

Unit 4: The Family



What are the different types of family?

The different types of family:

1- The nuclear family:

Made up of an adult man and an adult woman, who are married or in a relationship, and living together with dependent children.



The functionalist George Murdock argued that the nuclear family of a mother, father and dependent children was the basic family unit worldwide.

2- Extended family:

A nuclear family living with other relatives such as grand parents or great grandparents or aunts, uncles and cousins.

extended families were more common in the past and are now in decline **because** they seem less suited to life in modern industrial societies.

vertically extended family If there are more than two generations

horizontally extended family If there are aunts, uncles and cousins (that is, people of the same generation as the parents and children).

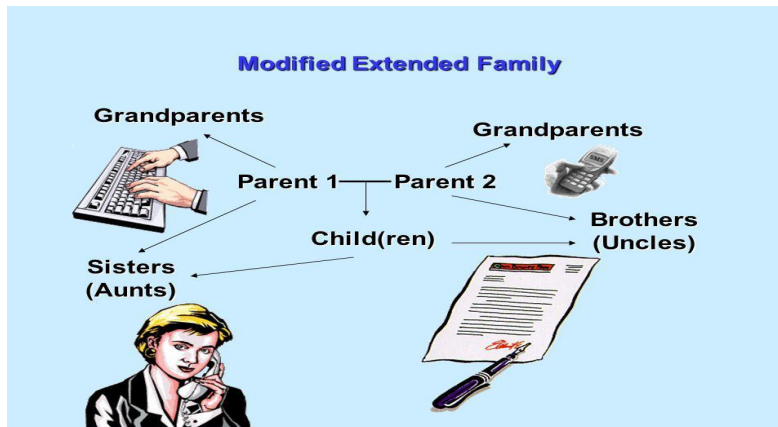


the term **extended family** is used for all the relatives sharing a household, that is, living together under one roof.

several nuclear families living close to each other in the same street or area **extended families**.

These are both **classic extended families** and seem to have been common in working-class British communities in the past.

In modern industrial societies, with better communication and transport, relatives who live far apart are better able to stay in contact, and where there is regular contact (for example, by phone or e-mail) and mutual support between them we describe this as a **modified extended family**.



3 – single-parent family or one-parent:

One parent and their dependent children living together.

In the past these were usually the result of the death of one of the parents, leaving the other parent to raise the children on their own.

there has been a marked increase in the number of single-parent families in modern industrial societies since the mid-20th century.

Some still result from death but many now result from **separation** or **divorce**.

Kinship:

When the ties between people are related by descent (common ancestors) by marriage and by adoption.

Marriage creates new kinship ties



Some reasons why there are more single-parent families these days than in the past:

- 1- **Divorce** has become common and it leaves one parent looking after the children.
- 2- Some women now choose to raise children on their own, without the father around.

3- Women have greater financial independence.

4- They are more likely to have qualifications that allow them to work to support their family and they may be able to receive welfare benefits, so they do not need a man as a breadwinner.

4 – Reconstitute or step family:

After death of one partner or divorce a new family is created by someone remarrying.

- ▶ **If a person marries for a second time after the death or divorce of their first partner, a new family is formed that is called a reconstituted or stepfamily.**
- ▶ **There are many possible variations of this kind of family: for example, one or both partners may have been married before, one or both partners may have children, and these children may live in the new family or with the previous partner.**
- ▶ **New relationships are created by remarriage: such as step-parents, step-children, step-siblings and step-grandparents.**
- ▶ **This situation is relatively new and so the norms and values are often not clear and may need to be negotiated.**
- ▶ **For example, a stepmother may not be sure to what extent she should correct bad behaviour in the children of her husband and his former wife.**
- ▶ **Equally, the children may be unsure what authority this new person in their lives should have.**



Key Term

Step-parent: after remarriage a step-parent shares with their new partner parental responsibility for children from previous marriages.

Step-child: a child who lives with one biological parent and one step-parent.

