

OxfordAQA

International AS/A-level

Sociology (9690)

Subject specific vocabulary

Used in our International AS and A-level exams

Families

Active ageing

the idea that later life can involve ongoing independence, good health, and a high quality of life, rather than being defined mainly by decline or dependency.

Age structure

the number of people in different age groups within a population.

Ageing population

a population with a growing proportion of older people, caused by longer life expectancy and lower birth rates.

Arranged marriage

a marriage where families play a significant role in choosing a partner.

Asylum seeker

someone who has left their country and applied for refugee protection in another country, but whose claim has not yet been decided.

Birth rate

the number of live births per 1000 of the population per year.

Boomerang families

families in which adult children return to live with their parents after a period of independence.

Bourgeoisie

the ruling class in capitalism who own the means of production (e.g. factories, businesses, land) and make profit from employing workers.

Bridewealth (or bride price)

property, money, or goods that are given by the groom or the groom's family to the bride's family as part of a marriage arrangement.

Canalisation

the way children are guided and encouraged to be interested in toys, games and other activities that are seen as gender appropriate.

Capitalism

an economic system where production is privately owned and run for profit purposes.

Child mortality rate

the number of deaths of children (often measured as under age 5) per 1,000 live births per year.

Child-centredness

the idea that families and societies place a high level of importance on children, focusing on their needs, wellbeing and happiness.

Children's home

a place where children who cannot live with their birth family are cared for by paid staff in a residential setting, with the state or local authority responsible for their safety and wellbeing.

Collectivism

where the needs and goals of the social group are more important than those of the individual.

Commune

a group of people who live together and share resources, such as housing, money, food, and childcare, rather than organising life around a traditional family structure.

Conflict theory

sees society as based on inequality and power struggles between different groups (for example, social classes, genders, ethnic groups). It argues that social institutions often benefit the powerful and help maintain inequality rather than harmony. Marxism and feminisms are examples of conflict theories.

Confluent love

a relationship in which people hope to have a high degree of emotional intimacy, not necessarily for life, but for as long as they are fulfilled and happy.

Conjugal family system

a couple-based family structure.

Connectedness thesis

people have choices but these are always linked and influenced by existing relationships and personal histories.

Consensus theory

sees society as based on shared values and agreement. It argues that social institutions (such as the family, education, and religion) work together to maintain social order and stability because most people accept common norms and rules. Functionalism is an example of a consensus theory.

Death rate

the number of deaths per 1000 of the population per year.

Demography

the study of the characteristics of human populations, including their size and structure and how these change over time.

Dependency ratio

the number of dependent young and old compared to the population of working age. It is used to show how many people are economically dependent on those who are in work.

Deterministic

the idea that people's behaviour is moulded (determined) by their social surroundings.

Diasporas

people who have migrated from their country of origin but continue to maintain cultural, social, economic, or emotional links with their homeland, often across several countries and generations.

Domestic division of labour

the division of roles, responsibilities and work tasks within a household.

Domestic violence

a pattern of behaviour in any relationship that is used to gain or maintain power and control over a family member.

Dowry

property, money, or goods that are given by the bride's family to the groom or the groom's family at the time of marriage.

Dual burden

when a woman has paid work but is also responsible for domestic labour, often resulting in unreasonable pressure being placed on them.

Emigration

leaving a country to live in another country.

Expressive role

a role focused on emotional care and support within the family.

Extended family

a family that includes relatives beyond parents and children, such as grandparents or aunts.

False class consciousness

the idea that the working class are unaware of their exploitation, accepting capitalist ideas as 'normal' or 'fair', so they don't challenge inequality.

Familistic welfare model

a system where the family is expected to do most of the caring and supporting (especially childcare and looking after elderly relatives) because government support is smaller or harder to access. Families rely more on grandparents and adult children as a 'safety net'.

Family

a group of people connected by blood, marriage, adoption or long-term care who provide support for one another.

Family diversity

the wide range of different family forms and relationships found within and across societies.

Family honour

protecting the family's reputation in the community.

Family system

the way family life is organised across a whole society, including rules, roles and power relationships.

Fertility rate (total)

the average number of children a woman is expected to have during their fertile years.

