

2. Sociological perspectives on Families and Social Policy

Learning
objectives:

To outline and
evaluate
sociological
perspectives on
social policies
affecting the family



Sociological perspectives on social policies affecting families and households

Starter: Write a paragraph on what you think functionalist may say about social policies how they affect families.
Is a positive view?? Negative view?



Functionalism

- A **consensus** perspective.
- The state acts in the interests of society as a whole & its social policies are for the good of all.
- **Fletcher (1966)** the welfare state, education, NHS, housing help the family to perform its functions more effectively.

Ao3 -Criticisms of Functionalism

- Assumes all members of the family benefit from social policy, feminists say that policies benefit men at the expense of women
- Assumes a 'march of progress' with social policy making life better & better
- Marxist's point to cuts in welfare services that can turn the clock back by cutting welfare to poor families

AO1 & A02 - The New Right

Support the traditional nuclear family & believe that social policies should avoid doing anything that undermines it

State policies have created family diversity that are threatening the conventional family (Almond, 2006)

Examples of policies?.....

Government policies act as **'perverse incentives'** which undermine the family and create **welfare dependency** (Murray, 1984)

- The solution is to cut welfare benefits & to encourage policies that make the family more self reliant.



Stretch and Challenge:

How can we criticise this view?

Which other topics under Families and Households does this New Right view link back to? Explain

AO3 - Criticisms of The New Right

- Feminists argue they want a return to the traditional patriarchal family that oppressed women
- Assumes nuclear family is natural not socially constructed.
- Cutting benefits would drive more people into poverty (Wallace and Abbott, 1992).



The New Right's influence on policies

- **Task:** Using pages 238-239 TB fill in P 8-9 of your **WB** handout with information on New Right influence on family policies.

Stretch and Challenge: Wider Reading

Begin to read the article 'The rise of the female breadwinner' – what would feminist say about this? How, and which, social policies have contributed to this trend?

Feminism – p10 WB

Policy as self-fulfilling-

Social policies assume that the ideal family is the patriarchal nuclear family. This idea of what the family should be affects the kind of policies put into place. They often reinforce that particular family type.



Policies supporting the nuclear family-

Feminists have identified a number of policies that help maintain the nuclear family.

- Tax and benefit policies
- Childcare
- Care for sick and elderly

Criticisms:

- Not all policies maintain patriarchy, e.g. Equal Pay Act.
- A number of policies have been implemented to improve the position of women in the family and wider society.

