

‘Examine the effects of industrialisation on the structure of the family’

The Industrial Revolution was from 1750's – 1850's, which had four main effects. One was the Economic system becoming industrial from agriculture, the second was Mechanisation meaning production in factories becoming more efficient, the third was Urbanisation and the fourth was population explosion – low mobility rate and higher birth rate.

Talcott Parsons (1950's) believed that the extended family in pre Industrial Britain was the most beneficial as they were a unit of production and they were able to maintain a subsistence level of existence with very little reliance on non-family members. Parsons believed that post industrialisation, the nuclear family became the new dominant family structure for reasons such as geographical mobility. Parsons suggested that the extended family had disadvantages in the industrial society such as the nuclear family containing basic roles i.e. carrying out the families essential functions and the functions of the wider kinship was taken over for example by the welfare state (1948)

Michael Anderson carried out a study (Preston – North West England) based on a sample of 10% census records (1851). His results showed that 23% of households in Preston were mostly extended families as they included kin beyond the nuclear family. He suggests that the process of industrialisation may have strengthened the need for reliance of the extended family being as they were the dominant in industrial families. Anderson's main concern was with the working class families for whom kin may have been a mutual support in times of need, due to the poor living conditions in early industrial period and as there was no welfare state (1948).

Peter Laslett researched the patterns of the family life in England Industrial Revolution; he conducted his research from parish records. As a result of his research he provides evidence that the large extended family households were relatively uncommon in the Pre Industrial society. He concluded that 10% of households in England (1564 – 1821) include kin beyond the nuclear family. He claims hoe the nuclear family households may have been a characteristic of much of North West Europe and Laslett argues that this may have been important factor encouraging the process of industrialisation. An important aspect of the industrial revolution was the prior existence of the nuclear family facilitating the movement of workers to urban areas. Although Laslett's Research was seen to be thorough its not possible to discover from his data how much cooperation occurred between kin who were members of different households, so the extended families may have therefore been important while remaining residentially dispersed among several neighbouring households.

Young and Willmott (Y&W) believed that there were four stages of the family and from those four, three main stages. They studied family life in London (1950's – 1970's)(using historical research and social surveys. They essentially ignore middle class and concentrate on the working class families. Young and Willmott say that stage one was represented by the pre industrial family. They believe that in stage one the family work together as a team for example in agriculture. They say that this family was as a result of the industrial revolution, but it continued into the nineteenth century and is still represented in the minority of families today. Stage two of their

studies researched its peak in early twentieth century. The family ceased to be a unit of production due to industrial members being employed as wage earners. In early nineteenth century working class poverty was widespread, Y&W agree with Anderson in the fact that the family responded to the high unemployment by extending its network to include relatives beyond the nuclear family. The extension of the nuclear family was built by women in defence of themselves and their children. Women formed a trade union which excluded men. Y&W claim husbands were pushed out of the female circle and took to the pub as their own defence. Stage two families were mainly headed by the women. In the early 70's Y&W conducted a large scale survey from which they argued that stage two families had largely dispersed for all social classes especially the working class. The family is characterised by the separation of the disbanded and husbands return to the family circle. This was due to home developments over the years for example central heating, video players, which is why the lifestyle in stage three is largely home centred. The conjugal bond is strong and relationships between husband and wife are more companionate in the home, they share the household duties therefore the nuclear family became largely self contained as Y&W describe as symmetrical meaning equal, although conjugal roles are not the same - but the wives still have the responsibilities of childrearing with the husbands contribution, they share many chores and decisions, yet there is men's work and women's work.

Goode supports Parsons theory that the family became nuclear as a result of industrialisation was that the high rate of geographical mobility in industrial societies decreases, also if the relatively high level of social mobility tends to weaken kinship ties then it tends to cut them off from their working class kinship, also the functions once performed by the family have been taken over by outside agencies such as schools, reducing the dependency on family kin and the importance of achieved status in industrial society means the family kinship group have less to offer their members. Goode argued that the ideology of the nuclear family encourages its growth because its prestige of western ideas and lifestyle, since the nuclear family is found in areas where the rate of industrialisation is slight. He applies the concept of 'role bargaining' to his study of the family meaning individuals attempt to obtain the best possible bargain in their relationships with others, which affects the family structure as they will maintain relationships with kin and submit to their control if they feel they are getting a good return on their investment of time, energy and emotion. David Cheal criticises Goode's theories as being closely related to the modernist view of progress. He particularly attacks Parsons saying faith in progress expressed by writers like Parsons ignored contradictions within modernity.

From a Marxist perspective the nuclear family benefited capitalism as it can be used as an ideological apparatus to promote the capitalist values rather than benefiting the whole of society, this is because consumer advertising is directed at the nuclear family nuclear for example adverts for cereals, it encourages them to pursue capitalist goals by stressing the importance of materialism.

Although Radical feminists believe the nuclear family benefits the needs of men rather than all of society. This is because radicals believe that men and women are socialised into a set of ideas that largely confirms male power and superiority, it transmits patriarchal ideology encouraging the notion that the sexual division of labour is natural.

It would appear that we are moving more into a nuclear family structure but it is unlikely for the movement to be as fast as Parsons suggests.