5- Same sex family:

- ▶ Same sex families are when the two adults are of the same sex; that is, a male or female gay couple, usually raising their own or adopted children.
- ▶ In the past arrangements like this were often not accepted but increasingly modern industrial societies allow same sex couples to adopt children and give same sex couples the same or similar rights and responsibilities that opposite sex couples have, for example property rights and rights to welfare benefits.

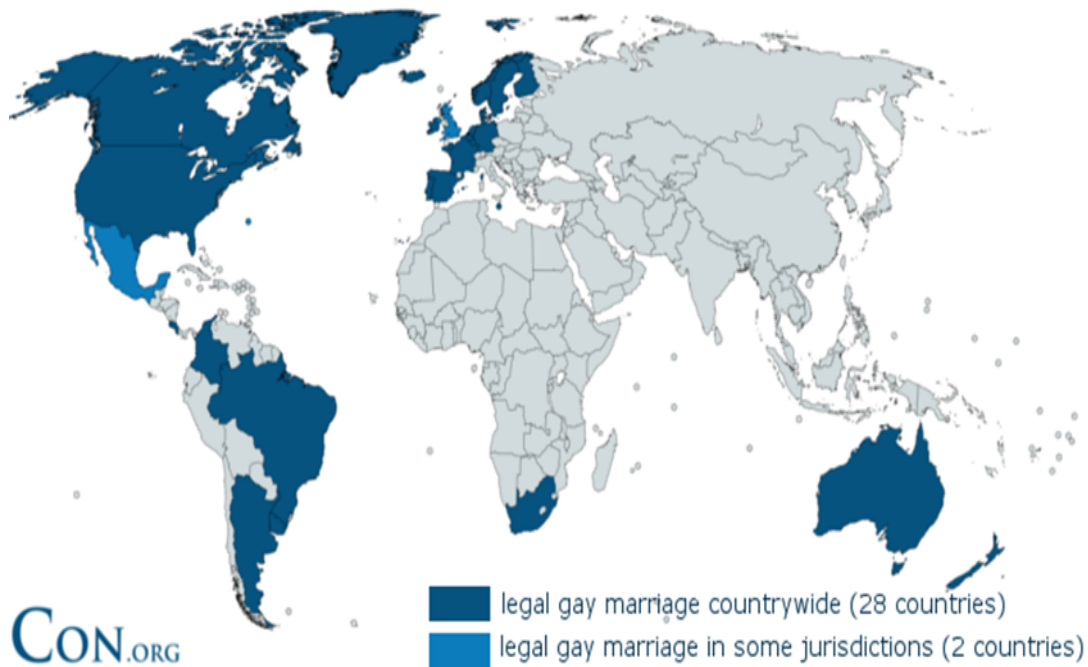


Key

Civil Partnership: a relationship between two people usually of the same sex that has been formally registered giving them similar rights to married couples.

- ▶ In the UK unions of two people of the same sex are formally recognised by a ceremony that creates a civil partnership. In other countries that do not recognise such relationships, same sex couples may still cohabit but do not have the same rights.
- ▶ Women who have left their husband to live with a lesbian partner are finding it easier than in the past to gain custody of their children. This is because research in the UK and in the USA has

found that children raised by gay parents are no more likely than others to grow up gay or to suffer bullying at school.



- ▶ **Same sex couples with children remain a contentious issue, with many people still firmly believing that this situation can only damage the children.**
- ▶ **Lesbian couples are more likely to be accepted as parents than male homosexuals because of the perceived importance of the mother to her children.**

- However, even with male couples there is a growing opinion that at least in some cases this may be the best available option for the children.



The influence of social stratification and ethnicity on family diversity:

- The changes in the number and types of different families, or family diversity, are related to both social class and ethnicity.



Key Term

Family diversity: the increase in the number of different types of families.

Stratification and family diversity:

- ▶ The extended family in the UK was strongly associated with the working class.
- ▶ Areas with old industries such as coal, had strong working-class communities in which it was normal for young men and women to marry and stay in the area, close to their parents. With secure jobs there was no reason for them to move away.
- ▶ These industries declined in the late 20th century. When men lost their jobs as factories were closed, women often became the main breadwinners and some men took on domestic roles they were not prepared for.
- ▶ The strong communities declined as people moved away in search of work and surviving extended family ties were weakened.

