

# Relationships within the Family

## Relationships between men and women

It is a fact that household chores have always and still are mainly the women's job in the family. Washing and ironing are definitely thought of as more of women's role because only 18% of couples share this task equally. Men take more of a part in preparing dinner now with 35% claiming it is done equally but still 32% of couples still think it is the woman more. The most even chores among partners is looking after sick family members (45%) and food shopping (52%). 49% of men still do most of the repairs around the house.

Relationships have changed and have become a lot more equal between men and women have become a lot more equal than the traditional patriarchal relationship.

Men and women are sometimes thought to have very different roles around the house. For example because women are supposed to have a nurturing and kind personality it is thought that they should look after the children, but the man is thought to have a more practical mind and strong so he does DIY and is the main breadwinner. These are called segregated roles.

Role conflict is when two or more of a person roles collide to make it impossible to fulfil them properly. For example, a woman could have three separate roles at one time as a mother, a friend and an employee. If she has to spend extra time at work and then has to look after a friend who is upset she may find it hard to find enough time for her family.

When men and women stick to their gender segregated roles but make sure they both contribute equally, it is called joint conjugal roles.

Young and Wilmott (1973) suggested that the main family form in Britain was the symmetrical family. This is a family that works on joint conjugal roles. Their relationship was more democratic or

equal Compared with past gender roles decision making and leisure activities were shared more. The family would become a lot more home centred as the men helped out more. This gave them things in common, which caused relationships between spouses to be warmer and more caring. Feminists do not agree with this symmetrical family theory. Feminists claim that it is not truly symmetrical because even if a man helps more, it is still only help and the main responsibility is still the woman's. They also think that men will pick and choose their jobs and leave the women with the worst ones. Oakly (1974) is critical of this theory and does not think that the evidence is convincing. A husband that washes up at least once a week is regarded as helpful in the home to Young and Wilmott. She also argues that men that iron a piece of their own clothing, they are a 'good' husband. Oakly thinks that there is no evidence of symmetry in the home even if the woman is employed she still does more housework. Jan Pahl (1989), in her study of money and power in marriages argues that they are still patriarchal. She found that men are more likely to make most decisions when she interviewed 120 married couples in Kent. Although she found that they share more decisions on what to spend the household income on compared to 30 years ago but however she points out that the man is still in charge of the finances and the wife's access to money. This could sometimes leave women and children living in poverty even when the man has a good income.

There are a number of factors that have contributed to equality between the sexes including changes to laws such as the sex discrimination act and equal pay rights. These laws ensure equality in the workplace, which changes the way people think and makes women believe that they deserve the same rights at home. Now girls are getting the same standard of education as boys and the same opportunities which means that women are getting good careers that are equal to men's. Also things like media with soaps and celebrities promoting equality in the home and cost of living makes both partners work contributes to the changing attitudes.

Another way of measuring equality instead of domestic labour is through things like decision-making, finance and power in the home.

A new age man is a man that believes in equality and shares all household chores with his partner exactly and contributes equally as much as the woman. This is different from a house husband

because this is a man who has had a complete role reversal and takes on the traditional role of a house wife and stays at home full time.

We cannot generalise about role relationships across society because changes in role relationships have not occurred at the same pace or to the same extent through all sectors of society. Role relationships vary according to social class and ethnicity.

Home based entertainment, for example DIY give spouses' things in common which gives them a friendlier and more loving relationship.

Contraception has allowed couples to have children later and also it means that a lot of couples choose to have smaller families or no children at all. This does not apply to some religions such as Catholics who do not believe in using contraception. Women can now plan when to start their families and to have children resulting in them planning them around their careers.

Feminism is an approach that fights for the equal rights of women. This is a large factor in the changing equality in the home because more women demand to be treated as their partner's equal. It has led to the rejection of the housewife role.

There is an increase in male unemployment more men have become more involved in domestic tasks. Jane Wheelock (1990) conducted research into this topic and found that men undertook a lot more housework and childcare while unemployed.

One survey showed that mothers that also worked outside home had it worse because they still spend more hours on housework a week than they do at their paid place of work. On average these women spend 62 hours a week on house hold tasks were fathers who also worked only spent 23 hours on house work. Another survey shows that some traditional gender roles are still being passed down to the younger generations (1992-93) such as girls still taking more of a part in cooking, cleaning and child care but boys are doing more things for themselves like cleaning their own rooms, making beds and washing their own clothes.

Sometimes sociologists say that social class and ethnicity change role relationships. It is suggested that working class families are more male dominated (patriarchal). Evidence proves that middle class conjugal relationships are more equal than working class ones but it is also said that working class fathers are more involved in childcare. It is believed that Asian families are usually based on unfair patriarchal relationships. Westwood and Bhachu (1988) challenge this

idea arguing that images of the Asian family are usually based on prejudice and prejudgement. They point out that Asian families are in fact British families and are a strong source of resistance against the racism of British society. In reality there are ethnic differences between Asian people in Britain according to religion and social class, which makes it hard to generalise about the Asian family.

