

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.

Indicative mark guidance

- Accurate concept/perspective/study rewarded as AO1.
- Clear application to the item, family context or evidence rewarded as AO2.
- Developed mechanism, alternative explanation or evidence limitation rewarded as AO3.
- Do not reward unsupported assertion or generic moral claims.

Model judgement

The strongest answers judge the condition under which the explanation works, rather than simply naming two sides of a debate.

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.