

# Families

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*SOC1101(B)*

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# Learning objectives

- Family: difficulty of defining it
- Family through major sociological perspectives
- Diversity of families in Canada
- Challenges facing families today



# Sociology and Everyday Life: How Much Do You Know about the Changing Family in Canada?

- Today, people in Canada are more inclined to get married than at any time in history. **T F**
- Men are as likely as women to be single parents. **T F**
- One out of every two marriages ends in divorce. **T F**
- Age of first marriage has increased significantly in the past 40 years for both men and women. **T F**
- In recent years, the number of extended families where members live together in the same home has decreased. **T F**

# Defining family

- Family is not an easy word to define: this term means different things to different people.
- As the nature of family life and work has changed in high-, middle-, and low-income nations, the issue of what constitutes a family has been widely debated.
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bvPOEsSNdwQ>

Standard sociological definition of family: a group of people who are related to one another by bonds of blood, marriage, or adoption and who live together

Family: a relationship in which people live together with commitment, form an economic unit and care for any young, and consider their identity to be significantly attached to the group

# Family structure and characteristics

- **Kinship:** a social network of people based on common ancestry, marriage, or adoption.

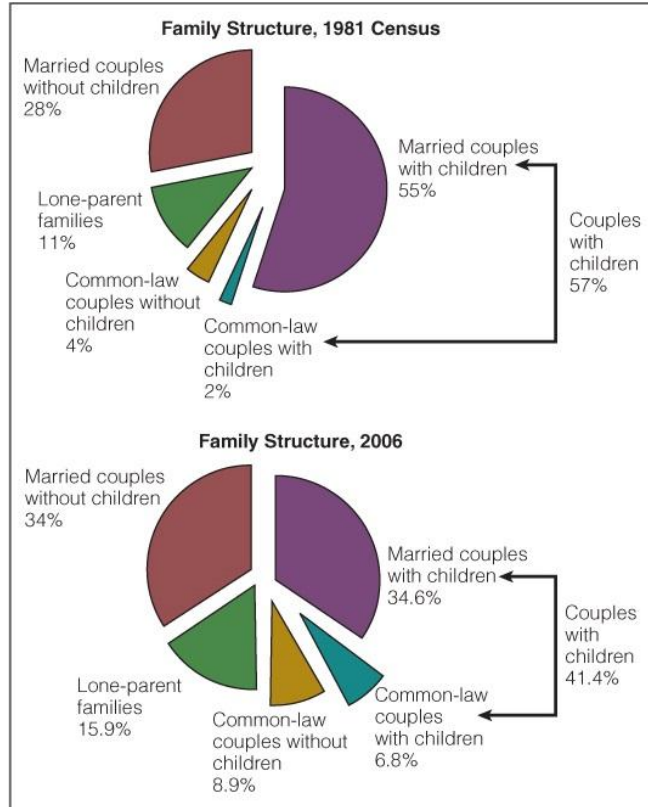
- **Family of orientation:** the family into which a person is born and in which early socialization usually takes place.
- **Family of procreation:** the family that a person forms by having or adopting children

## Extended and nuclear families

**Extended:** a family unit composed of relatives in addition to the parents and children who live in the same household .

**Nuclear:** composed of one or two parents and their dependent children, all of whom live apart from other relatives.

# Changes in family structure

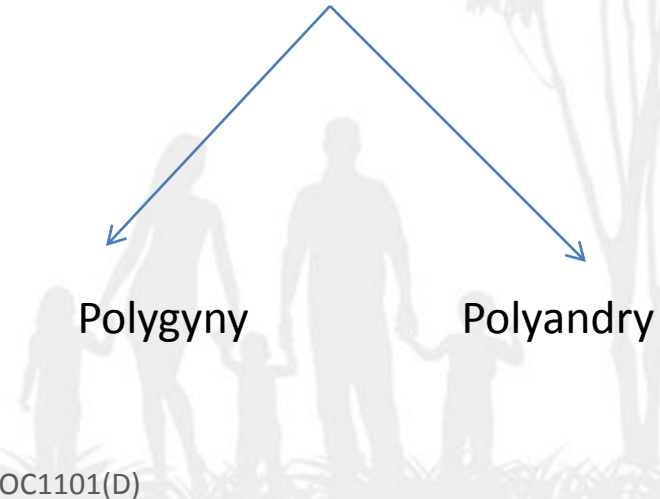


- Statistics Canada 2007
- Decline in marriages, an increase in common-law unions, and an increase in single-parent families

# Marriage patterns

- **Marriage:** a legally recognized and/or socially approved arrangement between two or more individuals that carries certain rights and obligations and usually involves sexual activity.

