

State policy affect on the family (uk)

[Family](#)



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Using information from Items B and C and elsewhere, examine the ways in which state policy may affect families and households. State policy has an influence on families and households through the laws the government create, and the messages certain policies give. Item B says that “ The state has intervened significantly in families for a considerable length of time”, showing how the government considers it part of their responsibility for the families of Britain.

However, the state has been accused of not doing enough to protect the traditional nuclear family. Some commentators have suggested that some liberal state policies, especially those introduced in the 1960's (such as the 1969 divorce act and the legalisation of homosexuality in 1967), are responsible for the perceived decline in traditional family values. Those who claim that the family is in decline can be grouped under the label ' New right'. They are usually conservative thinkers and politicians who believe strongly in tradition and dislike change.

They believe that there was a ' golden age' of the family, in which husbands and wives were strongly committed to each other for life, and children were brought up to respect their parents, the authority, and the law. Item B says that “ conservative thinkers tend to believe that there has not been enough state input into protecting the traditional family, or that state interference has actually contributed to the families decline by encouraging the development of ' deviant' living arrangements. They believe that equal opportunities and the equal pay legislation distracted women from their ' natural' careers as mothers and wives. They say that the 1969 divorce reform act undermined the commitment to marriage and that homosexuality

is 'unnatural' and deviant. However, some state policies have tried to uphold the traditional family. Tax and welfare policies have generally favoured and encouraged heterosexual married couples rather than cohabiting couples, single parents and same-sex couples. Graham Allen (1985) said that these policies have discouraged cohabitation and lone-parent families.

Policies such as the payment of child benefit to the mother, and the government's reluctance to fund free universal nurseries, have reinforced the idea that it is the woman (mother) who should take prime responsibility for the children. Also, the fact a coordinated set of family policies was not introduced until 1999 may reflect the state's tendency to see the family as a private institution, and therefore reluctance to interfere. Nevertheless, the New right still think that government policies have damaged the nuclear family ideal.

They claim that the government has encouraged women to return to work, and therefore 'damaged' children by 'maternal deprivation'. Morgan (2000) even suggests that the government is 'anti marriage', and that the government is responsible for 'deviant' family types. Item C says that Dr Adrian Rodgers, of the group Family Focus, says that 'homosexual couples cannot be defined as families- the basis of true love is the ability to procreate and have children'. The government has also had a positive effect on the individuals within the family. Conservative government made marital rape illegal in 1991, and the children's acts (e. 1989) have increased rights for women and children within the family. Many people believe that this has strengthened the family, although others believe that this had undermined

traditional male dominance within the family. Feminists say that the male dominance within the family is called private patriarchy, and in order to eradicate male dominance in society, we must first eradicate private patriarchy, which several state policies have attempted to do. In 2003, Labour appointed a Minister for children, and in 2007 they formed the Department for Children, Schools and Families.

Lewis (2007) says that Labour have taken a 'social investment in children' and have increasingly recognized that family forms are changing. Lone mothers are no longer condemned as a moral problem and threat. Labour introduced policies such as the New Deal of 1998 to help lone mothers get back into work. They have also invested in subsidies for nursery childcare, lengthened maternity leave from 14 weeks to 9 months, and introduced the right for parents of young children to ask for flexible working patterns from their employers.

However, this has attracted criticism that it is undermining family privacy and has constructed a 'nanny state' which over interferes in personal living arrangements. Furthermore, the government is still accused of conforming to familial ideology (the 'ideal' family; the preferred model is the traditional nuclear family with a clear sexual division of labour) in that the policy emphasis is still overwhelmingly on motherhood rather than parenting in general and fatherhood, for example in the way that there are limited rights of fathers to take paid paternity leave.

Feminists have claimed that familial ideology is merely a patriarchal ideology, which ensures male dominance in the workplace. Oakley says that the government (and society) has the view that women have a maternal

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instinct, which follows on from the view that women, who choose not to have children, are ‘deviant’. In conclusion, the state has created many policies which affect families and households. The government can be seen to be encouraging marriage and discouraging cohabitation.

Item C says that Lord Nicholls says that the family bond must be of a “relationship which is permanent or at least intended to be so”. Fox Harding (1996) argues that the best council housing is often allocated to married couples with children and the worst housing on ‘problem’ estates are allocated to lone-parent families. This suggests that the tradition nuclear family is the dominant family type, and the government discouraged other types of families. The state has also encouraged families to take responsibility for the elderly and long-term sick/disabled.

Female members of the family often carry the burden of this care, which means they are less likely to work full time and are more likely to be economically dependent on a man. This suggests that the government is reinforcing the traditional sexual division of labour. The new right say that the family is decline, but it may just be that it is simply changing, and the government changes its policies in accordance to how families change or need to be changed for the better.