

Comparing modern australian families with traditional afghan families sociology e...



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The result of comparing and contrasting modern Australian families with traditional families in Afghanistan can only be understood by recognising some of the complexities in the ideology and practices associated with both these families.

This essay will focus on 3 components,

Who are the family members?

What do the family members do?

How are the families connected to other groups?

Issues that will be discussed will include the complexity of family relationships, the nuclear family, patriarchy, education, feminism, employment and government supplied welfare, which will be examined in detail. The conclusion all the findings will be drawn together, with particular focus on the impact of the outcomes, and issues pertaining to the children in both cultures.

WHO ARE THE FAMILY MEMBERS

In Australia today, the Nuclear Family is still the most common type of family structure, with a (Welfare, 2005). This is in contrast to years ago when the family composition was predominately the extended family, where three or more generations would reside under the one roof, this represented a family model that was one of more meaning and sharing of responsibilities and workload. (Australia, 2005) The thought that families consisted only of members, who were related by blood, is now almost a thing of the past.

Kinship terminology is used to give classification to the family members

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according to the relationship in the family e. g. sister, brother, mother father (Cheal, 2002, p. 3). Kinship can also apply to members entering the family by marriage or co-habitation or adoption; e. g. son-in-law, uncle or aunts, sister-in-law and so on.

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Family structures are diverse and multifaceted throughout Australian society. Types of families include the Nuclear Family, Cheal (2002 p. 3) also describes the Nuclear Family as a 'traditional' family, which consists of a two generational family, a mother and a father and siblings, all living in the one home. This model also includes the extended family which is comprised of grand parents, uncles and aunts and cousins living in their own separate households (Australia, 2005).

Industrialisation, modernisation and secularisation have all had a significant impact on family life and the formation of families in Australia. More individual independence, a move away from religious constraints and Government acknowledgment of alternative family arrangements, have allowed individuals the ability to choose a life style more personalised allowing self fulfilment (McDonald, 1995, as cited in Cheal 2002. p. 20). The willingness of society to accept these changes and choices has led to an increase in, co-habitation between same sex couples, fewer births in marriages but an increase in births outside of marriage giving rising to more single parent families; with individual freedom has come a more self-directed way of life. There is also an increase in separations, divorces, and re connecting with other partners and increases in step families (Baker)

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A significant number of modern traditional families are now isolated, both geographically, due to transient way of life, and socially due to our need to remain autonomous. Families today are also experiencing rapid technological growth and more individualistic attitudes to relationships, adding to the complexities facing modern family.

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The family still remains the most fundamental institution in Afghan society (Peter R Blood, 2001). The extended family is the traditional type of the Muslim family, often with three or more generations living in the one household (Anwar 1994, as cited in Dhimi, 2000). Elderly parents are given a hierarchic position in the family unit and are esteemed on the grounds of their life experiences. It is regarded as a reward to be able to look after ones parents in their final years (Long, 2003). Traditional families in rural Afghanistan live in a group of buildings called a 'kala', this is an area that is completely surrounded by walls. Living in this compound is the land owner and his extended family, which comprises his parents, his wife, or, in some cases wives, as polygyny is allowed in Afghanistan. A man may have up to 4 wives if he can afford to look after them, although today the practice is not as common as years ago. Also living in kala are the married sons and their families, young children and unmarried female relatives (Dr Robson & Dr Lipson). The nuclear family structure in Afghanistan is seen as endangering the ideals of the family, e. g. being loyal to one another and looking after each other. The nuclear family is also blamed for causing the generation gaps in families because family members do not live together. The extended

family promotes acculturation and socialisation which the nuclear family does not (Faruqi).

Kinship bonds are very important in Islam and if someone cuts the family ties they are said to be cursed by Allah. The Qur'an has two examples of Allah cursing the person who severed the bonds of kinship (Baig, 2003).

What Do The Family Members Do?

In a 'traditional' family where both partners are employed, combining the income is usually the norm, monetary control is usually held by the male, allocating a stipend to his wife or partner to handle the day to day shopping (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983, as cited in Cheal, 2002, p. 109).

3

Women in Australia today still fit into the gender assigned roles, following generations of women before them (Cheal, 2002, p. 101). Changes in modern day society due in part to feminism, are challenging the traditional patriarchal gender roles in families, (Barrett, 1980), the emergence of more single parent families has added to the already increased work load for women, who now have more responsibility, less pay, and disadvantaged work opportunities. "It is the gendered nature of family responsibilities that now form the greatest barrier to equal pay. Pay inequity is intertwined with work and family issues" (Goward, 2002).

It has been acknowledged that mothers are predominantly responsible for the raising of the children; with the fathers function in nurturing the children being constrained because of work commitments (Kolar&Soriano, 2000).

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Employment outside the home has little outcome on the share of duties in the home. Domestic chores and child care is still predominately the mothers realm (Cass, 1985, p. 87 as cited in Families in Society, 2003).

Women maintain closer contact with other kin than men, they organise child care and other family activities including birthdays, anniversaries, weddings and other special events, with grandmothers performing more child minding tasks than grandfathers (Ochiltree, 1991 as cited in Family Matters No 32, 1992, pp. 14-19). It is typically the women in the family, who care for the elderly and ailing family members (Glezer, 1991, as cited in Family Matters No 32, 1992, pp. 14-19).