Filial duty

the belief or expectation that adult children have a responsibility to care for and support their ageing parents.

Foster care

a form of alternative care where a child lives with approved foster carers (not their birth parents) either temporarily or long-term, with the local authority or state responsible for their welfare.

Functional fit theory

the idea that the most common type of family at a particular time 'fits' the needs of society. For example, extended families are seen as fitting pre-industrial societies, while nuclear families are seen as best meeting the needs of industrial societies.

Gender inequality

the unequal treatment of people based on their gender.

Gender role socialisation

the process by which children learn norms and values associated with being male or female.

Globalisation of Western childhood

the process by which Western ideas of childhood spread to other parts of the world through global media, international organisations, and laws.

Horizontally extended family

an extended family that includes relatives from the same generation.

Household

a group of people who live together in the same home.

Immigration

movement into a country.

Individualism

emphasises the needs and goals of the individual.

Individualistic welfare model

a system where the government provides most support directly to individuals (e.g. childcare help, healthcare, benefits), so people don't have to rely as much on their family for care or money. Families are more independent.

Individualisation

the process whereby traditional social relationships, roles and beliefs lose their influence over the lives of individuals.

Industrialisation

the process where a society shifts from mainly agricultural production to manufacturing and factory-based industry.

Infant mortality rate

the number of deaths of babies under 1 year old per 1,000 live births per year.

Instrumental role

a role focused on earning income and providing financial support for the family.

Intergenerational relationships

the social, emotional, and practical connections between different generations within a family, such as between grandparents, parents, and children. These relationships often involve the exchange of care, support, values, and resources across generations.

Joint conjugal roles

husbands and wives share roles and responsibilities more equally, including housework, childcare, decision-making, and they are more likely to spend leisure time together.

Kinship

a system of social relationships based on blood, marriage or recognised family ties.

Latent kin

extended family members who are not involved in daily life, but who constitute a 'hidden' network of potential support.

Life expectancy

the average number of years a person is expected to live, based on current death rates in a population.

Lineage/clan-based family system

a family structure based around extended kinship.

Love marriage

a marriage based on individual choice and personal relationships.

Marriage

a socially recognised relationship between adults, shaped by cultural and legal rules.

Matriarchy

a system where women hold most power and authority in the family and/or society. Women are more likely to control decision-making, resources, and key roles. Matriarchal families are debated and are considered rare in practice.

Matrifocal

families are organised around mothers and their children.

Matrilineal inheritance

property, titles and lineage are passed down through the female line.

Migration

the movement of people from one place to another, either within a country or across international borders, usually involving a change of residence.

Monogamy

a marriage system in which a person has one partner at a time.

Neolocal living

when a newly married couple establish a household of their own, away from their parents and family.

Net migration

the difference between the number of immigrants and the number of emigrants over a period of time.

Nuclear family

a family made up of two parents and their children living together.

Old age as a social construct

the idea that what it means to be 'old' is not fixed or purely biological, but is shaped by social attitudes, culture, and historical context, meaning experiences of old age vary between societies and over time.

One-person household

a household made up of one individual living alone.

Organic analogy

comparing society to a human body.

Paranoid parenting

a term describing parenting that is overprotective and highly risk-aware, where parents closely monitor children due to fears about their safety.

Patriarchy

a system where men hold most power and authority, both in the family and wider society. Men are more likely to control decision-making, resources, and key roles, while women are often expected to take subordinate or caregiving roles.

Patrilocal living

when a woman gets married and moves in with, or next door to, her parents-in-law.

Polygamy

a person may have more than one partner at a time.

Proletariat

the working class who sell their labour for wages to survive.

Refugee

a person who flees their country and has been legally recognised as needing protection because they face serious danger if they return.

Risk society

the manner in which modern society organises in response to risk.

Sandwich families

families where adult children are caring for both dependent children and ageing parents at the same time, placing them 'in the middle' of caring responsibilities.

Segregated conjugal roles

husbands and wives have separate roles in the family, with a clear division between paid work (typically the man) and domestic work/childcare (typically the woman), and they often spend leisure time separately.

Single-parent family

a family in which one adult is responsible for raising one or more children.

Social construct

something that is created through social interactions and defined by people, such as childhood.

