

How do sociologists explain family policy?

Compare functionalist, New Right, feminist and Marxist accounts of family policy, and test their limits with one policy proposal.

Core learning

- Sociologists disagree because they begin with different assumptions about family, state, power, dependency and inequality.
- A policy proposal can be read in several ways: support, control, moral regulation, gender reform or labour-market management.
- Good evaluation tests each perspective against evidence and asks who benefits, who is excluded and what unintended effects follow.

Concepts, studies and perspectives

- Functionalist policy view: State intervention can support families to perform socialisation, care and protection.
- New Right policy view: State support may weaken self-reliance and traditional family obligations.
- Feminist policy view: Policy can redistribute care, but may also leave women responsible for unpaid work.
- Marxist policy view: Policy can manage the needs of capitalism by supporting reproduction of labour-power.
- Functionalism: Order, support, integration, role preparation.
- New Right: Moral responsibility, dependency, family form.
- Feminism: Patriarchy, unpaid care, gendered take-up.
- Marxism: Class inequality, labour power, state interests.

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: Swedish parental benefit guidance explains that parental benefit is paid for 480 days for one child; use comparison carefully and avoid assuming policy alone causes equality.