

Children's rights are
best provided for
within the context of
the nuclear family



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I will be discussing this statement in the following assignment, by studying some of the key issues and concepts it is associated with. Throughout the assignment I will be showing contrasting views for and against this statement.

Firstly, I will discuss what the nuclear family is and what different theorists interpret the 'perfect' family to be. Secondly, I will look at Children's Rights in relation to the nuclear family and whether or not it supports it. I will include other types of families and will discuss throughout whether they provide for Children's Rights in our society today. The family is a group of individuals related to one another by blood ties, marriage or adoption, who form an economic unit, the adult members of which are responsible for the upbringing of children. All known societies involve some form of family system, although the nature of the family relationships is widely variable. While in modern societies the main family form is the nuclear family, a variety of extended family relationships are also often found' (Giddens, 1997, p582).

Given that we have all had some first-hand experience of living within a family, some social scientists do not always agree on a definition of the word 'family'. For example according to George Murdock, a functionalist theorist, 'the family is a social group characterized by common residence, economic co-operation and reproduction. It includes adults of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain a socially approved sexual relationship, and one or more children, own or adopted, of the sexually cohabiting adults' (Haralambos, 1985, p325). This statement is suggesting that a homosexual couple who

had adopted a child would not constitute a family, nor would a lone parent and child.

To take this into account and other objections to Murdock's definition, some propose a simpler definition. A family is ' a social group consisting of at least one adult and child, usually cohabiting, related by blood, marriage or adoption' (Yeo and Lovell, 1998, p23). Murdock argues that the family performs four basic functions in all societies; they are sexual, reproductive, economic and educational. He says these are essential for social life because without sexual and reproductive functions there would be no members of society, without the economic functions there would be no basic needs like food, clothes, water etc, therefore life would cease. And without education, a term Murdock used for socialisation, there would be no culture.

Human society without culture could not function. Talcott Parsons another functionalist says there are two ' basic and irreducible' functions which are common in families in all societies. These are the ' primary socialisation of children' this is referring to the socialisation during the early years of childhood which takes place in the family, and the ' stabilisation of the adult personalities of the population of the society' this is where the child's personality is moulded. The emphasis here is on the marriage relationship and the emotional security the couple provide for each other. Married couples increasingly look to each other for emotional support. Adult personalities are also stabilised by the parents' role in the socialisation process.

A critique of the functionalist's perspective is that of the Marxist theory. Fran Ashley translates Parson's view, that the family functions to stabilise adult personalities, into Marxian framework. ' She sees the emotional support provided by the wife as a safety-value for the frustration produced in the husband by working in a capitalist system. Rather than being turned against the system which produced it, she states this frustration is absorbed by the comforting wife' (Haralambos, 1985, p341).

It is saying that the wife is like the ' glue' of the family, she keeps everything together. Both Murdock and Parsons assume that the ' perfect' family is that of the nuclear family. The nuclear family used to be seen as the norm for many years. It is assumed to be the smallest ' complete' family type.

It consists of two parents, traditionally Mum and Dad and children which they may have procreated or adopted. To assume the nuclear family has become the dominant form would be a mistake. In most societies today the extended family is apparently seen as the norm, and traditional family practices continue. There are both advantages and disadvantages with living in the nuclear family. As there are two parents there usually is a great deal of sexual gratification.

This strengthens the family, because husband and wife are united by powerful and often binding emotions. Murdock argues that like sex, ' the economic function is most readily and satisfactorily achieved by persons living together' (Haralambos, 1985, p331). But, as D. H. J Morgan states ' Murdock's nuclear family is a remarkably harmonious institution. Husband

and wife have an integrated division of labour and have a good time in bed' (Haralambos, 1985, p332).

He suggests that he does not see anything bad with the nuclear family; he is looking through 'rose-tinted glasses'. Although the nuclear family has the benefit of two parents there may be times where they demand too much from each other resulting in conflict. Leach says, 'the parents and children huddle together in their loneliness take too much out of each other. The parents fight; the children rebel' (Haralambos, 1985, p335).

The tension and hostility that is an effect of conflict is projected onto the child. In order to relieve their tension the child is used as an emotional 'scapegoat'. This process becomes dysfunctional for the child, but functional for the parents, the family and for society as a whole. Vogel and Bell who have analysed this process, argue that 'the cost to a child is low relative to the functional gains of the whole family' (Haralambos, 1985, p334). Some may say that the nuclear family is isolated from kin and wider community. The nuclear family, as it is seen by many people is the conventional family.

I believe it should meet all of the children's rights and needs. For instance, both parents should take joint primary responsibility for bringing up their children; if this and any other right is not happening then the state should intervene. When both parents are living at home with the children, there is usually enough love and support for the child. Having both parents around can give children positive as well as negative role models. There are many other different types of family, all having their own useful functions for society.

