

Some of these groups overlap. For example, statistics show that children from lower social classes appear at higher risk of abuse and violence.

Furthermore, men who suffer domestic violence are also likely to belong to these groups.

### The materialist explanation

The materialist explanation of domestic violence focuses on economic and material factors such as inequalities in income and housing to explain why some groups are more at risk than others. For example, Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett (2010) see domestic violence as the result of stress on family members caused by social inequality.

#### Application

Suggest two reasons why poorer families are more likely to end up in the child abuse statistics than better-off families.

Inequality means that some families have fewer resources than others. Those on low incomes or living in overcrowded accommodation are likely to experience higher levels of stress. This reduces their chances of maintaining stable, caring relationships and increases the risk of conflict and violence. For example:

- worries about money, jobs and housing may spill over into domestic conflict as tempers become frayed
- lack of money and time restricts people's social circle and reduces social support for those under stress.

The findings of Wilkinson and Pickett show that not all people are equally in danger of suffering domestic violence: those with less power, status, wealth or income are often at greatest risk.

### evaluation

Wilkinson and Pickett's approach is useful in showing how social inequality produces stress and triggers conflict and violence in families. As those in lower social classes face greater hardship and thus stress, this helps to explain the class differences in the statistics on domestic violence.

However, unlike the radical feminist approach, Wilkinson and Pickett do not explain why women rather than men are the main victims.

**Marxist feminists** also see inequality causing domestic violence. For example, Fran Ansley (1972) describes wives as 'takers of shit'. She argues that domestic violence is the product of capitalism: male workers are exploited at work and they take out their frustration on their wives.

This helps to explain why domestic violence is male violence against females. However, it fails to explain why not all male workers commit acts of violence against their partners and it doesn't account for cases of female domestic violence. (See **Topic 3** for more about Marxist feminism.)

#### Activity Media

Why don't domestic violence victims leave?

...go to [www.sociology.uk.net](http://www.sociology.uk.net)

## Topic summary

Sociologists disagree as to whether couples are becoming more equal. **Functionalists** argue for the necessity of **segregated conjugal roles** based on biological differences between the sexes.

However, '**march of progress**' sociologists argue that the family is becoming more **symmetrical**, with joint conjugal roles.

**Feminists** disagree, arguing that men's contribution remains minimal and women now shoulder a **dual burden** of paid and unpaid work, or even perform a **triple shift** that also includes emotion work.

Couples remain unequal in terms of **decision making** and **control of resources**. Men earn more and are more likely to take the major decisions, even where incomes are pooled. **The personal life perspective** argues that we need to understand the different meanings money can have within a relationship.

**Radical feminists** argue that **domestic violence** is an extreme form of **patriarchal power** over women. However, though most victims are female, not all women are equally at risk.

## EXAMINING COUPLES

### QuickCheck Questions

Check your answers at [www.sociology.uk.net](http://www.sociology.uk.net)

- 1 Distinguish between instrumental and expressive roles.
- 2 State two features of the symmetrical family.
- 3 'Patriarchal norms shape gender roles in couples.' Is this a cultural or a material explanation?
- 4 What reason does Edgell give for why men have more power to influence family decision-making?
- 5 Why according to Smart is control of money less of an issue in some same-sex couples?
- 6 Suggest two reasons why domestic violence is not simply the behaviour of a few psychologically disturbed individuals.
- 7 Identify two other groups apart from women who are at risk of domestic violence.

### Questions to try

Whether or not you are taking the AS exams during your A level course, answering the AS questions below is a very good way of testing your knowledge and understanding and practising your skills in preparation for your A level exams.

**Item A** March of progress sociologists argue that the family is becoming more equal. Increasingly today, both partners are likely to have jobs outside the home and they both carry out household chores and provide childcare. However, feminist sociologists reject this claim. They argue that the family is still patriarchal and that women today carry a dual burden.

**Item B** Domestic violence accounts for up to a quarter of all recorded violent crime. Victims are more likely to be female and offenders male: domestic violence is linked to gender roles in patriarchal society. However, not all women are equally likely to suffer domestic violence. Victims – both female and male – are more likely to belong to disadvantaged social groups and live under difficult circumstances.

#### AS questions

- 1 Define the term 'dual burden'. (2 marks)
- 2 Using **one** example, explain why the 'pooling' system of managing household finances may not always show equality between spouses. (2 marks)
- 3 Outline **three** characteristics of the symmetrical family. (6 marks)

#### AS and A level question

- 4 Applying material from **Item A** and your knowledge, evaluate the view that the division of labour in couples is now equal. (20 marks)

#### A level question

- 5 Applying material from **Item B**, analyse **two** reasons for patterns of domestic violence. (10 marks)

### The Examiner's Advice

**Q4** Spend about 30 minutes on this. Focus on the division of labour, not on domestic violence or resources. Cover a range of issues, including both housework and childcare, and who is responsible for organising it, not just who does it, whether tasks themselves are gendered, the division of labour in same-sex couples etc. Develop points from Item A, e.g. on the dual burden, patriarchy and the impact of women's paid work. Use these and other key concepts and issues such as emotion work and triple shift, 'quality time', background fathers, gender scripts etc. Use evidence from studies such as Gershuny, Sullivan, Kan, Boulton, Braun et al, British Social Attitudes surveys, Dex and Ward, Crompton and Lyonette, Southerton and Dunne. Evaluate how useful different views are in explaining the evidence, especially march of progress and feminist views, and material and cultural explanations.

**Q5** Spend about 15 minutes on this question. Divide your time fairly equally between the two reasons. You don't need a separate introduction; just start on your first reason. To answer this question, it's essential that you take two points from the Item and show through a chain of reasoning (see page 248) how each reason explains a pattern. (It is a very good idea to quote from the Item when doing so.) You could use patriarchy, social disadvantage or living conditions. For example, in patriarchal society, men exercise power over women. This means domestic violence is used to ensure women fulfil subordinate roles. Use concepts and issues such as radical feminism, the materialist explanation, stress, class inequality, alcohol abuse etc, and studies such as Dobash and Dobash, Firestone, Wilkinson and Pickett, Dar, Cheal, Ansley and Robertson Elliot. Include some brief evaluation.