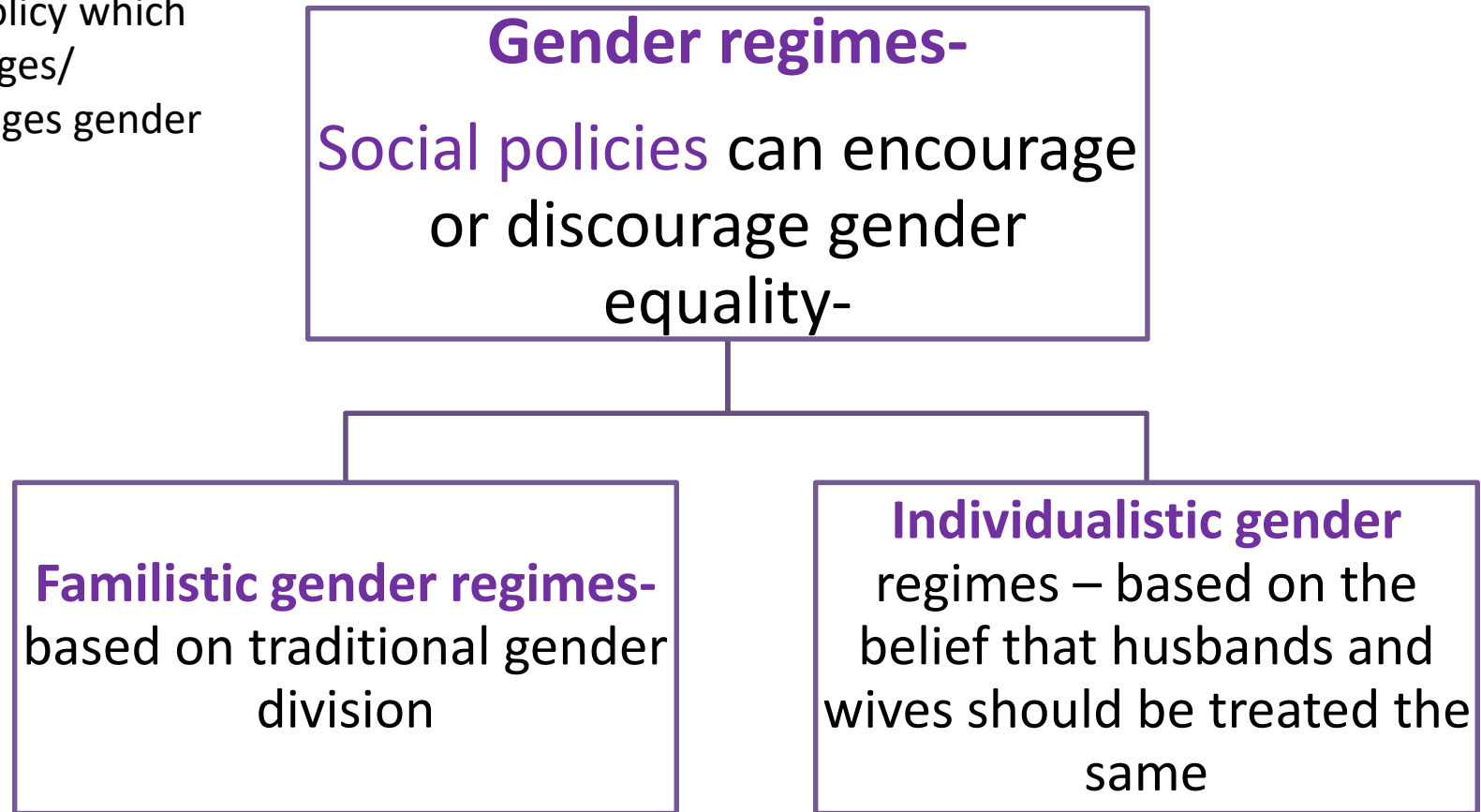
3. Feminism and gender regimes

- Feminists argue that Social policies reinforce the patriarchal family
- For instance tax benefits to married but not cohabiting couples
- Although maternity leave policies benefit women, they also reinforce patriarchy and the assumption that childcare is the mother's responsibility
- **Drew (1995)** Uses the concept of 'gender regimes' to describe how social policies in different countries can either encourage or discourage gender equality
- Traditional '**Familistic**' gender regimes
- More equal '**individualistic**' gender regimes

Eileen Drew (1995)

Task:

Give an example of a social policy which encourages/discourages gender equality



Gender regimes

Eileen Drew (1995)

Most EU countries moving towards an individualistic gender regime

Recession cutbacks on welfare
pressure on women

Move towards the market rather than relying on the state:

- Private healthcare
- Private pension



Tasks:

1. Read p. 240TB
2. Fill in the table on p. 12WB
3. Class feedback

State vs market

Drew argues most EU countries are now moving towards individualist gender regimes.....What will be the benefit of this?

A03 - Donzelot: The policing of families

- Donzelot sees policy as a form of state power of families
- Donzelot uses Foucault's idea of surveillance to show how teachers, doctors and nurses use their knowledge to control and change families
- Surveillance is not targeted equally on all social classes.
- Poor families are most likely to be seen as 'problem' families & the victims of crime and anti-social behaviour
- Compulsory parenting orders & parenting classes are ways in which the working class are taught the 'correct' way to bring up their children

A03 - Evaluation

- Rejects march of progress view, shows how state policy is a form of social control of the family
- By focusing on micro level of how caring professions act as agents of social control, Donzelot shows how professional knowledge acts as a form of power and control
- Marxist & feminists however argue that he fails to identify who benefits from such surveillance

AFL paragraph support

1. Read the model answer p. 15 - 16WB :
2. Highlight the following in three different colours

AO1		Identify the PEAC structure in the
AO2	OR	paragraphs and add any aspects
AO3		that are missing
3. Annotate around the essay, as you're reading it (use comments feature of word if you're completing it electronically)
4. Write a WWW/EBI feedback comment at the end of it

AFL Practice

Outline and explain two ways in which social policies or laws may affect household or family size

[10 marks]

Q5. Read **Item C** below and answer the question that follows

Item C

Many people see childhood as a natural stage of life that is determined by biology. What is expected of children is shaped by their age. However, sociologists suggest that childhood is a social construction. For example, changes in the laws regarding compulsory education and access to the labour market have shaped the experiences of children today.

Applying material from **Item C**, analyse **two** ways in which government policies and/or laws may shape the experiences of children today.

[10 marks]

Q6. Read **item D** below and answer the question that follows

Item D

According to feminist sociologists, the main function of laws and policies on families and households is to support the conventional heterosexual nuclear family and reproduce patriarchy. For example, policies concerning the care of the children or the old often make the assumption that these are women's responsibility.

Even policies seemingly designed to benefit women, such as paying child benefit to the mother, may have the effect of reinforcing their gender role.

Applying material from Item A and your knowledge evaluate the view that the main function of laws and policies on families and households is to reproduce patriarchy.

