

The Changing Family

- The nature of families
- The effects of women's employment
- The impact of divorce and the "divorce divide"
- Teen Pregnancy
- Gay and lesbian families
- Homeless families
- Family violence
- Social policy

The Nature of Families

- **Kinship unit**-a group of individuals who are related to one another either by bloodlines or by some convention equivalent to marriage
 - Blood, marriage or adoption
 - Division of labor, economic, sex roles
- **Nuclear family**-a kinship unit that consists of a father, a mother, and their children, living apart from other kin
 - Predominant in hunting and gathering & industrial societies
 - Industrial-more mobile geographically and socially
- **Extended family**-a kinship unit that consists of parents, children, grandparents, and other related individuals who are living together
 - Predominant in agrarian societies
- Many family forms will coexist under same conditions

The Nature of Families

- **Modified extended family**-a family structure in which the individual nuclear families live separately but the extended family remains a strong kinship organization through a combination of interpersonal attachments among its members and various forms of economic exchanges and mutual aid
 - Almost all societies are organized around modified extended kinship units
- Families in all societies are organized by roles
- Over time, family roles change
- Change that creates the most disruption has to do with serious health disorders, marital infidelity and change in roles

Women's Employment

- 1960-60% of American families conformed to the traditional model of family with husband as breadwinner/wife as homemaker
- Today-71% of American women with children under the age of 18 work outside the home
- Economic hard times especially difficult for working mothers, especially single mothers; limited opportunities, working harder for less
- Since 1970, increasing numbers of men and women working more than 50 hours a week
 - On average, women work fewer hours than men in formal employment

Women's Employment

- Kathleen Gerson (1985)-Most women wished to stay home with their young children, but inequalities in the workplace, lack of support with domestic roles (sick leave) and spouses made it difficult
- Gerson (1993)-More men are starting to share responsibility for domestic tasks
- Almost 1 out of 5 men taking care of kids at home
- Still, more women than men choose to sacrifice long-term career goals and take part-time jobs so they can spend time at home raising their children
 - Part-time work a benefit for employers

Family Issues of Black Families

- Many of the problems of African-American families are in segregated in inner-city communities
- Rates of marriage vary positively with education:
 - Better-educated black women are more likely to marry than are less-educated women
 - White women with more education are less likely than those with less education to marry
- About 1/3 of all children live with a single parent (pg. 330)
- African-Americans have the greatest decline in two-parent families
- Low marriage rates of families of all races due to poverty and education differentials

Divorce

- Divorce and remarriage are now routine in American society
- Divorce closely linked to modernization and urbanization
- In 2005, half as many couples got divorced as married in the U.S.
 - 1.2 million divorces; 2.3 million marriages
- Recently, the divorce rate has risen among college-educated couples and those in higher socioeconomic groups
- 1/3 of all divorces occurs in first three years of marriage
- Reports of the divorce rate waning in recent years greatly due to the fact that fewer people are getting married
- Early marriages now being replaced by cohabitating couples

Divorce

- “Divorce divide”-families with highly educated mothers have divorce rates 1/3 lower than those of women without college degrees
- Divorce rates for those with less education at historic highs
- Divorce divide due to greater economic well-being of families with more economic resources
- Babies early in a marriage don’t necessarily “cement” marriages, but can strain couple’s time, energy, money, etc...
- Couples who plan their children have a better prognosis for their marriages

The Impact of Divorce

- Divorce accompanied by emotional and financial strain
- The leading cause of dependence of welfare is divorce or desertion
- Divorced mothers of lower SES may be forced into poverty
- 50% of divorces involve couples with one or more kids
- Kids experience divorce as the “end of life as they knew it”
- Kids and mothers many times experience a decrease in their material well-being
- Divorcing spouses experience anxiety, depression, and disorganization
- Children may feel frightened or confused
- 3 causes of strain: responsibility overload, task overload, emotional overload

Stepfamilies and Cohabiting Couples

- Stepfamilies
- Nearly 50% of families in the U.S. are stepfamilies
- 30 million children in blended families
- Cohabitation
- Has been increasing over the past decade at a rate of 15% each year
- Most common among people under age 25 and over age 65
- About 3.5 million cohabitating couples in the U.S.
 - Even more popular in parts of Europe
- In the U.S. cohabitation serves more as a trial marriage than a permanent arrangement
- Cohabitation though unstable, common step toward marriage

Postponement of Marriage

- Became more popular after WWII when young people began focusing more on education and careers
- Today women are postponing marriage longer than ever
- First marriage median age for women: 25.8 years
- First marriage median age for men: 27.1 years
- Implications of postponement
- Fewer children likely the longer a marriage is postponed
- Become grandparents later and for a shorter period of time
- Women who postpone may get caught in a “marriage squeeze”
 - Number of women who want to marry is greater than available men

