Families and Households

Worksheet 5.1: The UK Family in European Context

Read the passage below and answer the questions that follow

Although there are many differences between the current 25 EU Member States, there are a number of trends common to all the countries, including the UK.

There is a rapid change in the age composition of the EU populations, with a dramatic shift in the coming decades in the balance between people of working age and people over 65.

The share of the elderly in the population is increasing substantially, with the proportion of the very old (80+) expected to double over the period 2000–2030. They are the most in need of social protection through expenditure on pensions, health and long-term care. In some countries it is still common for older people to cohabit with their children. In others, older people typically live alone and a large proportion of the very old live in institutions. Many of the very old will need daily care, yet they will have fewer children to look after them and these may not be able to do so for professional reasons or due to geographical separation. LINE 10

There are also changes in family formation and household structures. The number of marriages has been declining and people are marrying at an older age. The number of divorces has been growing steeply. Couples have fewer children and they have them later in life. The number of lone-parent households is increasing and one third of these lone-parent families are exposed to poverty and social deprivation.

The traditional pattern of growing up in the parental home, finding a partner for life and raising a family and, for many women, widowhood is being replaced by a more diverse succession of situations marked by the separation and reconstitution of couples. There is a substantial growth in the number of people living alone. Today more than 12% of the EU population live alone compared to 8% in 1981. The majority of these people are elderly. LINE 20 Young people are tending to stay longer in their parental home compared to previous cohorts. As many as 56% of Italian young people aged 25–29 years — more men than women — are still living with their parents, compared to 18% in the UK. Over recent decades it has become the norm for married women and mothers to be in employment. This shift from the single- to the two-breadwinner model might be expected to lead to more similar time-use patterns for men and women. However, in an average working day adult women (between 20 and 74 years) still spend far more time on unpaid work, notably on domestic duties, than adult men. When both paid and unpaid work is taken together, women appear to carry out marginally more work than men (28% of their time for women and 27% for men). LINE 30 Men in most Member States continue to make a limited contribution to domestic and parental tasks. The gap between men and women in terms of employment and domestic work is highest among couples with children, in particular for households with young children (up to 6 years). Three quarters of the physical childcare for a child under the age of six (between $1^1/_2$ hours and 2 hours a day) is carried out by women. As the child grows older the time needed for childcare declines but women continue to shoulder a larger share of domestic duties.

Adapted from *The Social Situation in the European Union 2005-2006. Overview* European Commission & Eurostat, European Communities, 2007

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Questions

1. Identify six changes that are occurring across the countries of the European Union, and in each case explain how these changes might affect family life.

2. One of the problems facing all EU countries is the ageing population. Drawing on information in the passage and your own ideas, explain all the effects of the ageing population on:
a) family life
b) society

3. What term do sociologists use to describe a 'succession of situations marked by the separation and reconstitution of couples' (line 20)?

4. Suggest reasons why, across the European Union, there is a growing tendency for people to live with their parents for longer.

5. What proportion of the physical care of a child under six is carried out by women on average across the European Union?

6. The EU report suggests the shift from the single- to the two-breadwinner model (line 27) might be expected to lead to more similar time-use patterns for men and women.
a) What evidence is there in the passage that this has not happened?
b) Suggest three reasons why, across the EU, women still appear to take the major responsibility for housework and childcare.

7. a) Suggest three reasons why the number of lone-parent households is increasing in all countries of the European Union.
b) Suggest three reasons why 'one third of these lone-parent families are exposed to poverty and social deprivation' (lines 16-17).

8. Although the passage above identifies a range of common trends across the EU, suggest three areas in which you might expect to find differences in family life in different countries of the EU. Give reasons for your answers.