[20 marks]

Another AfL example question and paragraph support

Evaluate the impact of government policies and laws on family life [20 marks]

(P) One government policy that has had an impact on family life is that of Shared Parental Leave (2015). (E) This allows up to 50 weeks of leave (37 weeks of which is paid) that can be shared by parents if they meet certain eligibility criteria. This has had an impact on family life in that it leads to more symmetrical roles. In the past maternity leave was longer for women *suggesting* that they should take on the expressive role (A) thus *supporting* the feminist idea that policies promote the patriarchal nuclear family. Sharing the leave now shows more equality of roles. (C) However, it is still women who are most likely to take the time off *indicating* that women are still expected to be expressive and nurturing.

A02 – Contemporary examples

Policy	Diversity	Experience of Family life	Perspective
Shared Parental Leave (2015)	Promotes the nuclear family (EV. gay couples are also entitled to this)	Creates a symmetrical/ neo-conventional family with joint roles	Liberal feminists/ Young and Willmott show that roles are becoming more equal. Individualistic gender regime.
Same Sex Couples Act (2013)	Allowed same sex marriage which creates more same sex families.		New Right would say that this undermines the traditional nuclear family. Feminists would favour women being in same sex relationships.
Adoption and Children Act (2002)	Allow cohabiting and same sex couple to adopt on the same basis as married couples.		New Right and Functionalists say this undermines traditional nuclear family.
Child Protection Act (1989)	Smaller families	Child-centeredness	Functionalists argue policies help families perform their functions better.

Policy	Diversity	Experience of Family life	Perspectives
Welfare cuts (2010 coalition)	Welfare state creates lone parent families according to the New Right. They advocate cuts to reduce this 'problem'.	More families in poverty.	New Right say welfare benefits provide a 'perverse incentive' that creates a dependency culture. They support this policy.
Divorce Reform Act (1969)	More reconstituted and lone parent families. More divorce-extended families (Stacey)	There may be conflicts in reconstituted families due to lack of clear social norms about how to behave in such families.	Feminists see divorce as releasing women from patriarchal oppression. New Right/Functionalists would say that this undermines the nuclear family
Commonwealth Immigration Act (1962)	Ethnic diversity, lone parent families (black) and extended families (Asian)	Ethnic minority families more likely to be w/c and therefore experience poverty.	New Labour (1997) had policies that encouraged diversity.
NHS, Abortion Act, pensions, Child protection, etc.			

Additional Reading Booklet

I have put **some** of the following articles and more in the Social Policy additional reading booklet



<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/david-cameron/6334823/David-Camersons-tax-incentives-for-married-couples-will-not-solve-family-breakdown.html>

Tax Credits:

<https://www.gov.uk/child-tax-credit>

Bedroom Tax:

https://england.shelter.org.uk/housing_advice/housing_benefit/bedroom_tax_are_you_affected

Shared Parental Leave:

<https://www.gov.uk/shared-parental-leave-and-pay/overview>

Free education and childcare for 2-year-olds

Your 2-year-old can get free early education and childcare if you live in England and get one of the following benefits:

- Income Support
- income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)
- income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
- Universal Credit - if you and your partner have a combined income from work of £15,400 or less a year, after tax
- tax credits and you have an income of £16,190 or less a year, before tax
- the guaranteed element of State Pension Credit
- support through part 6 of the Immigration and Asylum Act
- the Working Tax Credit 4-week run on (the payment you get when you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit)

A child can also get free early education and childcare if any of the following apply:

- they're looked after by a local council
- they have a current statement of [special education needs \(SEN\)](#) or an education, health and care (EHC) plan
- they get [Disability Living Allowance](#)
- they've left care under a special guardianship order, child arrangements order or adoption order

<https://www.gov.uk/help-with-childcare-costs/free-childcare-2-year-olds?step-by-step-nav=f237ec8e-e82c-4ffa-8fba-2a88a739783b>

What Universal Credit is

Universal Credit is a payment to help with your living costs. It's paid monthly - or [twice a month for some people in Scotland](#).

You may be able to get it if you're on a low income or out of work.

This guide is also available in [Welsh \(Cymraeg\)](#).

If you live in Northern Ireland, go to [Universal Credit in Northern Ireland](#).

If you already get benefits

Universal Credit will replace the following benefits:

- Child Tax Credit
- Housing Benefit
- Income Support
- income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)
- income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
- Working Tax Credit

If you currently receive any of these benefits, you cannot claim Universal Credit at the same time.

<https://www.gov.uk/universal-credit>

Am I entitled to free prescriptions?

