

Changing Patterns in the Family

An Introduction

Reading

- Sociology for AS Level pp.44-46
- Sociology Themes and Perspectives
pp.572-577 (5th ed.)

Debate

- Some have seen traditional family life as under threat
- Idea that the family is in “decline”
 - Lack of family values
 - Moral decline among young people
 - Thinkers tend to be “**New Right**” – conservative political thinkers – belief in tradition

New Right

- Idea that there was a “golden age” of the family
 - Commitment in marriage
 - Children respected parents & law
- 1960s & '70s as beginning of decline
 - Contraceptive pill
 - Abortion
 - Sexual freedom
 - Divorce reforms
 - Decriminalisation of homosexuality

New Right (cont.)

- Familial Ideology
 - Traditional nuclear family
 - Sexual division of labour
- Idea of an “underclass”
 - Criminals
 - Unmarried mothers – pregnant to get a council flat, living off benefits
 - Vicious spiral

Problems with the New Right view

- It ignores the darker side of family life
- Many existing state policies support the traditional view of the family
 - Tax breaks for married couples, child benefits paid to the mother
- Is the family in decline or just changing?

State Policy and the Family

- 3 broad trends
 - Tax & welfare policies generally benefit the married heterosexual couple
 - Policies reinforce the idea of childcare as a woman's role
 - Child benefit
 - Nursery provision
 - Government reluctance to interfere with privacy of the family

Changing Patterns

- Decline in family size
- Rise in divorce
- Growth of re-marriage & re-constituted families
- Growth of lone-parent families
- Decline of marriage and rise in co-habitation
- Rise in births outside marriage
- The darker side of the family