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ECAY6005: Relationships, Communication and Families in Contemporary Society
Perspectives on the Family
2024

Trawsnewid Addysg; Trawsnewid Bywydau
Transforming Education; Transforming Lives

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Recap of last session

- What were the key features of your last session.
- Share your thoughts with the group.

Discussion Point

- Having looked at the two web links to the Labour & Conservative manifestos; what are your thoughts on how each party considers ‘family’?
- What is considered a ‘good’ family?
- What is considered a ‘bad’ family?

Common Family Characteristics: Co-residence

- Living under the same roof is a qualification for immediate family membership, but the next generation of family members grow up and move out
- However, in contemporary, 'industrialised' society more and more are returning to the family home.

See: Parker, K (2012) *The Boomerang Generation: Feeling OK about Living with Mom and Dad* http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2012/03/15/the-boomerang-generation/

(Parker, 2012)

Group Task – The Boomerang Generation

- Discuss the following
- What are the factors that cause children to return to live in the family home as adults?
- What are the potential benefits of this arrangement?
- What are the potential disadvantages of this arrangement?

Changing Nature of Family: A Few Challenges

- The transition to parenthood being postponed as women pursue careers;
- Child-bearing more likely to be compressed into a small number of years and at a later age, especially among well-educated women;
- First births occurring as women approach the age of 30, and increasingly among middle-class women aged 40;

(Steel, Kidd and Brown, 2012)

Changing Nature of Family: A Few Challenges

- Fertility rates declining in several countries;
- Cohabitation rates increasing;
- Children increasingly experience transitions between different family living arrangements living with one parent or step-parents;
- More people are living alone

(Steel, Kidd and Brown, 2012)

Challenges to the Ideal Family Form

- ‘The Case against perfection’ (Sandel, 2004).
  - Not just referring to beauty but also our lives
- Each era ‘legitimises’ a particular ‘version’ of family
  - Identity of members
  - Rights and responsibilities
    - Towards children
    - Towards each other (Coltrane & Collins, 2001)

The changing nature of families in the UK

- The last 100 years have seen changes in legislation, technology, attitudes and expectations that have led to:
  - a massive feminisation of the workforce since the second world war;
  - widespread contraception leading to deferred decisions about the start of families; and,
  - divorce, remarriage and cohabitation becoming much more acceptable.