You can get free NHS prescriptions if, at the time the prescription is dispensed, you:

- are 60 or over
- are under 16
- are 16 to 18 and in full-time education
- are pregnant or have had a baby in the previous 12 months and have a valid maternity exemption certificate (MatEx)
- have a specified medical condition and have a valid medical exemption certificate (MedEx)
- have a continuing physical disability that prevents you going out without help from another person and have a valid MedEx
- hold a valid war pension exemption certificate and the prescription is for your accepted disability
- are an NHS inpatient

You're also entitled to free prescriptions if you or your partner (including civil partner) receive, or you're under the age of 20 and the dependant of someone receiving:

- Income Support
- income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Pension Credit Guarantee Credit
- [Universal Credit](#) and [meet the criteria](#)

<https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/help-with-health-costs/get-help-with-prescription-costs/>

Cut to disability benefits may make return to work harder, claim MPs

Government warned cutting benefits by almost £30 a week may push many disabled people into poverty, instead of incentivising them back into work



▲ Ministers justified the cuts by claiming the reduction would supposedly remove 'perverse incentives' that discourage people from returning to work Photograph: Maskot/Getty Images/Maskot

Government plans to cut disability unemployment benefit for new claimants could make it harder for them to find work and push many into poverty, an all-party group of MPs has said.

Ministers justified plans to cut £29 a week from employment and support allowance (ESA) payments on the grounds that the reduction would supposedly remove “**perverse incentives**” that discourage people from returning to work.

But MPs on the work and pensions select committee questioned whether cutting benefit rates would incentivise ill and disabled claimants to get a job, concluding that the evidence was “at best, ambiguous”.

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/feb/03/cut-to-disability-benefits-may-make-return-to-work-harder-claim-mps>

What is universal credit - and what's the problem?

By Rachel Schraer
BBC Reality Check

11 October 2018

f t e Share



Universal credit has proved controversial almost from the beginning, with reports of IT issues, massive overspends and administrative problems.

It's being rolled out across the UK. But now concerns are being raised that 3.2 million working families will lose £48 a week - about £2,500 a year- compared with the old system.

The system has been made significantly less generous since it was announced.

What is it?

Universal credit is a benefit for working-age people, replacing six benefits and merging them into one payment:

- income support
- income-based jobseeker's allowance
- income-related employment and support allowance

- income-related employment and support allowance
- housing benefit
- child tax credit
- working tax credit

It was designed to make claiming benefits simpler.

A single universal credit payment is paid directly into claimants' bank accounts to cover the benefits for which they are eligible.

Claimants then have to pay costs such as rent out of their universal credit payment (though there is a provision for people who are in rent arrears or have difficulty managing their money to have their rent paid directly to their landlord).

The latest available figures show that there were 1.1 million universal credit claimants in August.

This makes up about half of all households claiming unemployment benefit, but only 10% of households claiming housing support and 2% of those claiming disability-related support.

Labour has promised it would overhaul the system, with a spokesperson saying: "Universal credit in its current form simply isn't working, it is causing greater poverty and anxiety wherever it is rolled out, and we are committed to a root-and-branch review of the social security system."

How does it work?

The idea of universal credit is that it can be claimed by people whether they are in or out of work.

There's no limit to the number of hours you can work per week if you receive it, but your payment reduces gradually as you earn more.

It is designed to mean that no-one faces a situation where they would be better off claiming benefits than working.

Under the old system many faced a "cliff edge", where people on a low income would lose a big chunk of their benefits in one go as soon as they started working more than 16 hours.

In the new system, benefit payments are reduced at a consistent rate as income and earnings increase - for every extra £1 you earn after tax, you will lose 63p in benefits.

Universal credit is designed to be paid in arrears once a person's monthly income has been assessed. So new claimants have to wait 35 days before receive their first payment (four weeks to assess the last month's earnings plus a further week to process the payment).

School attendance and absence

Contents

- [Overview](#)
- [Help with getting your child to go to school](#)
- Legal action to enforce school attendance

Legal action to enforce school attendance

Local councils and schools can use various legal powers if your child is missing school without a good reason. They can give you:

- a Parenting Order
- an Education Supervision Order
- a School Attendance Order
- a fine (sometimes known as a 'penalty notice')



You can be given one or more of these but the council does not have to do this before prosecuting you.

<https://www.gov.uk/school-attendance-absence/legal-action-to-enforce-school-attendance>

Apply for a needs assessment by social services

A health and social care assessment is carried out by social services to find out what help and support you need - like healthcare, equipment, help in your home or residential care.

Enter a postcode

For example SW1A 2AA

Find

[Find a postcode on Royal Mail's postcode finder](#)

<https://www.gov.uk/apply-needs-assessment-social-services>

What you need to know

- Available in England and Wales only

Services can include:

- home care help with things like cleaning and shopping
- disability equipment and adaptations to your home
- day centres to give you or the person who cares for you a break
- day care for your child
- help with parenting, such as parenting classes
- care homes

Your local NHS service, [Citizens Advice Bureau](#) or a charity might be able to help you apply for a needs assessment.