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The extended family in Afghanistan is still resilient against westernisation due in part to the power of the Islamic community, political influence and economic values. With westernisation there have been some immediate changes in the behaviour of some Muslims, but the basic values are deeply entrenched in Islamic ethnicity that rapid change is unlikely (Long, 2003).

Elders in Afghanistan are highly esteemed, and their knowledge and authority is hardly ever challenged. This is a patriarchal society, so younger men must wait their turn before attaining head of the family status. As in eastern society the male is the wage earner and provides shelter and protection for his family. Traditional families in Afghanistan have senior women as reigning at the top of the hierarchy. At the core of the family is the mother-in-law and the daughters-in-law and daughters (Blood, 2001).

It is characteristically the grandfather that holds all the authority, he controls the money and he allocates the work and makes all the decisions relating to the family. The family is very private in Afghanistan and it is considered a violation of manners to enquire about the children and more particularly the women in the family unit (University, 2007).

How are families connected to other groups?

Economic events such as the great depression and more recently the global financial crisis have a very real impact on families today, and how they survive fiscally (Cheal, 2002, p. 13). In sole parent families there is a greater risk of economic hardship which can lead to borrowing money from acquaintances, financial institutions and Government for financial support (State of the Family, 2005, p. 17). In times of high unemployment, economic instability and increasing interest rates, more people need to rely on the Government for monetary support. The noticeable increase in women returning or entering the labour market has increased the need for children to be cared for by others. Grandparents provide the majority of care for their grandchildren on a voluntary basis or at the very least a lower cost than formal day care centres, while others go to paid recognised day care (Australia-Family Diversity, 2010, p. 138).

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Single mothers have reduced social networks as they typically don't have the support of the fathers' family, leading to a greater probability of poverty for the single mother (Gunnerson & Cochran 1990 in Cheal 2002, p. 144).

Australia is a 'liberal welfare' country, meaning that the Government has

only a slight function in the family and all families are not entitled to the same amount of support. Health, education and law are only a small number of the ways the Government is involved in families' lives.

The 'Zakat', a compulsory tax on income and capital, and to be paid by all Muslims, is the way the balance between the rich and the poor is kept in the Islamic religion. Families in Afghanistan rely on each other for support both socially and economically. Visiting family members is considered the social life in Afghanistan, with some of the more prosperous families having separate quarters for their guests (Merrill & Paxson & Tobey, 2006).

While men go out to work it is anticipated that the women will stay home and provide care for the children as well as do household chores. When women do work outside the home they are expected not to socialise with work colleagues but only with family. In traditional Afghanistan families if the woman does work externally then she is not permitted to work with other men, but be required to have a position with women only, (Fernea, E, 1984).

In the 1990's provision was made by the founding of a social insurance scheme, to support people with disabilities, the aged, plus the payment of sickness and maternity allowances and workers compensation (Encyclopaedia of the Nations).

In 1978 women joining the labour force increased but the proportion of female employees was still very small. Of the majority of the women who were working most of them were professionals who worked in the areas of education and health as these were seen as extensions of the role of women (Afghanistan Gender Roles, 2004).

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CONCLUSION

There are many similarities between the two families in question. In both cases the male in the family unit is considered the main source of income and the guardian of the family members, and the women raise and provide care for the children and assume the domestic duties.

There are differences in the family structures, with nuclear families being more widespread in Australian society, while in Afghanistan it is the extended family that is still very prominent. There are more diverse family structures in Australia than in Afghanistan such as, sole parent families, homosexual families, and de facto families. Homosexuality in Afghanistan is forbidden by Islam. It is also considered to be bringing dishonour on the family for a woman to have a baby without matrimony.

With feminism in Australia came more independence for women and a change in the gender roles in the family with more men helping with the domestic duties but still not being as involved in the child rearing as mothers. In Afghanistan the family is still a patriarchal, women maintain the home and look after the children while the men work and make all decisions regarding the family unit.

Children in both families suffer as a result of poor economic circumstances in the family with poverty being present in both eastern and western societies. Poverty can affect a child's self esteem, access to education, good health care and enough food to sustain life and provide the necessities needed for life.

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In Australia public schooling is available regardless of financial status and gender, by comparison in Afghanistan it is the boys who get an education. Girls in Australia are able to get an education and then go onto university and follow a profession, in Afghanistan girls are still being married very young, to increase the family wealth and position in the village.

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Hi Bonnie

I tried really hard on this one I hope it meets with your approval. I must say sorry for all the internet references but I have been unable to get out and get to the library or anywhere else for that matter. I also couldn't get the marking criteria sheet to go with my assignment. I did have multiple sessions on the phone about the referencing so I do hope its ok some of it I just couldn't understand no matter how hard I tried. Thank you for all you help and encouragement I have a very hard decision to make as to whether to continue in the light of how I have gone in your subject. Also while I was trying to do this assignment my surviving grandson has been diagnosed with stomach cancer and he is only 19 so after already burying 2 grandsons this came as a real shock and concern.

Once again many thanks and even if I didn't get it right I enjoyed the subject and learnt a lot from it.