Ethnicity and family diversity:

In some societies some ethnic groups are associated with particular types of families. In the UK the two main minority ethnic groups are African-Caribbean and South Asian (with family origins in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh).

- **African-Caribbean**

In the African-Caribbean minority in the UK there is a higher-than-average number of matrifocal families where the father, if present at all, plays a reduced role in the family and in bringing up children.

The word **matrifocal** is used for this situation rather than matriarchal. In a matriarchy, women would have power and a central role in both the family and wider society. In matrifocal families, mothers are the breadwinners and are often strongly supported by their own mothers and female relatives.





Key Term

Matrifocal family: one in which the mother heads the family and the father has a less important role in the family and in bringing up children.

Matriarchy: when the mother is the head of the household, with authority over the men and children in the household.

- ▶ This pattern of family life may have begun with slavery, when the male ancestors of today's African-Caribbean population were, as slaves, unable to provide for and protect their families.
- ▶ Later, poverty and unemployment, partly because of racism, may have meant that the men still could not take on fully the instrumental role.
- ▶ This led to high rates of single-parent families and absent fathers.



- **South Asian minorities in the UK:**

South Asian minority ethnic groups in the UK are associated with the following:

- **Strong extended families** and extended family ties. This may be linked to migration from the South Asian subcontinent, when one family member would come to the UK first and then family members would join him when he was established.
- **Large families.** The average number of children that women have in the countries of origin is higher than that in the UK and, although this is falling, women from South Asian minorities still have more children than the UK average.
- **Traditional gender roles.** With women less likely to go out to work, paid work is often done at home. This is often for cultural reasons but may also be a defense against racism.



- **Arranged marriages.** Parents or other family members decide who their children will marry or provide them with a limited choice.

- **The bride and groom have usually agreed to their parents doing this, often with the help of a matchmaker.**
- **Arranged marriages should not be confused with forced marriages, in which one or other partner has not given their consent. Forced marriage is viewed by the United Nations as an abuse of human rights.**

Key Term

Arranged marriage: marriage partners are chosen by older family members rather than people choosing their own marriage partner.

European ethnic groups

- Migrants, including immigrants to the UK from Eastern European countries such as Poland, are often young adults. Because of their age, and sometimes because of cultural and religious differences, the birth rate of these groups tends to be higher than that of native British people.



The functions of the family and the 'loss of functions' debate:

Functions of the family:

Functionalists argue that in order for societies to survive and work, certain essential tasks or functions must be performed.

They argue that it is the family that carries out several vital functions and is therefore the bedrock of every society.

the following functions of the family are agreed upon by most functionalists:

- **Reproduction.** Societies must produce new generations of children in order to survive; and marriage and the family are closely associated with having children. Reproduction is encouraged. Not having children may be regarded as a misfortune.
- **Socialisation.** Children need to learn the norms and values of their society, and this happens through **primary socialisation** in their families. Families transmit the culture of the society to the next generation; they are the vital link between individuals and the wider society.
- **Social control.** Closely related to socialisation, this refers to how the behaviour of children is controlled so that they conform to norms. For example, they may be punished for being 'naughty' or rewarded for behaviour their parents define as 'good'.



- **Status.** Families provide status for children; they involve children in a web of interpersonal and group relationships.
- **Regulation of sexual behaviour.** All societies seem to set rules about what kind of sexual behaviour is accepted, with whom and in what circumstances. Although sex outside marriage is often tolerated, most societies insist that children are born to people in a socially approved sexual relationship.



Map of the 73 countries with laws against sexual relations between people of the same sex.

- ▶ **Functionalists argue** that all these functions are performed best in the nuclear family. In such families the main responsibility for emotional and home-based needs is given to the mother, and the economic and material well-being needs of the family are given to the father.
- ▶ **This gender division**, say functionalists, suits the natures of men and women, and so nuclear families are the most common family arrangement because they are the best.
- ▶ **Against this**, however, it can be argued that these functions can be met by other types of family, and

perhaps by arrangements that are not families at all. For example, in modern industrial societies part of the socialisation and childcare functions are undertaken by schools and other institutions.



