

1. AQA: Topics in Sociology: Families and Households

The relationship of the family to the social structure and social change, with particular reference to the economy and to state policies.

Introduction

This topic is mainly focused on **sociological theories** such as **Functionalism, Marxism and Feminism** which are concerned with how **the family benefits the way society is organised** (known as the **social structure**) and the **economy**. Another theory – **the New Right** (which has some similarities to Functionalism) has mainly concerned itself with **how the State** (or government) **has supported, and sometimes undermined the family, through its social policies**. A final theory – **postmodernism** – is worth looking at too because it is critical of how these previous theories view the family as a particular type of concrete institution. Postmodernists argue sociological theories are actually quite **conservative** and **inflexible** when looking at the family and fail to appreciate that family life is very flexible and relative to people's **personal lives**.

The next set of guides will examine the following theories of the family;

- **Functionalism** – associated with **GP Murdock, Talcott Parsons and Ronald Fletcher**.
- **Marxism** – associated with **Frederick Engels and Eli Zaretsky**.
- **Feminism** – there are three broad types of feminist theory – you need to be able to distinguish between them;
 - ✓ **Liberal Feminism** – associated with **Ann Oakley, Sue Sharpe and Helen Wilkinson**
 - ✓ **Marxist or Socialist Feminism** – associated with **Margaret Benston and Fran Ansley**.
 - ✓ **Radical Feminism** – associated with **Kate Millett, Shulamith Firestone and Christine Delphy**.
- **New Right** – associated with **Charles Murray, David Marsland and Patricia Morgan**.
- **Late Modernism** – associated with **Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck** and his wife, **Elizabeth Beck-Gernsheim**
- **Postmodernism** – associated with **Tamara Hereven and Carol Smart**.