

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.

Learning route

- Access: identify the policy, mechanism and intended outcome.
- Core: explain two mechanisms using family examples.
- Stretch: evaluate why the same policy may have unequal effects.

Application workspace

Explain one mechanism, apply one piece of evidence and add one evaluation point.

WWW / EBI reflection

WWW: _____

EBI: _____

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.