In the past kinsfolk and neighbors gave the individual continuous moral support throughout his life. Today the domestic household is isolated.

Leach means that the demands made on the nuclear family are too great, and this leads to conflict within the family. The conflict is often expressed in feelings of suspicion and fear of the world outside the family.

So for Leach, the modern nuclear family is less functional than an extended family that is closely embedded in a community.



Cereal packet family:

The stereotypical nuclear family with mother, father and children with traditional gender roles that is often shown in advertisement.

The Marxist view of family functions

- ▶ **Marxists agree with functionalists that families are important because they carry out functions that are vital for individuals and society.**

- ▶ **However, they disagree with functionalists on what these functions are. For Marxists, the family is functional for capitalist society; that is, as an institution the family contributes to the continuation of an economic system.**

- ▶ **Engels, who lived at the same time as Marx and collaborated with him, showed that the family**

could only be understood by considering how it fitted into the economic system of a society.



Functions of the family, according to Marxists;

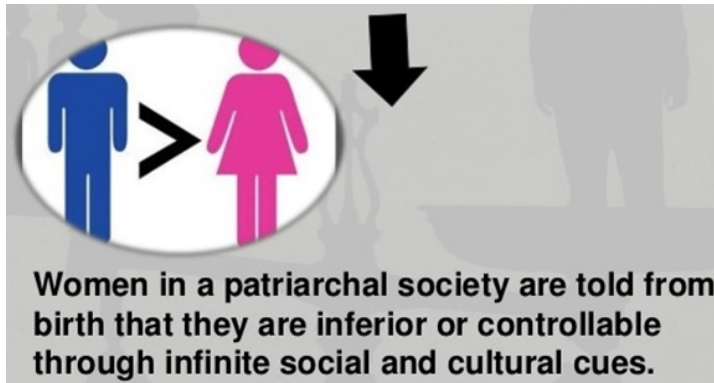
- **The family is where each generation is socialised into accepting capitalism and its values so that, for example, many working-class people believe that the system is fair and that their failure to succeed is their own fault.**
- **The family brings up children to be the next generation of workers, producing profits for capitalists.**
- **Having families makes it difficult for workers to go on strike because then they would not be able to support their families.**
- **Men who are oppressed and alienated at work can compensate for this in the family, where they are in control. They take out the anger and frustration from work on their wives and children.**

- **The family is the main unit of consumption; that is, families buy and consume and in doing so support the system.**
- **Part of women's role is to look after sick and old people, so they help keep the workforce healthy and capitalists avoid responsibility for health care.**

The main focus of Marxists has always been on the economy and the world of work, and for many Marxists the family is a relatively insignificant side issue.

The feminist view of family functions:

- **Feminists take the view that the nuclear family is functional for patriarchal society. The institution of the family gives men a powerful and privileged role, so it is a patriarchal institution.**
 - **Feminists see the family as having several functions. Traditional gender roles make men the breadwinner and head of the household.**
 - **Men benefit from the family because they have a wife whose expected role is to look after their needs: to cook, clean, support their husbands emotionally and to put her interests behind those of her husband's.**
 - **Families socialise both boys and girls into gender roles. A son or male heir traditionally inherits the family's wealth, so that wealth and power stay with males.**
- Patriarchy in the family, according to feminists, is the basis of patriarchy in the wider society.**



What has happened to the family's functions?

The 'New Right' and family functions

- **The functionalist view of the family was strongest in the middle of the 20th century, when the nuclear family with its traditional gender roles seemed normal.**

Among the changes that, according to the New Right, have undermined the family's functions are:

- **the growth of one-parent families**
- **the easy availability of divorce**
- **cohabitation (seen as a sign of instability and impermanence)**
- **homosexuality (seen as deviant and a sign of moral decadence).**
- **the rise of feminism (seen as responsible for making women unhappy with their role)**
- **legal abortion (the New Right strongly supports the idea that fetuses have a right to life)**
- **women going out to work (seen as having negative effects on children and depriving women of their 'natural' role of housewife/mother)**



The New Right believes these changes are related to or responsible for children failing in school, rising rates of crime and delinquency and a dependency culture (in which people rely on welfare benefits and are not interested in working for a living).