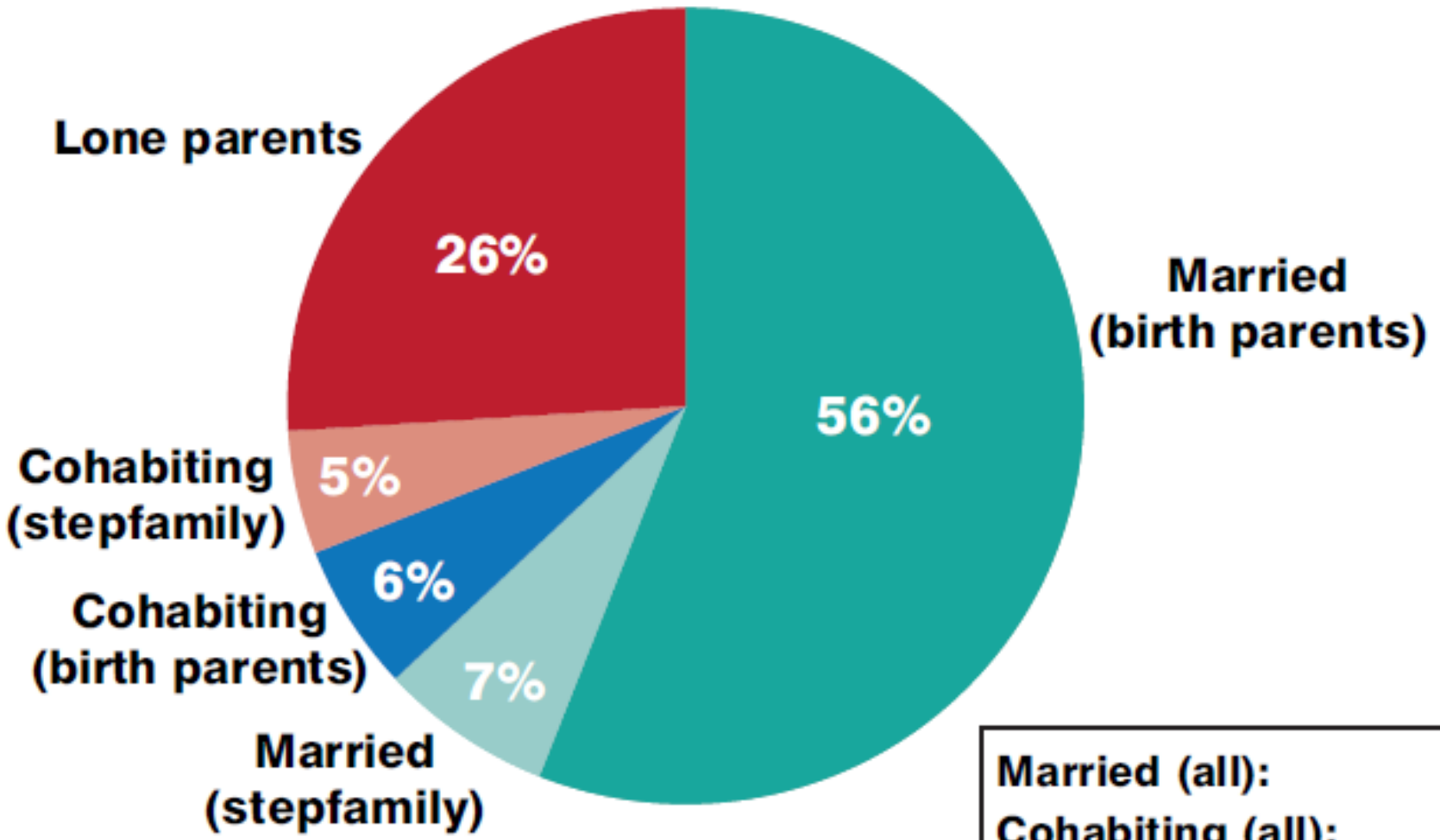
Based on Ipsos Mori (2008) *Families in Britain: The impact of changing family structures and what people think.*

The changing nature of families in the UK

- A relaxation of societal attitudes so that it is no longer seen as unusual to be involved in a ‘complicated’ family structure
- 7 in 10 households are still headed up by married couples but this number is declining
- Families are now a mix of cohabiting parents, stepfamilies, single parent families, those living apart together and civil partnerships, as well as the traditional nuclear family

Based on Ipsos Mori (2008) *Families in Britain: The impact of changing family structures and what people think.*

Chart 1.2 Family structures in the UK



Married (all):	63%
Cohabiting (all):	11%
Stepfamilies (all):	12%

Source: Focus on Families (UK), ONS (2007)

