

How do social policies shape family life?

Define social policy and distinguish intentions, mechanisms and outcomes using family-formation, care and resource examples.

Core learning

- Social policy means state action, law or provision that can shape family choices, responsibilities and resources.
- Policy affects families through mechanisms: rules, money, services, rights, sanctions and definitions of eligibility.
- Intentions and outcomes can differ: the same policy may affect families differently by class, gender, ethnicity, disability and work pattern.

Concepts, studies and perspectives

- Policy mechanism model: A policy does not automatically change behaviour: design, eligibility, awareness, affordability and workplace culture all matter.
- Divorce and relationship law: Legal change can alter available options, but does not by itself determine private relationships.
- Parental leave example: Leave policy can alter care opportunities, but take-up depends on pay, job security and gender norms.
- Functionalist: Policy can help families perform functions such as care, socialisation and social stability.
- New Right: Policy may create dependency or weaken traditional family responsibilities.
- Feminist: Policy can reduce or reproduce gender inequality depending on care design and take-up.
- Marxist: Policy may manage labour-power and protect economic arrangements rather than remove inequality.

Before the lesson

Read the core terms and write a one-sentence definition for each. Bring one question about evidence quality.

C → B → A → A* development

- C: accurate definition and simple example.
- B: clear mechanism and some application.
- A: evidence and alternative explanation.
- A*: qualified judgement linked to group differences and evidence limits.

Source / accuracy note

Source note: GOV.UK Shared Parental Leave and Pay explains that eligible parents can share up to 50 weeks of leave and up to 37 weeks of pay.