Social construction of childhood

the idea that childhood is not fixed or natural, but is a created society, meaning children's experiences vary across different cultures and historical periods.

Social institutions

the structures that make up society, such as the family, education, religion, work, and media.

Social status

the social position a person or group holds in society.

Structural differentiation

the process by which institutions, such as the family, become more specialised, with different organisations taking over roles that were once carried out by a single institution – for example, hospitals taking over healthcare. This leaves the family with fewer, more specialised functions.

Symmetrical families

families in which partners share roles more equally, with a more balanced division of housework, childcare, and decision-making, rather than having strictly traditional *male breadwinner/female homemaker* roles.

Toxic childhood

the view that modern childhood is becoming harmful due to factors such as pressure from education, media influence, family breakdown, and loss of freedom.

Transnational families

families whose members live in different countries but maintain close emotional and financial ties through communication, remittances, and visits.

Transnational family

a family whose members are separated physically between two or more countries but maintain close ties and relationships.

Triple shift

the combination of paid work, domestic work and emotional work carried out by many women.

Unit of consumption

the role of the family as a group that buys and uses goods and services produced by capitalist businesses.

Urbanisation

the process where an increasing number of the population live in towns and cities, often due to people moving from rural areas to urban areas for work and services.

Value consensus

general agreement around the main values of a society.

Vertically extended family

an extended family that includes several generations.

Warm bath theory

the idea that the family acts as a 'warm bath' by providing comfort and emotional support that helps adults cope with the stresses of work and wider society.

Socialisation and social control

Ability

socially constructed ideas about what a person should be able to do, mentally and physically.

Achieved status

a status a person creates for themselves through effort.

Agencies of socialisation

the different people, groups and institutions that teach an individual the norms, values and behaviours of the society in which they live.

Agenda setting

the process through which people working in the media industry determine what is to be considered important and what to prioritise or overlook in terms of the news.

Ascribed status

a status given to a person at birth.

Assimilation identity

individuals or groups adopt the norms, values and behaviours of a dominant culture.

Capital punishment

the death penalty. The state-sanctioned execution of an offender for crimes including murder, terrorism or treason.

Cohort

a group of people with a shared characteristic.

Collective identity

an individual's sense of belonging to a group, and how that group is seen by others.

Colonial identity

the identity formed under foreign domination, characterised by notions of a superior coloniser and an inferior colonised.

Colonialism

when one nation establishes political and economic control over another nation or territory, usually through settlement or conquest.

Conflict view/theory

a perspective that focuses on the inequalities and conflict between various groups in society.

Consensus view/theory

a perspective that regards social control as having a beneficial effect on society.

Consumption

the process of buying and using goods and services.

Corporal punishment

a physical punishment intended to cause pain, such as flogging, beating and mutilation.

Corporate crime

a crime carried out by, or on the behalf of, a company, with the aim of making greater profits for the business.

Culture

the shared way of life of a group of people.

Custodial punishment

imprisonment for a period of time set by the court.

Cybercrime

criminal activities carried out by means of computers or the internet.

Dark figure of crime

the volume of criminal offenses that are committed but never reported to the police or recorded in official statistics.

Deviance

behaviour that is seen as wrong in a given time and place.

Deviance amplification

when the media exacerbate the crime that they are reporting about by exaggerating it or reporting it in a distorted way.

Deviant subculture

a group that develops values, norms and behaviours differing from, and often opposing, the mainstream culture.

Diaspora

a group of people who have migrated from their homeland but maintain strong cultural and emotional ties to it.

Disability

a physical or mental impairment which affects a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

Discreditable identities

identities where the stigma is hidden but could be exposed.

Discredited identities

identities where the stigma is visible.

Discrimination

unfair or prejudicial treatment of people and groups based on characteristics such as race, gender, age or sexual orientation.

Elite

a small group of people holding great power and privilege in society.

Ethnic group

a community made up of people who share a common cultural background.

Ethnicity

an individual's shared cultural identity.

Folk devils

groups whose behaviour is seen as a threat to society.

Formal social control

the ways governments and institutions maintain order and regulate behaviour through laws, rules and official sanctions.