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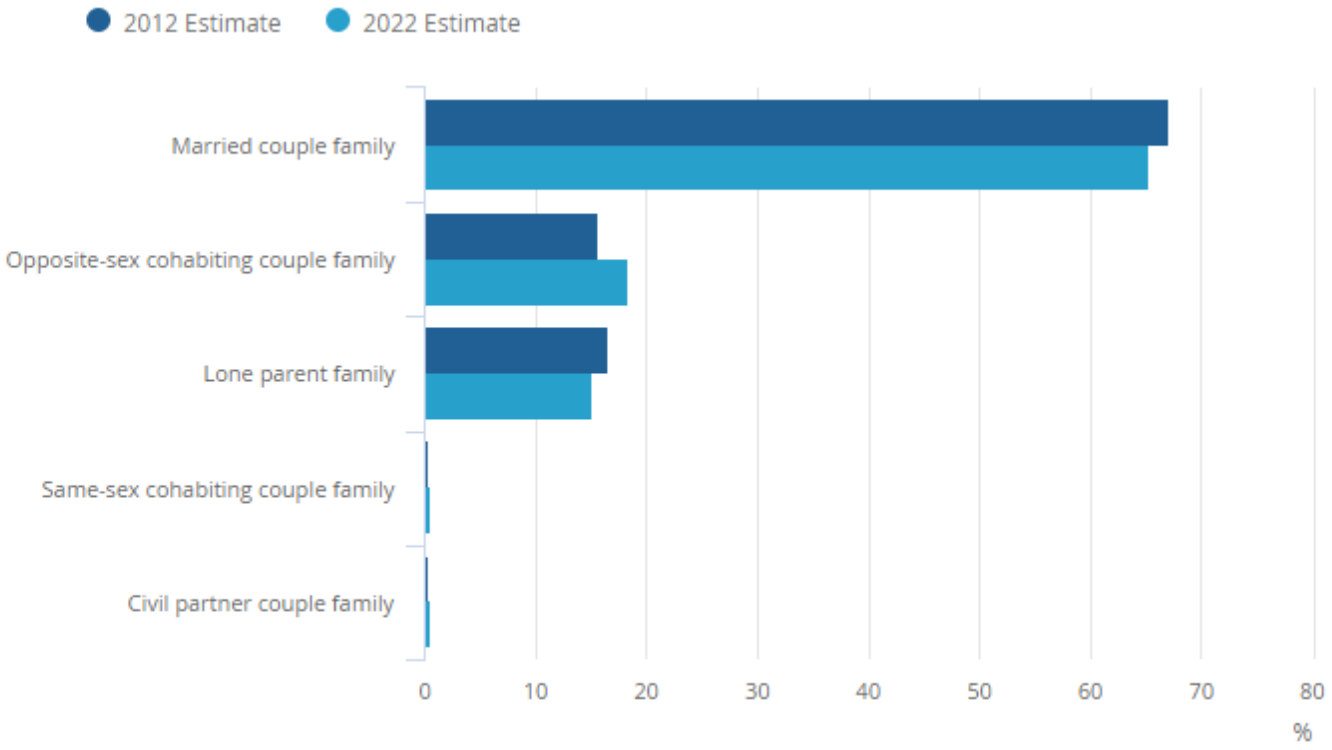
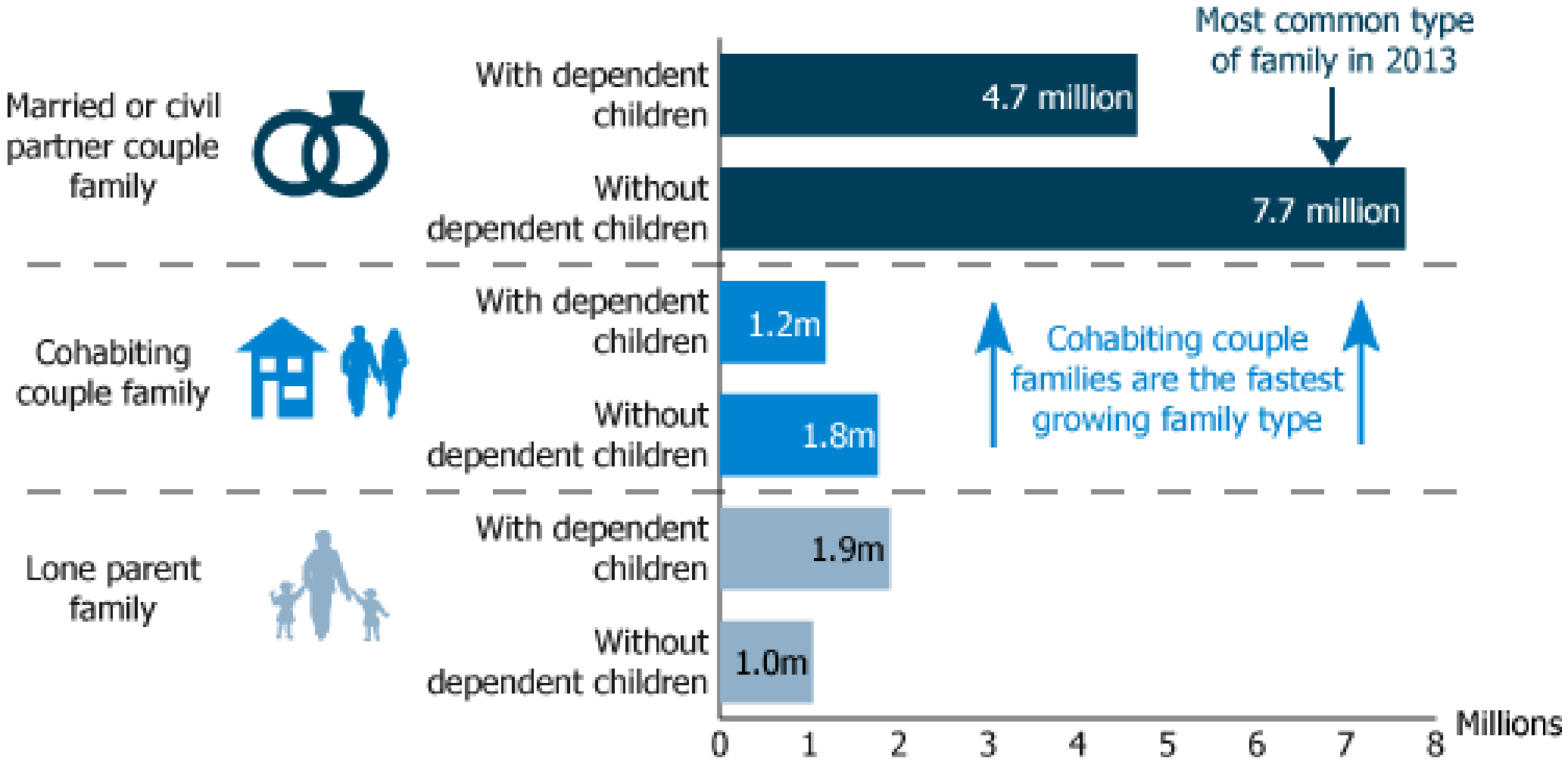
(ONS, 2023)