Changing Norms of Parenthood

- Marriage is not always a prerequisite for parenthood
 - West Africa-no stigma attached as long as father's identity is known
 - Sexual activity not stigmatized, but promiscuity
- Overall, society still expects children to be provided with two recognized parents
- Problems of single parents the same whether the parent is unmarried, widowed or divorced
- Growing up fatherless never desirable
- A nurturing upbringing of utmost importance

Teen Pregnancy

- Teen birthrates have fallen to a level not seen in four decades
 - Fallen by 2/5 in past 15 years
 - Still, the U.S. ranks above other urban industrial nations
- U.S. ranks with Turkey, Indonesia and Philippines as nations with highest teen birthrates
- Japan, France, Germany, Britain significantly lower
 - More sex education, access to birth control, better health institutions
- Vermont has lowest rate within the United States at 27/1000
- South and Southwest have high rates (pg. 339)
- Rate of teen abortions has declined from a peak in mid 80s
 - 45/1000 women(mid 80s) to fewer than 30/1000 in late 90s

Gay and Lesbian Families

- Number of same-sex families is growing
- When Massachusetts became legalized same-sex marriages in 2005, 6,000 couples came forward to be legally married
- Some corporations like Disney and Xerox have extended health and other insurance benefits to the domestic partners of gay and lesbian employees
- An estimated 1/3 of lesbians and 1/5 of gay males have children from previous heterosexual marriages
- American Psychological Association has shown that children of gay unions are just as likely to be well-adjusted as children of heterosexual unions
 - Score equally well on intelligence tests
 - No more likely to be confused about sexual identity
 - They suffer by society rejecting their parents and family

Homeless Families

- Homelessness became a recognized social issue in 1980s
- Families are a large portion of the homeless population
- Number of homeless difficult to estimate depending on how it is defined; permanent, public housing, enforcement, etc...
- Harvard Joint Center for Housing Studies est. that there are about 750,000 homeless people on any given night in U.S.
- Families most at risk of homelessness are those that have experienced a divorce or desertion (reduction of income)
- Large majority of homeless families do not have relatives or close friends who can help them
- Homeless women and children also are often victims of violence

Shelter Poverty

- **Shelter poverty**-a condition in which a family must pay more than 30% of its monthly income for rent or other housing payments
 - Often low-paid workers in child care, retail, nursing homes, etc...
 - Leaves less money to be spent on other necessities like food, education, healthcare, etc...
 - 6% of all full-time workers experience severe housing cost burdens

Family Violence

- **Child abuse**-a deliberate attack on a child by a parent or other caregiver that results in physical injury
 - At least 750,000 children physically abused each year
 - Became a national issue in mid 1970s; 14% reported abuse
 - By mid-80s 11% reported abuse, has not significantly decreased since
- Autonomy of family
- Some estimates that only 1 in 3 cases is ever discovered
- At least half of victims have experienced abuse prior to report
- Almost 90% committed by child's parent/guardian
- Steele & Pollack: abusive parents demand high level of performance from child before child is old enough to understand
 - In every case, abusive parents had themselves been subject to unreasonable demands

Spouse Abuse

- Wives are most frequent victims
- Autonomy of family also has been an issue
- In 1980s response of police changed from “maintaining the peace” to arresting offenders and protecting victims
- “Learned helplessness”-many battered women don’t try to leave their abusers
 - Form of fatalism and dependency
- “battered women’s syndrome”-cycle of tension, belittlement, violence, remorse, and reconciliation
- 50,000 victims of spouse abuse every six months
- 2,400 arrests for violations of protective orders per 6 months

Social Policy

- Policies that improve the economic situation of families help decrease rates of marital breakup and divorce
- Divorce law-California in 1970 was first state to liberalize divorce laws
- No-fault divorce-judges decide on child custody and division of property without blaming one partner or requiring children to testify about parental behavior
 - Divorce rates have not increased disproportionately in states with no-fault divorce laws
- Louisiana, Arkansas, and Arizona have passed laws that create a “voluntary covenant” form of marriage
 - Sign a contract requiring them to seek counseling if problems, and forbids them from getting a “no-fault” divorce
 - Only adultery, felony conviction or abuse are grounds for divorce

Alimony

- **Alimony**-the money paid by one partner for the support of the other, after they have obtained a divorce
- Usually by the husband to the wife
- Has been closely tied with fault in divorce proceedings
 - Blame is determined, pay is a higher amount than would have been paid because of wrongdoing
- When divorce can be granted without punishment, alimony based on financial need and ability to provide instead of “restitution”

Child Support

- Child support collections from parents have been increasing steadily
- 1/3 of eligible children receive no child-support payments
- 12 million mothers who have legal custody, only 4.5 million receive child support payments
- Amount of child support due greater than amount received
- Currently, \$36 billion is overdue

Teen Pregnancy and Abstinence

- Sex education and access to birth control have been shown to decrease rates of teen pregnancy
- **Abstinence-only program**-a program designed to teach teenagers the value of remaining celibate until marriage
- During Bush administration, dept. of HHS invested \$140 million in these programs
- In studies, programs were shown to not influence sexual behavior
- Attendees had same number of partners as those who did not attend