

Is the nuclear family universal

[Family](#)



Is the nuclear family universal? This essay will explore whether the nuclear family is in fact a universal sociological institution. The term 'universal' means applicable to all cases, so, for this to be correct the nuclear family must be found in all families in every society. Nuclear family consists a husband and wife and one or more children, own or adopted, it is defined by Murdock and according to him, he believed that the nuclear family is 'a universal social grouping.' Functionalist George Murdock suggested an idea of universality of the family as family is the basic and vital institution in all societies.

He looked at 250 societies and found four the most significant functions of the family: sexual, economic, reproduction and socialization. These functions are essential and meet needs in all societies and institution who best fits in performing them is family. Murdock defined the family as social group characterized by common residence, consisting of adults of both sexes and dependant children. There are statistics that suggest the diversity of families is developing, such as cohabiting, single-parent and reconstituted homosexual families. All evidences seem to prove that nuclear family is not the dominant type of family.

However, living in a nuclear family is a phase that most people, as children and adults, go through in the course of their life. The Government seems to be more preferable to nuclear family, as the nuclear family can be a nurturing environment in which to raise children as long as there is love, time spent with children, emotional support, low stress, and a stable economic environment. So, although there is an increasing diversity of family, nuclear family is still universal. The nuclear family is promoted by politicians and

media. For example, Labour policy Supporting Families (1998) suggested different ways of all types of families.

However Labour also pointed out that preferred type will be nuclear. Media created 'cereal packet image' of the family where it was promoting ideal nuclear family. People being influenced by media and politicians start seeing other types of households undesirable or abnormal. However there is an opposing view to Murdock's theory that goes against the idea of the nuclear family being universal. In 1959, Kathleen Gough provided a detailed insight of the Nayar society. This culture was mainly centred on the woman and known as a matrifocal family. In this society, when the woman reaches puberty, she is married to her Tali husband.

This is a sacred and traditional marriage but although they are married by law the husband and wife have no obligations to each other, the woman is then allowed to take on up to 12 visiting Sandbanhan husbands who must come after tea and stay the night and leave before breakfast the next morning. Husbands and wives didn't form an economic unit. Also, husbands were not expected to maintain the wives and it was frowned upon to do so. Moreover, he didn't bond, look after or socialize with the children. Another opposing view of the universal nuclear family is the IK culture.

This tribe lives in Africa where each member shows no emotional connection with one another. Family, to them, means very little and each member of that society feeds for themselves, showing no maternal instincts. If a new baby shows signs of weakness and disability, it will be disowned into the wilderness. The same happens to an elderly member who has no 'purpose' in the society. The experience and lifestyle of the IK suggests that family life

across the world is characterised by diversity. However, in the UK definitions are dominated by the nuclear family.

However, there is a lot of support for Murdock's theory of the universal nuclear family. One argument is that statistically, the female-headed family is not the norm either within black communities or in the societies in which they are set. Also, some sociologists believe that the mainstream model of the nuclear family is valued by blacks and regarded as the ideal. However, there are many opposing views to his theory. The supposed harmful effects on the children of the matrifocal family are far from proven, and, we know that children from a nuclear family are sometimes abused or neglected.

Looking closely at all the evidence I have explored in this essay, I conclude to find that the nuclear family is not universal. Families are simply groupings of people brought together by blood, marriage or some kind of connection. By looking at groups such as the Nayar society and the IK culture, it shows that the nuclear family is not applicable in all circumstances. Finally, in British culture the times are changing and there is a more diverse range of families in our society today.