Framing theory

related to agenda setting; the media focuses attention on certain events and then places them within a field of meaning. How something is presented to the audience ('the frame') influences the choices people make about how to process that information.

Gender

socially constructed ideas about what it means to be a man or a woman in a specific time and place.

Generalised other

when an individual understands and responds to the attitudes and viewpoints of those in their society.

Generational identity

a group of people born and living during the same time.

Globalisation

the growing interconnectedness of economic, cultural and political structures across the world due to the exchange of views, products and ideas, and other forms of culture.

Green/environmental crime

illegal activities that harm the environment, wildlife, natural resources or human health.

Hegemony

Gramsci's concept to explain how dominant groups maintain power through the subtle use of ideas to win the consent of subordinate groups.

Heterosexuality

a sexual orientation towards people of the opposite sex.

Hidden curriculum

the informal learning processes that occur in school. they are the assumptions, unwritten rules, beliefs, values and customs which exist alongside the formal curriculum.

Hybrid identity

an individual forms an identity which combines elements from two cultures into a single identity.

Identity (individual)

how individuals see and define themselves and how other people see and define them.

Ideological state apparatus (ISA)

a state institution that maintains social control by shaping people's beliefs, values and ideas, and encouraging individuals to accept the existing social order without the use of force.

Impairment

some loss, limitation or difference of functioning of the mind or body.

Impression management

the ways individuals attempt to control how they are perceived by others; also known as self-presentation.

Inadequate socialisation

the result of an individual not being fully socialised; failing to learn the norms and values of a society.

Informal social control

everyday methods used by society to encourage individuals to follow norms and behave appropriately.

In-group

the group an individual identifies with and feels they belong to.

Interpellation

according to Althusser, ideologies 'hail' people and offer them a particular identity which they are encouraged to accept. They are not forced to accept that role through violence.

Master status

a dominant status that overrides all other statuses that person may have; often, a person is judged on their master status.

Moral entrepreneurs

individuals or groups who seek to have certain behaviours defined as deviant.

Moral panic

an exaggerated fear, often of a group or a behaviour.

Nationalism

a sense of pride and commitment to a nation, and a very strong sense of national identity.

Nationality

having citizenship of a nation state, including the right of residence, voting rights and a passport.

Negotiated order

a concept that emphasises the dynamic and interactive nature of social order.

Non-custodial punishment

discharges, fines and community order, but not imprisonment.

Norms

unwritten rules that guide how people are expected to behave.

Othering

the process through which some individuals or groups are seen and treated as different or separate from the dominant group in society.

Out-group

a group the individual doesn't belong to.

Peer group

a group of people of similar status, and usually age, who an individual regularly has contact with.

Personal troubles

a problem affecting an individual.

Person-first language

a way to emphasise the person before the disability.

Police statistics

records of crimes that have been reported to the police and formally recorded by them.

Policing

how the police survey, control and enforce rules using their authority.

Precariat

a social class formed by people without stability or security in work, income and life.

Primary socialisation

socialisation during the early years of childhood which takes place within the family.

Property crime

a crime involving the theft, damage or destruction of property.

Public issues

large-scale faults in society.

Race

a socially constructed idea often centred around physical characteristics and how society responds to these characteristics.

Racism

according to UNESCO, racism is any theory that involves the claim that one racial or ethnic group is inherently superior to another.

Repressive state apparatus (RSA)

a state institution that maintains ruling-class dominance through force and coercion.

Resistance identity

protesting against and countering a mainstream identity that disadvantages another group.

Re-socialisation

learning new norms and values to enable people to operate in a changed or new social environment, or when their life circumstances change.

Role allocation

the idea that education sifts and sorts into the correct job or role in society.

Roles

the patterns of behaviour that are expected from individuals in society.

Sanction

an action taken in order to make individuals obey a law or rule, or a punishment given when they do not obey.

Secondary socialisation

socialisation that takes place beyond the family and continues throughout life.

Self-branding

creating a public persona in order to influence others and gain followers.

Self-report studies

anonymous questionnaires asking individuals to confess to crimes they have committed.

Sex

the biological features that differentiate men from women.

Social action (interactionist) theory

a theory that emphasises the creative action people take. It focuses on the meanings and motives people attach to their behaviour.

