Sociology revision: the family

What is a family and A household? 1)

**A Family** - is a unit of people who are tied by “kinship” (are related by blood, adoption or marriage)

**A household** - is one or more people living in the same address and sharing living arrangements.

Different types of Families and Households

- **Nuclear** – two generations: parents and children living in the same household
- **Extended** – All kin, including beyond the nuclear family
- **‘Beanpole’ family** – A multi-generation family where each few children are born in each generation, but people living longer
- **Patriarchal family** – Authority held by males
- **Matriarchal family** – Authority held by females
- **Symmetrical family** – Authority and takes shared between couple
- **Reconstituted family** – One or both partners previously married, with children from previous marriages
- **Lone parent families** – A family with just one parent
- **Single person household** – An individual living alone

Functionalist perspective 2)

- See the family as a working function of society
- [Murdoch] came up with the four functions of the family

  - **Sexual** – Expressing sexuality in a way that is deemed acceptable
  - **Reproduction** – Need to provide a suitable way to raise children
  - **Socialisation** – Primary socialisation helps children learn social “Norms and Values”
  - **Economic** – Provides food and shelter for family members

Parsons

**Primary socialisation of children**: Parsons stated that society wouldn’t function without the primary socialisation of children, especially into value consensus, culture, language, history and morals of today’s society.

**Stabilisation of adult personalities**: the pressures of modern society can “destabilise personalities”. Parsons said that through the “sexual division of labour” the family can stabilise personalities. Whilst the male plays the instrumental role, the women plays the
Postal or self-complete questionnaires – are when the participant picks up or is sent a questionnaire which they fill out themselves and return by post or via the internet.

**Advantages of postal or other self-completion questionnaires**

- They are cheap, especially if done over the internet
- Results are obtained quickly
- People can respond whenever they want, not just when an interviewer is present
- Participants are more likely to give personal or embarrassing responses if they have the privacy of a self-completion questionnaire
- There is less risk of interviewer bias

**Disadvantages of postal or other self-completion questionnaires**

- There is a very low response rate with self-completion questionnaires as there is no real pressure to complete them
- You are likely to get a certain group of people, for example the unemployed or elderly that answer the questionnaire as many other people might be too busy, and so you won’t get a particularly representative sample.
- There is no way of knowing whether the right person actually completed the survey or if someone else did it for them
- The interviewer isn’t there to ask follow up questions and explain questions the participants if they don’t understand

**Participant’s observations**

Participant observation is where the researcher joins in with the group she or he is studying. This method is usually favored by interpretivists as they can understand the meaning behind the behavior of the group they observe. By putting themselves in the shoes of the participants they can understand why people act in certain ways. This could be particularly helpful in understanding behavior which is very removed from our normal lives, for example gang behavior.

There are two types of observation, covert and overt. In a covert observation the participants do not know you are observing them for research. In overt observations the participants do.

**Advantages**

- You get a primary source of data. It’s first-hand information which hasn’t been interrupted by anyone else.
- The participants are likely to develop a relationship with the researcher so are more likely to be truthful and honest
- You gain rich, insightful qualitative data as you are effectively finding out more information the whole time you are observing the participants