- **Monogamy:** marriage to one person at a time
- **Poligamy:** more than one spouse at a time



# Descent and inheritance

**Patrilineal:** a system of tracing descent through the father's side of the family

**Matrilineal:** a system of tracing descent through the mother's side of the family

- **Bilateral:** a system of tracing descent through the mother's and the father's sides of the family

# Power and authority in families

- **Patriarchal family:** a family structure in which authority is held by the eldest male (usually the father).
- **Matriarchal family:** a family structure in which authority is held by the eldest female (usually the mother).
- **Egalitarian Family:** family structure in which both partners share power and authority.

# Functionalist perspective on family

- Durkheim:
  - Marriage as a microcosmic replica of the larger society.
  - The division of labour contributed to greater efficiency in all areas of social life—including marriage and the family

Parsons:

The husband/father fulfills the **instrumental roles** and the wife/mother fulfills the **expressive roles**.

Family maintains the stability of society and the well-being of individuals

In advanced industrial societies families serve 4 key functions:

1. *Sexual regulation*
2. *Socialization*
3. *Economic and psychological support*
4. *Provision of social status*

# Conflict perspective

- Families are sources of social inequality and conflict over values, goals, and access to resources and power.
- According to some conflict theorists, families in capitalist economies are similar to workers in a factory (*'The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State (1884) by Friedrich Engels*)
- Other conflict analysts are concerned with the effect that class conflict has on the family.

# Feminist perspective... :

Focuses on:

- The diversity of family arrangements
- Patriarchy
- The division of labour by gender, both within the society at large and within households

Patricia Mann: *“Male power in our society is expressed in economic terms even if it does not originate in property relations; women’s activities in the home have been undervalued at the same time as their labor has been controlled by men”*

“Dark side of the family” – problems of dominance and subordination in relationships

# Symbolic interactionist perspectives (1)

- Examine the roles of husbands, wives, and children as they act out their own parts and react to the actions of others.
- What people think, as well as what they say and do, is very important in understanding family dynamics
- Married couple constructs a shared reality and redefines their past identities; this is a continuous process taking place within the family and outside
- SI explain family relationships in terms of the subjective meanings and everyday interpretations people give to their lives (Jessie Bernard's "his marriage" and "her marriage")

# Symbolic interactionist perspectives (2)

Lenore Walker:

Many women are socialized into passive roles and men into active and even aggressive roles.

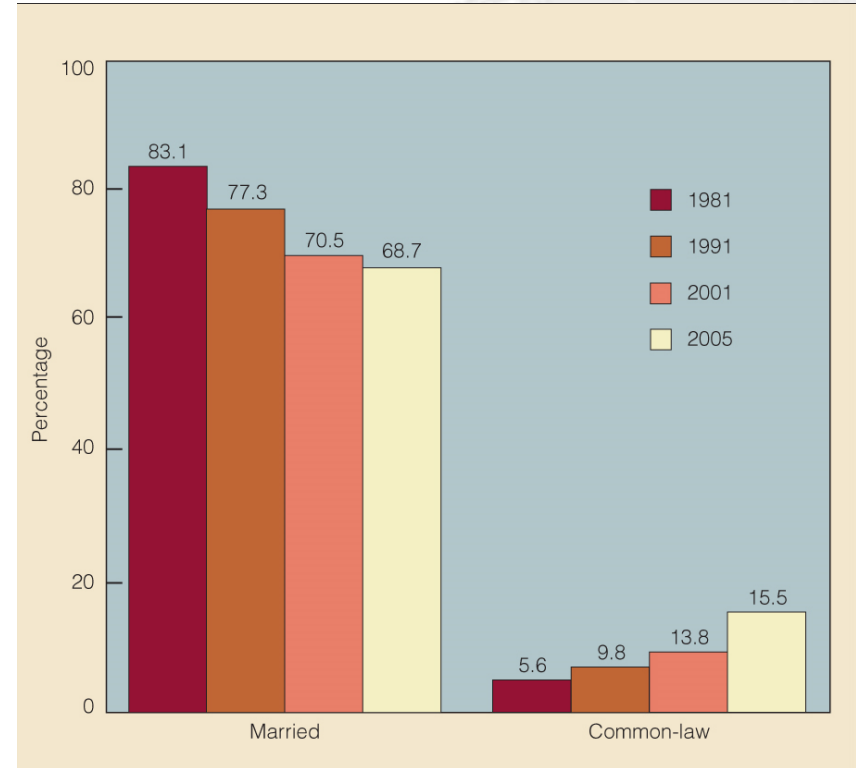
- This is at the heart of violence against women.
- Three factors contribute to this:
  - 1) low self esteem on the part of both
  - 2) limited range of behaviours
  - 3) a belief by both in stereotypic gender roles