The welfare state, together with the other changes, disturbs the 'natural' order of family life, interfering both with relationships between men and women and with the raising of children.

The New Right approach has been strongly attacked by, among others, Pamela Abbott, Claire Wallace and Melissa Tyler, who take a feminist approach.

They favour tolerance and diversity in the way people live together, and argue in favour of the rights of people to choose to live alone, in a homosexual couple, in single-parent families or with a female breadwinner supporting a househusband who cares for the children.



Part of the traditional female role in many cultures

Alternatives to the family:

Not everyone lives in a family. Some people live alone or with friends who are not their family. Sociologists are interested in the different living arrangements people have.

When a family lives together there is a family household but there are other types of household and ways of living that are in some ways strikingly different from families, such as **communes.**



Key Term

Commune: a group of people who choose to live together and share at least some of their property.

One-person households and singlehood:

In the UK and some other modern industrial societies, there is a growing number of one-person households.

Three main types of people live alone:

- 1. About half of these are older people who are widowed and whose children have moved away.**

- 2. People who choose to live alone are often middle-class women who have chosen to focus on a career rather than a family. Some of these women marry later in life.**
- 3. Men who are separated and divorced. The wife often stays in the family home with the children, becoming a lone parent family, while the man moves out.**

The number of one-person households has increased as a result of greater opportunities for women and the increase in the number of divorces.

Communes

Communes are groups of individuals who choose to live together, sharing their living space and meals and also usually some property.

They often begin in an idealistic attempt to find a better way of living, based on religious or political beliefs. In some communes all the adult members of the commune act as the parents of all the children in it.

In the 1960s and 1970s groups of hippies trying to find an alternative to the mainstream lifestyle they rejected set up communes and some of these still survive.

CASE STUDY

Case study of the Oneida community

An example of a commune was the Oneida community in the USA in the 19th century.

The community was led by John Humphrey Noyes and based on his religious beliefs.

Noyes attracted a group of followers who believed, with him, that they could practise a lifestyle that was perfect and free of sin.

They lived communally, sharing possessions. All community members worked according to their abilities and routine unskilled work was rotated so that everyone took a turn.

The commune lasted for more than 30 years. It ended when Noyes tried to pass on the leadership to his son and community members began challenging some of the practices, including free love.

At its height there were three hundred members and several branches of the Oneida community.

For example,

the norm of marriage for life has changed to a choice among alternative arrangements such as periods of cohabitation, serial monogamy and choosing to remain unmarried.

- Some believe that family ties are less permanent than they were in the past, and it has been suggested that people may rely more on their friends than on their family.

For example:

Friends have become very important for young people establishing their independence from their parents.

Friends may play a greater part in emotional, practical and social support.

Friendships with other unattached people become important for divorced and separated people.

Young people in particular tend to rely on friends of their own age group. Groups of young people sharing a house have become more common.



- **Shared households often exist for economic reasons;** taking out a joint mortgage with a group of friends or renting

with them may be the only way they can afford housing. But the change also reflects the importance of friends in young people's lives.

Friendships are different from family ties in several ways:

Families are very unequal, while friendships are often based strongly on equality and reciprocity.

- ▶ **However**, the family is still important in many ways, with commitments in which friends would rarely be involved; **for example**, care of older people and the inheritance of property.



Other alternatives:

Traditional societies show a range of living arrangements that are unlike the family in some ways.

One well-known example is **the Nayar people of southern India**. Traditionally large numbers of women and children descended from a female ancestor, lived under a single roof, with an older man or karnavan as the head of the group or tharavad.



**The Nayar People
and Family**

Women were allowed to take several sambandham husbands who visited the tharavad at night but did not live there

The paternity of the children would not be known and the karnavan, the woman's brother, was responsible for bringing up her children, with the 'husbands' playing no part.