The extended family, which emerged during the Industrial Revolution, is made up by adding a generation. For instance, both or one grandparent may come to live with the nuclear family. Vogel and Bell define the extended family as 'any grouping broader than the nuclear family which is related by descent, marriage or adoption' (Haralambos, 1985, p326). Some may argue that having so many people in the household is a disadvantage, as it is overcrowded it may cause a lot of conflict. Others may say having a lot of family around and by being a close-knit family can have its advantages. For instance, it can provide psychological and practical support for the individual.

There are well over a million lone-parent households in Britain today, and the number is increasing (Giddens, 1997, p153). Lone parent families occur either because neither has got married so only one parent lives with the children or because the nuclear family has lost a parent through death, divorce or separation. In 90% of cases it is usually the mother who is the lone parent. Another type of family is that of the kibbutz. The kibbutzim movement was largely inspired by political beliefs. It represents a form of child rearing that is particular to the state of Israel.

It is a voluntary collective living arrangement in which children are raised by multiple caregivers. It focuses on the idea of collective rearing as opposed to one mother. The idea of a close mother-child bond was deliberately discouraged from birth. The mother keeps the baby for four days. On the fifth day it went with the parents' agreement to the children's house and placed in charge of a metapelet (which in Hebrew, means 'to take care').

The metapelet would try to treat each child much the same as any other.
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The mother is then free to continue working in the fields or elsewhere and stay in the community. Breast feeding by the mother was encouraged, but is not allowed beyond six months. Some parents do not put their babies to bed in the evening. The main aim was to make each woman as free as a man, to allow her to play her full part as a working community member. Her first loyalty was to her community. A second major aim was to protect children from possessive mothering.

The kibbutz population has been slowly declining since the early 1990s, however, the impact it had on the establishment of the state of Israel still stands strong. A child not having a strong bond with their parents can sometimes cause emotional and psychological problems. They would have no role models which are important for young children and there would be no love and support from their parents. The kibbutz criticise the conventional nuclear family, by saying that the nuclear family life tends to encourage undesirable attitudes, such as possessiveness in human relationship, competitiveness between individuals and between families, and personal greed. Conventional family life is also said to suppress women and to leave children too much at the mercy of inadequate or mentally ill parents.

Rights in general are the language to entitlement and equality. There are so many different types of rights, for instance legal rights which is what the law sets out for our society, moral rights which are not established by law but are what 'ought' to be, human rights are about meeting our basic needs, social needs are the entitlement to standards of welfare and benefits of society, civil rights are the entitlement to individual freedom, and political rights are the entitlement to participation in decision making. A lot of aspects from <https://assignbuster.com/childrens-rights-are-best-provided-for-within-the-context-of-the-nuclear-family/>

each of the different rights, together help make up a structure for children's rights. Some theorists believe we all have natural rights and some argue that rights are socially or legally constructed.

During the International Year of the Child in 1979, the Polish government proposed a convention for children's rights. The UN Convention promotes the idea that all children have equal values to adults, but they also need special safeguard and care. The UN Convention articles cover the basic rights of children to survive and develop. These range through health care, food and clean water to education and the environment which allows children to develop. The Convention is clear that the best place for a child is with their parents, and that the State has a duty to support and assist parents in this responsibility if necessary. There is a relationship between duties and rights, for example, a child may have the right to its parents care and supervision.

The child has the right, the parents have the duty to care and supervise their child. Sometimes it is hard to distinguish who is the duty-holder, for instance, a child may have the right to an adequate standard of living, but who has the duty? In the UK, primary responsibility automatically goes to the parents, but if for some reasons they can not meet this duty, then the state has to intervene and take the secondary responsibility. Veerman (1992) identified two specific advantages of the UN Convention: 1) it brings together under one single, binding international instrument provisions of international law pertaining to children, and 2) it exceeds the 1959 Declaration of the rights of a child. Not only are children's particular needs and rights recognised, separated from those of adults, but also general human rights are reiterated for children (Hill and Tisdall, 1997, p30). To conclude, I feel it is important <https://assignbuster.com/childrens-rights-are-best-provided-for-within-the-context-of-the-nuclear-family/>

that everyone understands what children's rights are and understand how the UN Convention operates.

If everyone has not been educated, it is likely that some important rights maybe disregarded. I personally am still unsure if ' Children's Rights are best provided for within the context of the nuclear family'. As the nuclear family is seen as the conventional type I think that they should, but what about incidents like child abuse, which can happen in any family structures. I believe that all types of families can bring their children up in a loving and caring relationship regardless of their structure. All families have conflict, but the majority just take it at ' face-value' and understand this is part of being in a family.

To come to a conclusion is difficult and I do not believe anyone has the answer, there can be debates but there can be no concluding explanation.