

Sociology Factsheet



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British Asians and Family Structure

There are many changes occurring within the British family, including fewer marriages, a rise in cohabitation, and increase in divorce rates, which has led to a change in the structure of the traditional British family.

This Factsheet will look at how British Asians have influenced the structure of families in Britain.

The information in this Factsheet is important for the study of the following topics:

- Families and Households,
- Culture and Identity,
- Research methods.

The Asian Family in Britain

Data from the latest (2011) Census shows that 86% of the UK population are classified as white, 7.5% as Asian or Asian British, 3.3% as Black, 2.2% as Mixed, and 1% as 'other'.

Different cultures have different family structures and this contributes to family diversity in British society.

Exam Hint: What is family diversity?

Make sure you can identify and explain the different types of families that exist within British society. Make sure that you know the differences between: nuclear families, extended families, single parent families, same sex families, reconstituted families, beanpole families, and single person households.

South Asian Family Life in the UK

Ballard (1982) found that most South Asian families had a much wider family network than a typical white British family and one individual household might be only one small part of a complex global network of kin-relations.

Ballard argued that South Asian family life in the UK in the 1980s was based on the ideal model of family life in Asia which is patriarchal, being based on tight control of women and concerned with maintaining family honour (getting divorced/ committing adultery or having children outside of wedlock would affect family honour). Maintaining honour was crucial to your ability to do business in the wider community.

Professor Richard Berthoud of the Institute for Social and Economic Research at the University of Essex found that Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities are most likely to live in traditional nuclear families, made up of two adults and their children. However, 33% live in extended families where they have strong connections to their kin and have more than one generation which includes grandparents, in-laws, aunts and uncles, and a long list of relatives, each with a specific title in relation to everyone else in the family. Asian family values focus on keeping the unit together, in one physical place if possible, and providing mutual support.

Exam Hint: Use this research as evidence for the existence of family diversity in the UK.

Marriage is still seen as a key milestone in British Asian family life.

Berthoud (2001) found the key feature of family life in South Asian communities is the very high rate of marriage.



A UK National Statistics report says the highest proportions of married couples under pension age, with or without children, are in Asian households.

Over half of Bangladeshi (54%), Indian (53%), and Pakistani (51%) households contained a married couple, compared with 37% of those headed by a White British person which demonstrates the importance of marriage for British Asian communities.

Arranged marriages are more common amongst Asian Families with parents selecting the husband for their daughter to marry.

One report from 2008 suggests that there are up to 3,000 third and fourth generation Asian women who likely to have marriages arranged for them.



Around three-quarters of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women are married by age 25, compared with about two-thirds of Indian women and half of white women. The majority of South Asians with a partner are in a formal marriage.

Single-parent families are far less common among Indians (ten per cent), Bangladeshis (12 per cent), Pakistanis (13 per cent), Chinese (15 per cent), and whites (22 per cent).



Activity

Summarise the key characteristics of family life for Asian families.

Exam Hint: Using statistics in your answers will show evidence and will give you important marks in the exam.

Divorce

Divorce has traditionally been seen as something shameful in Asian culture, with children under pressure to stay in loveless marriages in order to uphold the family's honour and prevent shame falling on the family. Divorce was a very taboo subject and seldom heard of within Asian communities.

Berthoud (2000) studied data from the 1993 - 94 National Survey of Ethnic Minorities and found the following rates of divorce and separation:

Ethnic Group	Divorce and Separation (%)
British Asians	4%
White British	9%
Black Caribbean	18%

He found that British Asian families were most committed to 'traditional' family life.

Exam Hint: Try not to generalise too much as although there are trends in marriage, divorce and separation among different ethnic groups it doesn't mean that it is the same for everyone within that ethnic group.

However, in more recent years, these traditional patterns are changing. As generations develop, British Asian society has started to take advantage of what British life offers. Asian men have started to go to university, and more Asian women are wanting to achieve higher qualifications and pursue professional careers.