This system seems to have developed as a response to the lifestyle of the Nayar, as most of the men were away a lot of the time fighting as mercenary soldiers.

Traditional societies;
non modern societies, contrasted with modern industrial societies.

Cross-cultural comparisons and variations in marriage

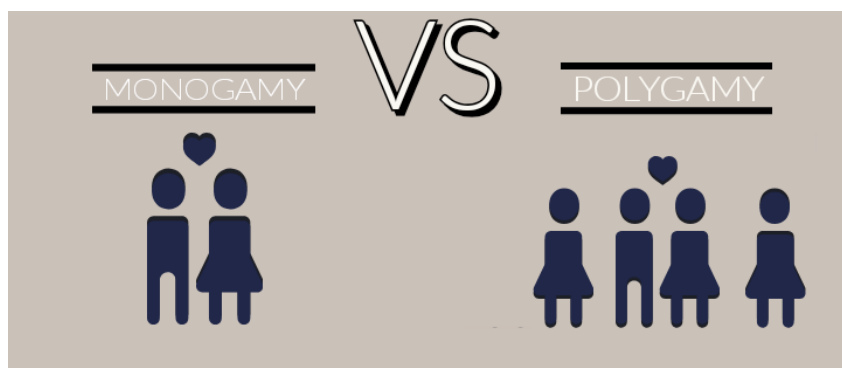
different types of marriage across cultures, including:

- **monogamy,**
- **serial monogamy,**
- **polygamy and polyandry.**

- **Monogamy**

Monogamy is a marriage between only one man and one woman. In many countries it is the only legal type of marriage.

The increase in divorce in the UK and other modern industrial societies has led to serial monogamy becoming more common; that is, a person has several marriage partners over their lifetime, but only one at a time.



- **Polygamy**

Is a marriage that involves at least three people. It can take two forms:

1. **polygyny**, when a man has several wives, and
2. **polyandry**, when a woman has several husbands.



- **Polyandry** seems always to have been rare. Examples that are known usually involve a woman marrying two or more brothers. This is known as fraternal polyandry. It has been practised in Tibet, where it helps to prevent the division of scarce farming land into areas too small to support a family.

It is usually the wealthy men who take more than one wife, and the number of wives can be an indicator of status and wealth. The first wife is usually regarded as senior to other wives and has a higher status. Each wife may have separate living quarters within a larger compound.

Jacob Zuma, the President of South Africa since 2009, is one of the world's best known polygamists. In April 2012 he married for the sixth time, with his other three current wives (one having died and the other divorced) present.



Polygamy is allowed in South Africa by the Customary Marriages Act.

- **Serial monogamy**

In most modern industrial societies only monogamy is allowed. However, over the course of their lives many people are married more than once because they remarry after the death of a partner or after divorce. Serial monogamy is when someone has more than one marriage partner over their lifetime, but only one at a time. It became more common with the rise in the divorce rate in the late 20th century.

A number of well-known celebrities and others in the public eye have been serial monogamists. In history, the English King Henry VIII is known for having married six wives in succession in the hope of having a son to succeed him.

Alternatives to marriage:

at alternatives to marriage, such as:

- 1.cohabitation**
- 2.civil partnerships.**

1- Cohabitation

Cohabitation is when two people live together in a sexual relationship but are not married to each other. In the UK until about the 1970s this was unusual and was strongly disapproved of, being referred to as 'living in sin'.

However, values changed and cohabitation became widely accepted and is now considered normal.