# Postmodernist perspectives

- Postmodern family as permeable: capable of being diffused or invaded in such a manner that an entity's original purpose is modified or changed.
- The permeable family reflects the postmodern assumptions of difference, particularity, and irregularity.
- Urbanity is another characteristic of the postmodern family. The boundaries between the public sphere (the workplace) and the private sphere (the home) are becoming more open and flexible.
- As a result, family life may be negatively affected by the decreasing distinction between what is work time and what is family time.

# Establishing families

- Cohabitation: sharing of a household by a couple who live together without being legally married
- Increasing popularity in Canada: from 700,000 in 1981 to 1,4 million in 2006
- In Quebec, one in three couples lives common-law
- Proportion of common-law families grows, while the married couples' proportion declines



# Marriage

- The majority of Canadians will marry at some point in their lives, and the majority of marriages in Canada do last a lifetime
- Most people in Canada tend to choose marriage partners who are similar to themselves.
- Homogamy: the pattern of individuals marrying those who have similar characteristics (race/ethnicity, religion, age, education, or social class)
- Communication and emotional support are crucial to the success of marriages

# Remarriage

- Most people who divorce get remarried. In recent years, over 30% of all marriages were between previously married brides and/or grooms.
- Among individuals who divorce before age 35, about half will remarry within three years of their first divorce.
- Through remarriage, complex family relationships are often created.
- Some people become part of stepfamilies or blended families, which consist of a husband and wife, children from previous marriages, and children (if any) from the new marriage.
  - There are just over half a million stepfamilies in Canada.

# Deciding to have children

- On average, women are now having 1.5 children.
- Aboriginal women have a total fertility rate of 2.6.
- Sociologists believe that fertility is linked not only to reproductive technologies but also to women's beliefs that they do or do not have other opportunities in society that are viable alternatives to childbearing.



# Reproductive freedom and infertility

- The concept of reproductive freedom includes both the desire to have or not to have one or more children.
- The desire not to have children often comes in conflict with our society's pronatalist bias, which assumes that having children is the norm and can be taken for granted.
- **Infertility:** an inability to conceive after one year of unprotected sexual relationships.
  - Fertility problems originate in females: 30-40% of cases and men, about 40%; the rest unidentifiable.
  - Only about half of infertile couples who seek treatments can be helped.

# Adoption

- A legal process through which the rights and duties of parenting are transferred from a child's biological and/or legal parents to new legal parents.
- This procedure gives the adopted child all the rights of a biological child.
- There are fewer infants available for adoption today in Canada than in the past, and Canadians turn to international adoption

# Assisted Reproductive Technologies (1)

- **Test tube babies or in vitro fertilization**
- **Artificial insemination**
- **Surrogacy:** traditional and gestational
- Federal legislation specifies what practices are forbidden:
  - human cloning
  - sex selection
  - buying or selling human embryos and sperm

