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Q8(c)

Distinguish between family and household as sociological concepts.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2016 · Sociology GS 1 · 15 marks · Systems of Kinship

Systems of Kinship: Family, household, marriage; Types and forms of family; Lineage and descent; Patriarchy and sexual division of labour; Contemporary trends.

Core demand of the question

- Distinguish between family and household as sociological concepts
- Keep the distinction within a 15-mark length

Revision summary

- **Family:** kinship, descent, **alliance**, and care norms, including non-resident kin.
- **Household:** coresidence and shared domestic economy, including non-kin.

Mead, Levi-Strauss, Parsons, **Marx**, and Oakley attach to family functions and household labour.

Census and NFHS count households; family obligations often exceed the roof.

Distinction matters for migration, servants, and women's claims.

Introduction

Family and household are often collapsed in everyday talk and in some **Census** tables. Sociologically they answer different questions. Family is a kinship and marriage relation. Household is a residential and commensal unit.

Body

Family

- A set of relations of descent, **alliance**, and parenthood, with norms of care, sexuality, and succession.
- It can be nuclear, joint, or extended in ideology without sharing one roof.
- **George Herbert Mead:** the family as the first game of roles, which can include absent kin.
- **Claude Levi-Strauss:** **alliance** may bind groups who never coreside.
- Talcott Parsons specialised the modern family in socialisation; that is a function of a kinship unit, not a house plan.

Household

- Persons who live together and typically share a cooking pot, as **Census household** definitions try to capture.
- **Can include servants, lodgers, and friends:** not all are kin.
- Can exclude migrant spouses and children who remain family.

- **Karl Marx**: the household is often the site of **reproduction of labour-power**, including unpaid care that Ann Oakley made visible.

Distinction

- Family is jural and moral belonging. Household is a dwelling-and-budget unit.
- **Max Weber**'s household communism of consumption is a possible household form, not the whole of kinship.
- **Emile Durkheim**'s domestic morals can stretch across several households of a lineage.
- NFHS interviews a household; many family decisions sit with kin outside it.

Why the cut matters

- Policy that targets "household income" can miss women's natal family claims and split-migrant families.
- Calling every **Census** house a "family" hides female-headed residential units that still sit in a patriarchal family system.

Flow diagram

Family kinship alliance -> Care descent marriage
Household residence -> Shared dwelling budget
Family kinship alliance -> Overlap not identity
Household residence -> Overlap not identity

Conclusion

Family names kinship, marriage, and care obligations. Household names who coresides and shares a domestic economy. Mead, Levi-Strauss, **Marx**, and official surveys all need the split. Do not read the cooking pot as the whole of kinship, or the lineage as a single address.

Facts & figures

Census household

Usually a coresident group sharing a cooking arrangement; an operational, not a full kinship, unit.

Alliance

Marriage exchange that creates family ties across households.

Reproduction of labour-power

Marxian reading of what households do for capitalism, including unpaid care.

Female-headed household

A residential fact that may still sit inside a male-line family ideology.