There are three different types of cohabitation:

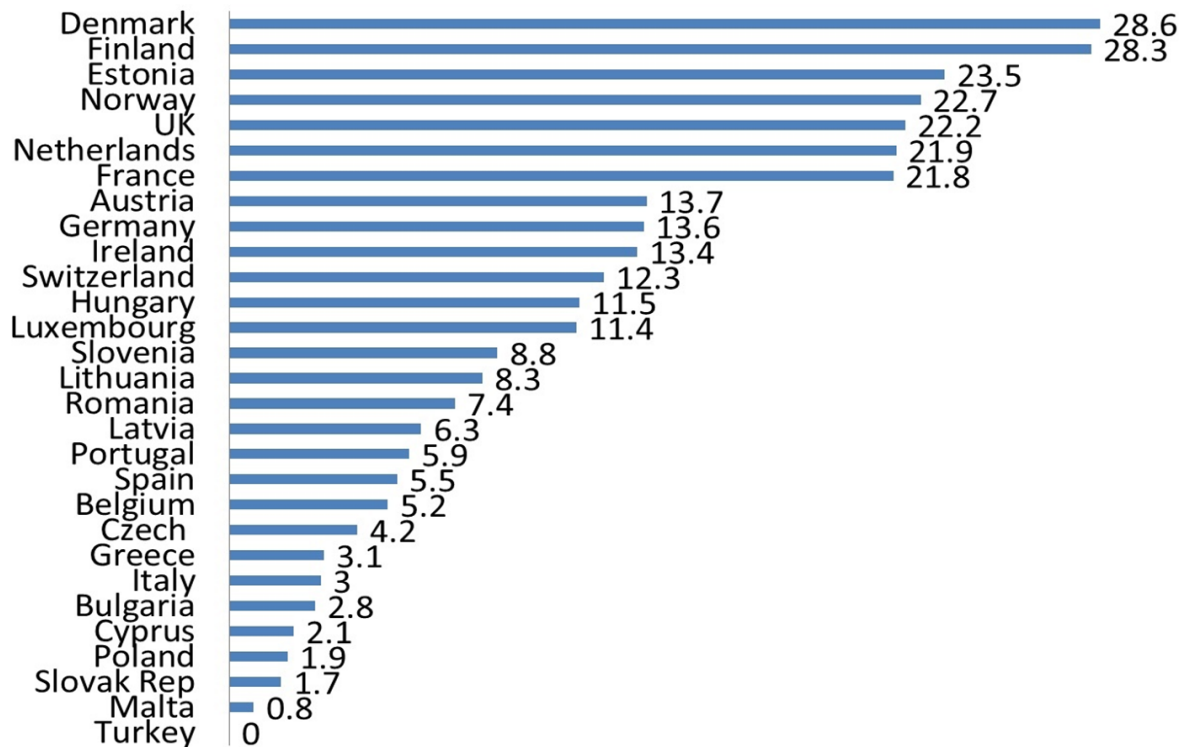
- **permanent or long-term relationships** differing from marriage only in that a formal ceremony has not taken place
- **short-term relationships** without commitment
- **trial marriages:** living together before marriage.

While the first type is prevalent in Scandinavia, it is the third type that seems particularly significant in the UK.

More than half of all couples in the UK now cohabit before marriage. This does not suggest a rejection of marriage but a change in marriage practice.

Marriages are delayed, perhaps for economic reasons. However, continued social disapproval of extramarital sex and social pressures make many couples marry eventually.