# Assisted Reproductive Technologies (2)

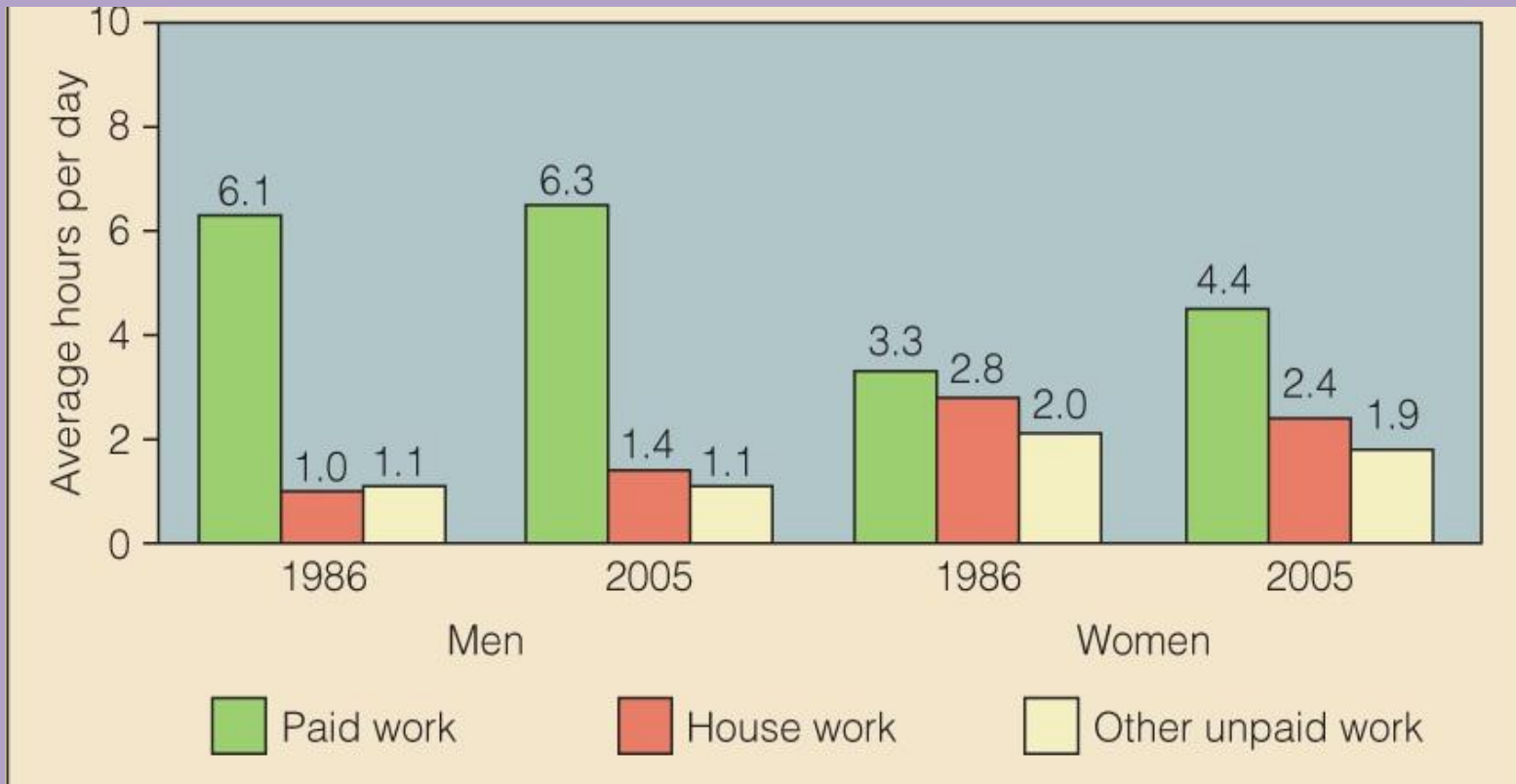
- Positives of new technologies:
  - Possible to screen for a number of life-threatening conditions.
  - Enables some infertile couples to become parents
- Negatives of new technologies:
  - May lead to the creation of what has been described as “unnatural selection”.

# Single-parent households

- About 20% of single-parent households are father-single-parent families.
- Among many of the men, a pattern of “involved fatherhood” has emerged.
- The courts continue to award mothers custody in divorces, but an increasing number of fathers are attempting to gain sole or joint custody of their children.

# Child-Care Responsibilities

- About 70% of all families in Canada are **dual-earner families**—families in which both partners are in the labour force.
- The **second shift**: the domestic work that employed women perform at home after they complete their workday on the job.
- Dependent children at home tend to increase the gap between paid and unpaid work within young dual-earner couples.
- Millions of parents rely on child care



## Time spent on paid and unpaid work, men and women