2012 Estimate
2022 Estimate
Married couple family
Opposite-sex cohabiting couple family
Lone parent family
Same-sex cohabiting couple family
Civil partner couple family
0
10
20
30
40
50
60
70
80
%

Families by **family type** and whether they have **dependent children** in the household, **2013**



The changing reporting of families in the UK

- In the previous two slides we have seen that the ONS can change the way that it visually represents changes in the family.
- This can cause problems for the researcher/student.
- However the ONS also gives access to the actual data as well as graphic interpretations.
- The previous images were for 2007 & 2013 but the ONS website will inform you if there is more recent data available.

Traditional vs Contemporary views of the family Group Task

- In our previous Theme we briefly looked at contemporary, alternative family arrangements to the following 'traditional' models;

Two parents

Married parents

Heterosexual parents

Biological parents

Co-resident parents

One (male) breadwinner

Childcare by parents

What alternative family arrangements can you think of for each of these?

Assumptions Underlying the 'Ideal Family' Form versus Alternative Family Forms

Ideal Family Form	Alternative Family Forms	
Two parents	One parent; No parents;	Multiple parents
Married	Cohabiting; Planning to marry;	Staying single; Divorced
Heterosexual	Homosexual; Bisexual;	Non-sexual; Transsexual
Two biological parents	One or more social parent(s) through artificial insemination; Surrogacy;	Adoption; Foster care; Kinship (related headed household)
Co-resident	Part-time resident; Shared custody;	Visitation access to children
One (male) breadwinner	Dual earner couple; Job cycling in/'out reverse role families Female as breadwinner; Male as primary caregiver	
Child care only by parents	Childcare by parents and/or relatives; Staff in child care centres or family day care homes;	Siblings; Neighbours; Members of the childcare cooperatives; Members of a collective community

Perspectives on the Family

- There are a variety of ways of knowing and understanding families:
- Anthropology
  - views the family as the source and carrier of culture
- Social Psychology
  - sees families as small groups with tasks to successfully master

Perspectives on the Family

- Developmental psychology
  - studies the environment within which children are raised and grow into themselves
- Clinical Psychology and Psychiatry
  - As the environment within which normal or abnormal behavior begins, takes hold and becomes the patterns enacted by children
- Sociology
  - Family as the major unit through which socialization occurs (e.g. structural functionalism)

N.B. The following slides draw on all of these academic disciplines

Group Activity Functions of the family

- Discuss the various functions or tasks that families perform.
- You might find it useful to refer to Maslow's Hierarchy when trying to think of the functions or tasks.
- Share your thoughts with the larger group.

