Your notes

GCSE Sociology: revision notes

Conjugal roles and relationships

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Conjugal roles

- **Conjugal roles** are the roles of partners in a relationship, especially in housework, childcare and paid work.
- **Segregated conjugal roles**: partners have separate roles, such as a male **breadwinner** and a female homemaker.
- **Joint conjugal roles**: partners share tasks and decisions.

The symmetrical family debate

- Young and Willmott (1973) argued that families were becoming more symmetrical: partners share roles more equally, as more women work and men help more at home. This is a "march of progress" view.
- Oakley (1974) disagreed. Her study of housewives found that few men did significant housework or childcare, and that the housewife role was still seen as women's.

Continuing inequality

- Many women face a **dual burden** (paid work plus most housework) or a **triple shift** (adding emotional work).
- Research on decision-making and money often finds men still have more control over major decisions.
- Domestic abuse is a serious issue, mostly affecting women, and shows the family can be a place of inequality and harm.

Key terms

Conjugal roles	The roles of partners in a relationship.
Segregated conjugal roles	Separate roles for partners.
Joint conjugal roles	Shared roles and decisions.

Symmetrical family	A family where partners share roles more equally.
Dual burden	Women doing paid work and most housework.
Triple shift	Paid work, housework and emotional work.
Breadwinner	The main earner in a household.

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. What are segregated conjugal roles?
2. What are joint conjugal roles?
3. Who argued that the family was becoming symmetrical?
4. What did Oakley find?
5. What is the dual burden?
6. What is the triple shift?
7. What is a breadwinner?
8. What view did Young and Willmott take of family change?

Answers

1. Separate roles for partners
2. Partners sharing tasks and decisions
3. Young and Willmott
4. Few men did significant housework or childcare
5. Women doing paid work and most housework
6. Paid work, housework and emotional work
7. The main earner in a household
8. A march of progress towards equality

What to do next

Practise 10 questions on this topic

Try 4 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

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