**Sociology Revision**

**What is the family?**

"The family are a close group of people, usually related not always. Who support each other and at some point in their lives tend to live in the same household."

There is no correct definition on the family; Sociologists do not agree on a definition, broadly there are two types of definition;

- **Exclusive definitions** – These focus on the specific relationships within the family unit i.e. marriage
- **Inclusive definitions** – These focuses on the functions of the unit e.g. support.

**The Cereal Packet Family**

A popular image of the family in Britain in the late twentieth century has been described as the **cereal packet family**. The ‘happy family’ image gives the impression that most people live in a typical family and these images reinforce the dominant ideology of the **traditional nuclear family**.

**Functionalists Roles of the Family – Parsons**

The Functionalist Talcott Parsons sees two main functions that the family performs these are:

- **The primary socialisation of children**
  
  Parsons argues that every individual must internalise the norms and values of society. He said it is the family that moulds the child’s personality to fit the needs of society, producing children who are committed to shared norms and values and who have a strong sense of belonging to society

- **The stabilisation of adult personalities**
  
  Adults need emotional security, which is given by partners in a marriage, and they also need a source of release from the stresses and strains of daily life, which they get from being able to indulge in childish behaviour when playing with their children.
  This ‘stabilisation’ is often referred to as the ‘warm bath theory’.

**Other functions of the family:**

- The family is an important agent of social control. It defines what is socially acceptable behaviour. The family also allow individuals to know the difference between right and wrong backed up by positive and negative sanctions.
- The family also has a number to economic functions. It provides children with economic support. The family also provides the economy with workers and they are a significant unit of economic consumption.
- Marriage is also considered important, as reproduction is an essential function because the family provides new members of society to replace those that have died.

**Criticisms of the Functionalists**

- Functionalist theories tend to focus on the positive functions of the family and give little consideration to its disadvantages. I.e. Feminists emphasise the male dominated nature of the traditional family.
- Functionalists assume that the family is of equal benefit to everyone. But Marxists argue that society is shaped by the needs of the capitalist economy and that the family exists to serve these needs rather than those of its members.
- Functionalists fail to consider the viability of alternatives to the family
- Many functionalists, particularly Parsons, do not consider the diversity of family types. Even within one society, there are variations based on class, region, ethnicity, religion etc.
- Interpretive sociologists argue that functionalists concentrate too much on the importance of the family for society and ignore the meaning family life has for individuals.

**Marriage and Divorce**

**What is happening to Marriage?**

- There is a decline in first marriages
- But there has been an increase in remarriages
- The average age at which people get married is increasing

**Cohabitation**

- Living together is no longer seen as ‘living in sin’
- Two thirds (67%) of the British public now regard cohabitation as acceptable, even when the couple have no intention in getting married.

**Marriage Patterns for African-Caribbean’s**

- Only 39% of British born African-Caribbean adults under 60 are in a formal marriage compared to 60% of white adults
- This group is more likely than any other to inter-marry
- Only one quarter of Caribbean children live with two black parents.