

Chapter 2

Family and Society

1.0 Types of families

Families are the building blocks of any society. When people decide to live together and perhaps have children a family is formed. The most common understanding of the concept of a family is the **nuclear family**, which consists of parents and their children. However, not all couples have children.

Beyond the nuclear family there is the **extended family**, which includes relatives: married children and their wives and husbands and children. This type of family although far less common in Western countries, is very common in Tajikistan, where the youngest son or daughter is expected to stay with the parents after marriage. However, it is important to remember that we live in a multicultural country and traditions like these vary between cultures and tribes.

Marriages in some societies are arranged. In some cases parents arrange the marriage in advance of the actual ceremony and so the future husband and wife have little say. In other societies the choice is entirely the decision of the men and women getting married. They may even get married without the approval of the parents.

There are many ways societies organize living arrangements from people living alone to a whole tribe sharing one house, but not all of these are families. A family is intended to be permanent and includes people where they are related by marriage, blood ties or adoption.

Although the arrangement where there is a single wife and a single husband is the most common, some societies, often because of religious beliefs, allow a man to have more than one wife at one time. Much more rare are societies, which allow a woman to have more than one husband. However, in these cases the codes of religious beliefs demand that the rights of multiple wives or husbands are protected.

Although marriages are intended to be permanent in some societies it is common for couples to divorce and find new partners. Many societies and states have rules making it difficult to obtain divorce so as to protect any children that might have resulted from the relationship.

2.0 The Function of the Family

The family has personal, social, and economic functions. The personal function of the family is to institutionalise and give legitimacy (through marriage) to the intimate relationship between a couple.

Different cultures have different points of view on extra-marital sexual behavior and divorce. In some cultures they have been punished by death but in others the reaction may be social disgrace. Practically all societies, however, have imposed very strict incest rules. Incest was quite a usual event in an ancient Egypt and members of royal families in Western Europe, which often led to genetic problems.

Perhaps the principal function of the family is to **create a home**, a shelter for its members, a place where they are physically as well as psychologically safe. The human infant is known to be among the most helpless and most in need of nurturing among mammals. Children have to be fed and clothed for many years and be provided with extensive education. In some cultures, children are encouraged to be independent whereas in others they are not. The **socialization** of the child requires a great deal of effort from the family. People resolve the issue in various ways, even within one culture and one society.

Cooperation among people is learned at an early age through the family, where each member has to take into consideration the needs and interests of others. In this sense, the family serves a **civilizing** function.

3.0 How are families different to states?

Although there are some similarities between families and states they are very different. This idea is opposed in democracies like Tajikistan as it equates leaders like the presidents and citizens with children. Citizens like presidents are thinking and often well educated adults who need to be respected as such and take on all the responsibilities of life. Children do not choose their fathers whereas in a democracy citizens choose and change their leaders.

4.0 Property and Families

The way property is transferred from parents to children and the organization and customs of families and the status of family members are closely linked.

Families in Central Asia often pass most property from the father to the last son. (However, daughters can and are also gifted property.) In some countries property is passed to daughters and in others to the first son and in others property is divided equally amongst all the children. The customs are often based on religious traditions and writings such as the Koran.

Where property is passed through sons the relative status of women is often reduced. In some societies women themselves become property and the payment of a bride price indicates an exchange of the ownership of the daughter from the parents to the new husband. Both the Soviet system and Western democratic traditions rejected the idea of women having such an inferior status. In Tajikistan, although “kalyn” is sometimes paid, most people, and certainly the government, reject the idea that this indicates that the wife becomes the property of the husband.

5.0 Families and Economics

Families in Tajikistan traditionally had many children. This changed as a result of the civil war and now the country’s political leaders have recommended smaller families.

Although in some countries the average age at first marriage is as low as 17, in other countries, particularly the developed Western economies people do not normally get married until they are 25 or older. This happens mainly because young people want to get an education and a good job before getting married and starting a family. Generally as countries get richer, people get married later and they have fewer children.

In less developed economies people often have many children because:

- they provide security in old age
- the children can work
- the financial cost of upbringing children is much lower (in Tajikistan as the perceived financial cost has risen, family size has decreased)

Although inheritance is important in richer market economies it is generally much less important as children are able to gain a much larger proportion of their wealth through using their skills than they would through inheritance. Furthermore, the wealth is not created through the use of property like land in contrast to less developed economies where land generates much of the wealth.

6.0 The Relationship between the Family and the State

In some societies the state has very little influence on families. However, in highly tribalised societies the traditions and customs greatly influence and control the behaviour of families.

Throughout the former Soviet Union the state at first had little influence on family life through the implementation of laws. However, in later years, laws based upon Marxist ideology and pre-existing European custom and laws began to have a more significant effect.

Later more strict divorce laws and laws relating to division of property and protection of children were introduced. The current Tajik family laws are based on these Soviet laws. They regulate marriage, divorce, the registration of births and deaths, inheritance and any benefits the government gives to families. There are also laws, which determine what happens in the case parents are unable or do not look after their children.

Tajik family laws are based on the idea that both men and women are equal in the eyes of the law and so sometimes the laws are in conflict with the traditions of some families.

In some societies it is culturally acceptable for men to violently abuse their children and wives. In most countries this is strongly opposed in law, partly because if people are live in fear of violence they and their entire family cannot reach their full potential and therefore the growth of the entire nation is held back. However, more importantly violence like this denies people their basic human rights, which is the topic of the next chapter.
