Your notes

GCSE Sociology: revision notes

# The functions of families

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## Functionalist views

- Murdock (1949) studied many societies and argued the **nuclear family** is **universal**, with four functions: sexual, reproductive, economic and educational (socialisation).
- Parsons argued that in modern industrial society the family has two basic and irreducible functions: the **primary socialisation** of children, and the **stabilisation of adult personalities** (giving adults emotional support).

## Marxist views

- Marxists see the family as serving capitalism.
- Engels argued the family developed so that men could pass on private property to their own children.
- Zaretsky argued that the family is a refuge where workers can escape the pressures of capitalist work, and that it acts as a **unit of consumption**, buying the goods capitalism produces.

## Feminist views

- Feminists argue the family benefits men and exploits women.
- Delphy and Leonard argued the family is a patriarchal and hierarchical institution, where men benefit from women's **unpaid labour**.
- Critics say these views are one-sided and ignore families where roles are shared.

## Key terms

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|---|---|
| **Nuclear family** | A family of two parents and their dependent children. |
| **Primary socialisation** | The first stage of socialisation, in the family. |
| **Stabilisation of adult personalities** | Parsons' idea that the family gives adults emotional support. |

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| **Unit of consumption** | A family's role in buying goods and services. |
| **Universal** | Found in every society. |
| **Unpaid labour** | Work done without pay, such as housework. |

## Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. Which four functions of the family did Murdock identify?
2. What two functions did Parsons say the family has?
3. What did Murdock claim about the nuclear family?
4. What did Zaretsky argue?
5. What did Engels argue about the family?
6. What did Delphy and Leonard argue?
7. What is a unit of consumption?
8. Which perspective sees the family as benefiting society as a whole?

### Answers

1. Sexual, reproductive, economic and educational
2. Primary socialisation and stabilisation of adult personalities
3. It is universal
4. The family is a refuge from capitalist work and a unit of consumption
5. It developed so men could pass on private property
6. The family is patriarchal and exploits women's unpaid labour
7. A family's role in buying goods and services
8. Functionalism

## What to do next

**Practise 10 questions on this topic**

**Try 4 exam questions, with mark schemes**

**Read the lesson, one step at a time**

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