

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.

Concept	Meaning	Exam use
Mechanism	The process connecting cause and outcome	Use it to move beyond description
Differentiated effect	Policy or social change affects groups differently	Use for AO3
Evidence limit	What the data cannot show	Use to qualify judgement

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.