No longer are many British Asian men and women thinking in the same way as their grandparents or parents, instead feeling a part of mainstream British society.

This has led to marriage not becoming the priority in their lives because careers, business and status take centre stage.

The trend in arranged marriages has declined and the concept of meeting their own partners has grown to the extent that young British Asian married couples are now more commonly living independently from family. The notion of the extended family is eroding. Marriages today are more about the unity of the couple rather than the families.

Lifestyle choices of British Asians have led to marriages happening later in life implying that they are more prepared for marriage when they feel they are ready, compared to when their parents and family think they are ready.

These changes have impacted family life, breaking the nucleus that was once prominent in Asian households.

This shift in the British Asian marital process has definitely provided more choice and less pressure for many but at the same time it has led to divorce happening more frequently too.

British Asian marriages are failing and many within the first year of marriage, these often include couples that have dated for a long period prior to marriage.



Reasons given for marriage break-up include boredom, lack of interest in a partner, in-law pressures, limited time for each other, imbalance in giving and taking, intolerance of each other, money and work pressures, arranged marriages, and extra-marital affairs.

Affairs and adultery incidents have risen dramatically amongst British Asians which include not only high rates in men but women too.

Many blame the advent of mobile phone culture, social networking, and Internet dating, making it very easy to meet new people.

Consequently, divorce today is now much more common among Asian couples.

Recent research funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), conducted by Qureshi in London and Peterborough, involved interviews with British Pakistani men and women about ageing

and family life. This research produced 28 interviews with people who described substantial marital conflict, or who were separated or divorced. Qureshi also spent long periods of time with families informally which gave the opportunity to have conversations with each spouse, their parents, parents in law, and adult children. Women were more talkative about their marriages than men.

The data revealed very different findings to the research of Berthoud, finding that the percentage of lone parent families in British Asian families had at least doubled since Berthoud's research.

	Lone parent families in British Pakistani and Bangladeshi families with dependent children	Lone parent families in British Indian families
1991 Census	10%	5%
2011 Census	17%	11%

These figures indicate a rise in long term separation and divorce. The research showed that the older generations were more likely to be against divorce than younger generations. They felt divorce created stigma for the family.

The research also showed that migration plays an important part in the lives of young people. Approximately 50% of British Pakistanis marry in Pakistan and bring their spouse to live with them in the UK. The attitudes and outlooks of young people brought up in the UK and in Pakistan may be significantly different and may produce marital conflict.

Couples who get married may not spend much time together either before marriage or after marriage. One spouse may return to the UK without their partner to apply for the entry visa for their Pakistani spouse – it can be several years before they are able to join their spouse in the UK. This absence from each other can lead to marriage difficulties when they are eventually together. Marriage migration brings pressures to the Pakistani marriage.

Research has also shown that marital conflict amongst Pakistani couples resulted from an unmet desire for love, intimacy, and fulfilment, which is also a fundamental cause of relationship breakdown in the wider UK population.

Exam Hint: This piece of research can be used as evidence when answering question about research methods.

Activity

Summarise why there has been a change in family structure within British Asian families.

Division of Labour

The majority of Bangladeshi and Pakistani women look after the house and family full time, rather than taking paid employment. The traditional family with a working 'breadwinner' husband and home based wife is more likely to be found in Pakistani and Bangladeshi than in any other ethnic group.

The majority of them look after their homes and families full-time, rather than taking paid jobs, although this traditional role is becoming less common as more women obtain higher educational qualifications. Therefore, for some British Asian couples, especially younger ones where both partners are working, domestic responsibilities are shared.

Activity

How are Asian Families and British families similar and how are they different?

Similar**Different**

Similar	Different

Activity

1. Using one example, briefly explain how family life may vary between ethnic groups.
2. Evaluate the view that cultural differences have contributed to growing diversity in personal and family life.