Henriques and Slaughter talk about the patriarchal relationships between men and women. This means that the relationship is male dominated. They talk about the two different segregated roles.

### Children and parents

Relationships between children and parents have changed over time but it has always varied between working, middle and upper class families. Throughout the nineteenth century life chances varied a lot for different classes for children. A paid employee such as a nanny would often look after higher-class children. This would often separate their children from their parents and so it would be harder for them to develop a strong bond. Working class children on the other hand, especially boys would often have to start work very young. There was a wider range of jobs for boys were available but girls would often have to work in cotton factories. The hours would be long and the pay and conditions would often be unfair. Poverty prevented parents sending their children to school and sometimes they would only send their boys but keep the girls at home to teach them how to be a good housewife. Mothers would often have a close relationship with her daughter.

People used to have children so they could send them out to work to earn money for the family. Sometimes parents thought that education just blocked this. Another reason why people used to have children was so they had someone to take care of them in old age.

Factors that changed these relationships included the growth of the welfare state, which meant people no longer needed children to look after them in old age. Parents could no longer send children out to work at such a young age because of protective legislation, this meant that law including factory and mine acts stopped it. There was a growth of the meaning of childhood and they remained children for

longer because of the state of education in 1870 meant you had to attend school. Children were given more attention by parents, media and toys invented a new childhood and children and parents spent more time together.

Today the relationship is usually warmer and more caring than in the past. Children are seen as more important and taken a lot more seriously. There have been changing attitudes towards discipline and laws against hitting children in Scotland. It is now seen as wrong to hurt a child, if they do organisations (social services) get involved. There is more of an emphasis on freedom and children's rights. Relationships are more children centred and because family sizes are smaller children get more attention. In 1976 a law was passed to say that the minimum age of leaving school was 16 and though a child can work before then the hours and law restricts times. This means that children are financially dependent on their families for long periods of time especially if they go on to further education. Children are fully dependent on their parents and this can sometimes bring stress and tension to the family. Not all relationships between child and parents have improved as sadly cruelty to children is still widespread and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) estimate that around 600 children are intentionally harmed by their parents each year.

Asian parents work to have extremely strong and close family bonds especially with parent children relationships but they have kept a strong level of discipline especially for girls for their children along with high expectations.

Gender differences also emerge by the way children have been socialised. While girls are encouraged to help their mother with housework but only a small proportion of boys are expected to do the same. They are also given toys, girls are given dolls to look after but boys are given toy cars to pull apart. Different behaviour is expected and it is seen as normal for a boy to be boisterous but bad for a girl to be so. Children grow up being the person their parents have taught them to be.

## The wider family

Now a person can expect to live at least into their seventies with women usually outliving men. There are lots of old widows that live alone but fewer old men. This results in the growth of three generation families. Old people were often looked up to and powerful, firstly for surviving to an old age but also the oldest male in the family would own all the land, he would remain wealthy until he died.

Things have changed and now old age is normal but they rarely have economic power over younger generations and not of a high status. Some people think that old people are abandoned in society. This has an impact on families. Grandparents are able to give more support and care within the family. For example if they live close grandparents can provide childcare in holidays and after school.

In the same way the family can look after the grandparents, in practise this is normally the adult daughter's responsibility. These women can experience role conflict if the responsibility of the roles of an employee, mother and adult daughter conflict.

## Fertility and women

Women are choosing to have children later in their lives. Some women have fewer children or none at all. There are several reasons for this change in fertility, one being the increasing availability of birth control. Women have the choice to whether they want children at all, and if they do they can decide when and how many. This means that women can plan their families around their lives. More women are furthering their education. Women can choose to wait until a convenient time until they have left education and built a successful career for themselves or travelled.

Another fact is the cost of children, they may wish to wait to be able to afford the expenses of having a child or until they can afford a house to live in. People are tending to want a higher standard of living instead of spending a lot of time and money rearing children.

There is a growing decline in religion, which means that there isn't such disapproval on birth control.

The media also show smaller families or couples having children later because of women having careers which makes it more socially acceptable.

Probably the most important reason is the changing attitudes to women. Over this century women have changed their views on their role. Traditionally women would have children and then stay at home as a housewife and look after them. Women see this as just part of their lives, but they also want careers. The result is fewer children and later on in life. All of the reasons listed mean that it is now normal to have only two children in a family. Cultural expectations mean that large families can be seen as slightly abnormal.

The result of lower fertility is that we have an ageing population with a lot of old and middle age people but fewer young people. This means there will be a smaller population. There will be less people to fill jobs and carry on society.