Percentage of Young People (20-34 years) who are Cohabiting– Europe



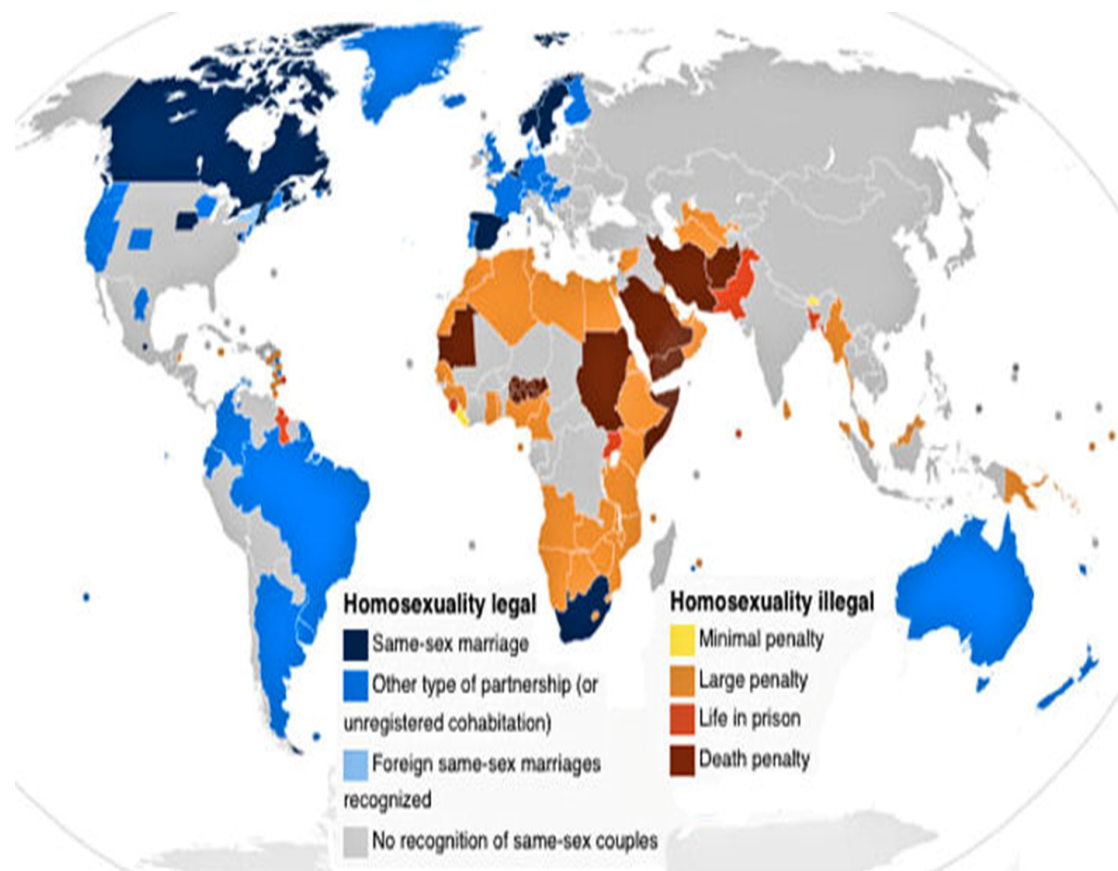
2- Civil partnerships:

In a small number of countries and areas same sex couples are allowed to marry. This is the case in, **for example, Spain, Portugal, Denmark, Norway and Sweden.**

Other countries recognise a formal union of same sex partners, which is the equivalent of marriage, giving

the same rights to same sex couples as heterosexual married couples have. These are called civil partnerships in the UK and elsewhere.

In other countries there is no legal recognition of same sex partnerships or relationships and these may be socially disapproved of or even illegal.



Trends in marriage and divorce:

Marriage trends:

A significant development has been a fall in the number of marriages. For example, in the UK the number of first marriages in a year (that is, between people getting married for the first time) fell by 50% between 1970 and 2000.

Feminists might argue that women are realising the disadvantages of marriage but against this is the fact that most people do marry and many remarry after their first marriage ends.

Remarriage:

A growing proportion of all marriages in modern industrial societies are now remarriages; that is, one or both partners have already been married at least once.

Because of the death of a spouse this has always happened to some extent but many people now remarry after a previous divorce.

Remarriages create new reconstituted families, also called stepfamilies, with individuals acquiring new relatives and new roles and relationships.

There has been a big increase in the divorce rate in many modern industrial countries **Because the law has been changed so that divorce becomes easier and more affordable.**

Marital breakdown:

There are alternatives to divorce that make it difficult to know how many marriages break down:

Separation: the partners stop living together. This can often lead to divorce but it does not have to. Because separations are not recorded it is difficult to know how many couples separate.

Desertion: a type of separation in which one partner leaves the family. Again, there are no reliable figures for desertions.

Empty shell marriage: the couple continue to live together and continue to appear to the outside world to be a married couple, even though there is now no substance to their relationship. This may be for financial reasons; they may be unable to afford to live apart.

Empty shell marriage: a married couple continue to live together but without love or affection.