

Locality and families

Source Text: Taylor et.al. (1996) *Sociology in Focus*

Eversley and Bonnerjea (1982) claim that there is a relationship between locality and family type. They identify six kinds of areas in England and Wales, each of which is associated with characteristic types of families and households.

1. **The 'sun belt'** This includes much of the more affluent southern and south eastern England, with an over-representation of the higher social classes, owner occupiers and two parent households.
2. **The 'geriatric wards'** These include many of the coastal areas of England and Wales. They are characterised by an increasing proportion of elderly, one and two person households, often living some distance from their nearest relatives.
3. **Older declining industrial areas** These are founded on industries such as coal, iron and steel, ship building and textiles. They tend to be characterised by older populations and stable family type households, with traditional patriarchal family structures and strong family and neighbourhood loyalties.
4. **Newly declining industrial areas** These are found mainly in the Midlands, for example Coventry. Such areas were prosperous, with high rates of female employment, but now face high unemployment among older workers and migration by the young. As many people in such areas are recent arrivals, they often have little support from extended family networks.
5. **Truly rural areas** Few of these survive as in most rural areas commuters and others have moved in. In strongly agricultural areas family based farms and businesses remain important. There is a high proportion of two parent families and single old people, with few women in paid employment.
6. **Inner city areas** These tend to be characterised by high measures of social deprivation and a high proportion of immigrants. They also have a high proportion of one parent and multi-adult households. Many people in these areas are isolated from extended families and social networks, for example, young single people, elderly people whose children have migrated, homeless people and discharged mental patients.

If one accepts Eversley and Bonnerjea's classification, then it can be seen that local influences affect the kind of families which prevail in different regions of the country. Their research points to the danger of generalising about the 'typical British family'.

Many of the answers are in the passage, but some are not. You may need to revise topics.

1. When was the research described conducted?
2. Which geographical locations are associated with deprivation and poverty?
3. Suggest reasons why there are high numbers of geriatric people in the south coastal regions of Britain.
4. Why might some families be discouraged from moving to the 'sun belt regions' of Britain?
5. What family structure is typical of areas of former heavy industry?
6. Suggest reasons why there is little female employment in rural areas of Britain.
7. Why might people from ethnic minorities be discouraged from leaving inner city areas?
8. What dangers are there in making generalisations of this nature about any family structures?
9. What does this research add to the debate about the 'typical British family'?

To what extent can it be argued that the British family is becoming fragmented in nature?