Social class

a broad group of people who share a similar economic situation, such as occupation, income and ownership of wealth.

Social construct

something that is created through social interactions and defined by people, such as childhood.

Social construction of deviance

the view that no acts or behaviours are automatically deviant. Deviance is defined by society.

Social control

the methods used to persuade or force individuals to conform to values and norms.

Social harms

a term used to describe deviant behaviour. The behaviour is not illegal or officially a crime.

Socialisation

the process by which norms and values are passed on and learned.

Sociological imagination

an awareness of the relationship between personal experiences and larger societal forces that shape a person's choices and perceptions.

State crime

an illegal activity carried out by, or on the behalf of, the government.

Status

the position a person occupies in society; the importance a person has in the eyes of others in that society.

Stereotype

an oversimplified and generalised view of a social group.

Stigma

a quality or characteristic an individual may have that others view negatively.

Subculture

a smaller culture held by a group of people within the main culture of a society.

Surveillance capital

a new form of capitalism that uses personal data taken from surveillance as its raw material.

Surveillance

how agencies such as the police watch and monitor people, places or activities to gather information with the aim of preventing or investigating crime.

Taking the role of the other

when an individual tries to imagine how others see them.

The self

how we see ourselves from the perspective of others.

Third space

where a cultural encounter occurs between the coloniser and the colonised, producing a hybridity in culture.

Value consensus

general agreement around the main values of a society.

Values

the shared beliefs about what is right or acceptable in society.

Victim surveys

questionnaires or structured interviews that ask people if they have been victims of crime.

Victimless crime

a crime in which no individual is harmed or injured.

Violent crime

a crime involving physical force against another individual.

Virtual community

a group of people who interact online through shared interests or values.

White-collar crime

crimes of powerful groups, often including individuals who are less likely to be policed and punished in society.

Research methods

Activism

taking action to create social change.

Agency

behaviour that is self-motivated; actions are derived from choice rather than structures.

Capitalism

a society based on private property, which is divided into social classes.

Causation

when one variable directly affects another.

Closed-ended questions

questions that give people a set of fixed answers to choose from. Also known as multiple-choice responses.

Collective conscience

the shared moral values that serve to enforce social integration and order in society.

Communism

an equal society, without social class or class conflict, in which the means of production are the common property of everyone.

Concepts

sets of related ideas.

Conflict theories

perspectives that focus on the inequalities and conflict between various groups in society.

Consensus theories

perspectives that regard society as having a beneficial effect on the individual and social groups.

Correlation

a statistical relationship between two variables.

Covert observation

when the researcher's identity and purpose are hidden.

Data interpretation

the process of making sense of data by identifying patterns, explanations and meanings.

Deterministic

the idea that people's behaviour is moulded (determined) by their social surroundings.

Ethnography

the detailed study of people in their natural setting to understand their way of life.

Feminism

examining the world from the point of view of women; the belief that women are disadvantaged and their interests ignored or devalued in society.

Field experiment

research conducted in a natural setting where one variable is still changed.

Field notes

written records a researcher makes while observing people during a study.

Functional prerequisites

the basic needs society must satisfy to survive and remain stable.

Functionalism

a theory that see society as made up of parts that work together to maintain society as an integrated whole.

Gatekeeper

a person who gives access to a group or research setting.

Generalisability

the extent to which research findings can be applied to a wider population.

Going native

when a researcher becomes too involved with the group they are studying and loses objectivity.

Group interview

an interview involving several participants at once.

Hawthorne effect

when participants change their behaviour because they know they are being observed.

Hegemony

dominance or leadership, especially by one social class over another.

Inference

reaching a conclusion based on evidence and reasoning.

Interpretivism

a methodological perspective that claims sociological research should use qualitative data to develop an understanding of people's thoughts, feelings and meanings behind behaviour.

Interview bias

when the presence of the interviewer influences how participants respond.

Interviewer-led survey

(structured interview) an interview with a fixed set of standardised questions asked in the same order.

Laboratory experiment

research conducted in a controlled setting where variables are carefully managed.

Longitudinal study

research that follows the same individuals or groups over a long period of time.

Marxism

a conflict theory that sees society as two opposing social classes due to the private ownership of the means of production and the exploitation of the non-owners by the owners.

