age distribution, so this point is at a tangent to the question. ⁴ A common mistake here: the student has talked about the impact on roles, not structures, of the family.

⁵ It is true that there are more single-parent families but there is not a clear link between this and decreasing fertility. ⁶ There is a notion of choice here, which is good, but still it is not linked to the specific question about structures. ⁷ Sociological knowledge, but not relevant to the question.

4/10 marks awarded.

Question 2: Student A

As suggested by the item, power relations refer to who has control in a relationship, and a way of this being measured is through decision making. ¹ Edgel found in his research into decision making that relationships remain patriarchal, or male-dominated, because men continue to make the really important decisions in family life, for example about moving house and buying expensive items like cars. Women, he found, take decisions about less important issues such as what to eat or children's clothing. ² This reveals that although more women earn more money recently, they still have less power in the family. Furthermore, ³ Pahl and Vogler found that the way couples manage their finances shows how relationships remain patriarchal. For example, they found that men still control most of the finances. They said, however, that things are becoming gradually more equal as there are more couples who 'pool' their finances, by having a shared bank account. ⁴

As suggested by the item, conflict in the family often leads to patriarchal patterns in relationships. Dobash and Dobash found in their classic research that one in four women experiences domestic violence. ⁵ This suggests relationships are very controlling and damaging for women. They used unstructured interviews to gain rapport with victims of domestic violence and found rich data: for example, on average women experience 28 incidents of domestic violence before reporting it to the police. ⁶

¹ Good start, clear link to the item. ² An appropriate study, well understood and explained, with examples. Excellent application to the specific question. ³ Analysis developed here, breaking down the issue by offering further evidence. ⁴ Interesting and relevant point which challenges the assumption that relationships are always unequal by noting that instead they may be changing.

⁵ Again, a well-identified hook from the item, using an appropriate and relevant study. ⁶ Good knowledge of the study including methodology. Could have developed the point further and applied it more successfully to the question. More analysis needed for a higher mark.

8/10 marks awarded.