Understanding Families

- As the base for all members to experience connection and belonging while each experiences simultaneously the push toward autonomy and independence
- As the environment within which children learn to know, experience and modulate their emotions through relationships with attachment figures

Based on McKie & Callan (2012)

Understanding Families

- As a system where the whole is greater than the sum of the parts and where each individual affects and is affected by every other individual

Based on McKie & Callan (2012)

Ideally, Families Offer:

- An experience of connection with history
- Stories of ancestors which offer meaning and value to lives
- A sense of identity through identification with family members

Based on McKie & Callan (2012)

Ideally, Families Offer:

- A safe haven in which to relax and experience acceptance and regard
- A set of relationships within which one experiences care and guidance and the opportunity to care for and guide others

Based on McKie & Callan (2012)

Families are Places within which . . .

- Physical intimacy among some members is sanctioned
- And is also forbidden among other members (e.g. social taboos, legal restrictions for example the Sexual Offences Act 2003)

Based on McKie & Callan (2012)

Families have Very Specific Tasks:

- Gathering enough resources to ensure survival
- Procreation and looking after immature children
- Promoting maturation and successful aging and adapting to loss
- Providing enough empathetic connection to encourage attention to the above tasks

Based on McKie & Callan (2012)

Variables of Interest in Understanding Families:

- Functional collaboration
- Gender expectations
- Power relationships
- Responsibility
- Warmth
- Positive support
- Cultural background and difference

Based on McKie & Callan (2012)

Family Coherence

- Basic building block of family life, enabling
  - Organisation
  - Communication
  - Values and Beliefs

- We will briefly look at what we mean by coherence

Based on McKie & Callan (2012)

Coherence

- A sense of
  - uniqueness and identity of the family
  - membership, inclusion and belonging
  - personal space and voice
  - recognition of developmental status and skills
  - accommodation to individual differences

Based on McKie & Callan (2012)

Coherence

- Ideally, provides a secure base for;
- Emotional expression and regulation
- Ideally, allows for the recognition of the shared;
- effort to pursue family activities such as providing safety, nurturance and socialization
- capacity to resolve conflict
- Ideally, allows for the collective reflection on;
- family strengths, capacities and areas of difficulty
- the nature of the family as members see it

Based on McKie & Callan (2012)

Family Adaptability and Reactions to Change

- In an ideal world families are effective in
- The recognition of stress or change
- Identifying the nature of the challenge, and
- Developing a shared approach to the problem
- Utilizing the family as a focal point for developing and evaluating stress management strategies

Based on McKie & Callan (2012)

Family Coherence and Individual Resilience

- The role of belonging
- Family attachment as an affect monitor and mediator of emotional expression
- The role of family myths in creating shared identity
- The role of family competence in building individual self-esteem
- The role of ritual and celebration

Based on McKie & Callan (2012)

However, families do not exist in an ideal world!

When Family Coherence Fails

- The possibility of multiple, individual definitions of the family
- Too rigidly defined family views failing to accept individual difference
- Family members who do not conform to family norms can be seen as 'deviant'

Based on McKie & Callan (2012)

When Family Coherence Fails

- The role of individual temperamental factors
- Family behavior amplifying affective/emotional responses, leading to isolation and scapegoating

Based on McKie & Callan (2012)

Group Activity: Forming Partner Relationships

- In groups, discuss the issues and challenges that people face when they form a new partnership
- Share your thoughts with the larger group.

Partner Relationship: Important Features

- Negotiation of Interpersonal Distance
- Negotiation of roles and tasks assignment
- Emotional tone e.g.
  - positive comments vs. criticism
  - caring vs. controlling

Based on McKie & Callan (2012)

Partner Relationship: Important Features

- Negotiation of cultural integration
- Negotiation of connection to extended family
- Negotiation of location and intensity of career
- Negotiation of sexual behavior
- Negotiation of leisure activities

Based on McKie & Callan (2012)

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