Means of production

land, tools, raw materials, machinery, factories.

Micro

an approach that focuses on small groups or individuals, rather than the structure of society as a whole.

Modernism

the belief that knowledge, science, and reason can lead to progress and a better world.

Neo-functionalism

A modern development of functionalism that recognises society as made up of interdependent parts, but also accepts conflict, change and individual action play a role in shaping social structures.

Neo-Marxism

an extension of Marxism that includes culture, ideology, and individual agency.

Non-participant observation

when the researcher observes behaviour without joining in.

Objectivity

approaching research in a way that is based on facts and not influenced by personal beliefs or feelings.

Official statistics

government-collected data on areas such as crime, health or education.

Open-ended questions

questions that allow people to give their answers in their own words.

Operationalisation

measuring a concept during research.

Oppression

a set of systematic disadvantages.

Overt observation

when participants know they are being studied.

Participant observation

when the researcher takes part in the group's activities while observing.

Patriarchy

a system of male power and dominance.

Personal document

a record created by an individual that reflects their life or social context.

Pilot study

a trial run of a research method using a small sample.

Population

the group of people from which the sample will be taken.

Positivism

a methodological perspective that claims sociological research should be conducted in a scientific way by using quantitative data.

Postmodernism

a view that because of the constant change that has brought about postmodernity, the old ways of understanding the social world no longer apply.

Postmodernity

a description of the world today that is complex and constantly changing shaped by the forces of globalisation, technology, and the media.

Primary data

information collected by sociologists themselves, using a range of research methods.

Public document

a record produced for public knowledge.

Public sociology

the application of sociology to the wider public to promote understanding and change.

Qualitative data

non-numerical information that explores meanings, feelings and experiences.

Quantitative data

information that can be measured and expressed in numbers.

Questionnaire

a written set of questions used to collect information from respondents.

Reliability

the ability to replicate the research method in the same way over time.

Representative

how far findings from a sample can be applied to the wider population.

Representativeness

how far findings from a sample can be applied to the wider population.

Researcher bias

when a researcher's own opinions or expectations unintentionally affect their research.

Right answerism

respondent answers to questionnaires may be influenced by social desirability. For example, if someone is asked, 'Do you recycle?' they might say 'Yes' even if they don't, because they want to appear responsible.

Sample attrition

the loss of participants during the course of a study. It is particularly common in longitudinal research, as participants may move, lose interest, or become unavailable over time.

Sampling

using a smaller part of a larger group of people to research.

Sampling frame

an existing list or database of named individuals from which the sample can be drawn.

Secondary data

information that has been created by others but is used for sociological research.

Semi-structured interview

an interview with some predetermined open-ended questions that allows the interviewer to ask follow-up questions.

Social class

classes are defined by their relationship to the means of production. The ruling class own and control the means of production. The subject class (working class) do not.

Social construct

something that is created through social interactions and defined by people, such as childhood.

Social desirability

when participants try to please the researcher by giving answers they think are expected.

Social facts

the values, laws and customs of a society. They exist outside of the individual but impact their behaviour.

Socialism

a society where the means of production, distribution, and exchange are owned by the community as a whole (collective ownership).

Sociology

the study of the social world around us.

Social solidarity

people feel they belong to society; they feel part of a group.

Structure

external factors that shape human behaviour.

Structured interview

(interviewer-led survey) an interview with a fixed set of standardised questions asked in the same order.

Subjectivity

making a judgement based on your own feelings and personal bias.

Survey

a method of collecting data from people through pre-set and standardised questions.

Symbolic interactionism

a perspective concerned with understanding human behaviour in face-to-face situations.

Symbols

things that have shared meanings; they can be objects, words, or images.

The biological analogy

the idea that society is like a living organism.

The self

how people see themselves and how they think others see them.

Triangulation

using more than one method, source, or researcher to study the same topic.

Unstructured interview

a flexible interview that allows respondents to answer in their own words.

Validity

how accurately data reflects people's real experiences.

Value free

research that is objective; there are no personal opinions or biases.

Value laden

research that is subjective; the researcher's personal values or beliefs influence the results.

Verstehen

understanding human behaviour by putting yourself in the position of the people being studied; having empathy with them.