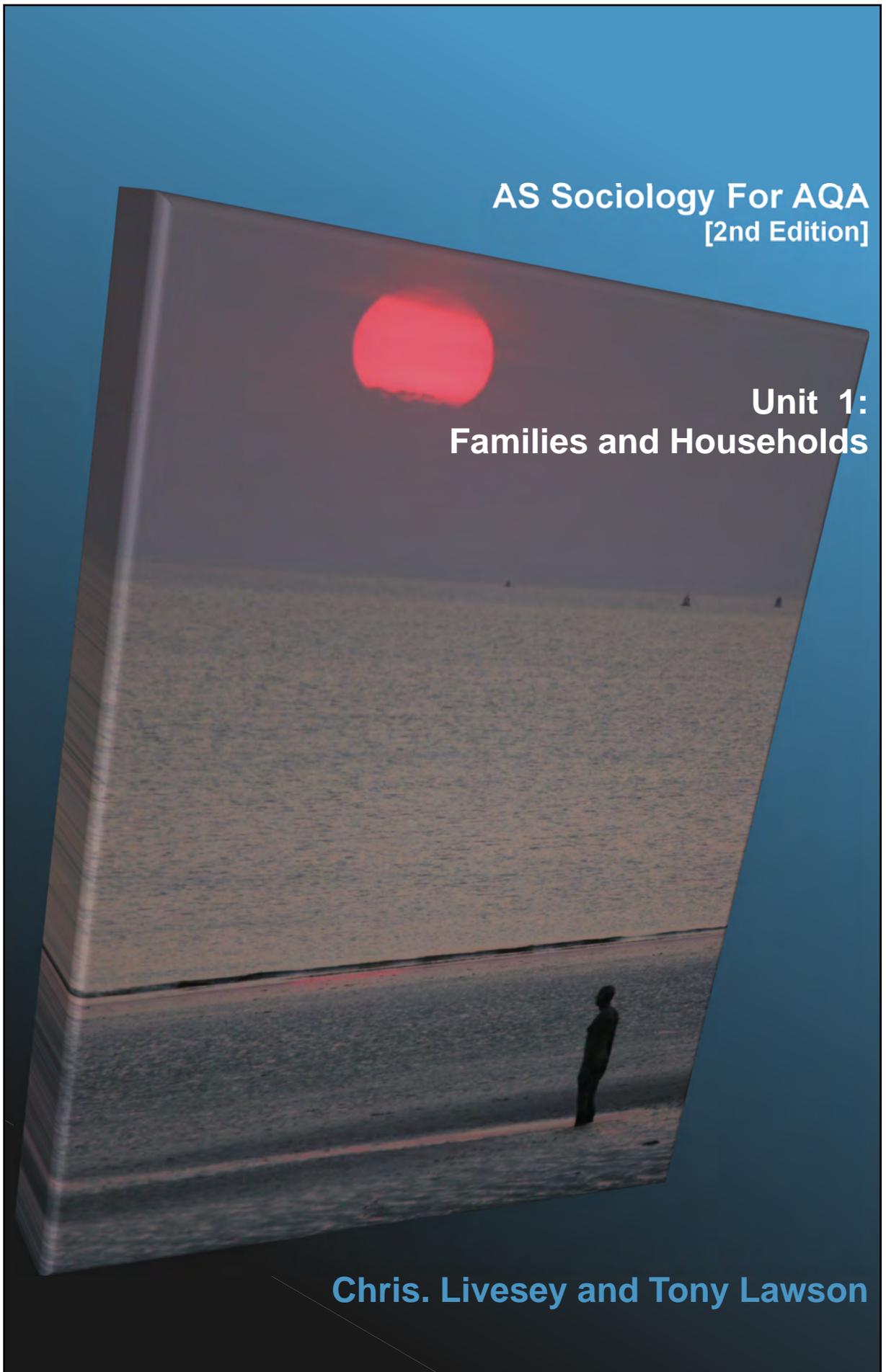
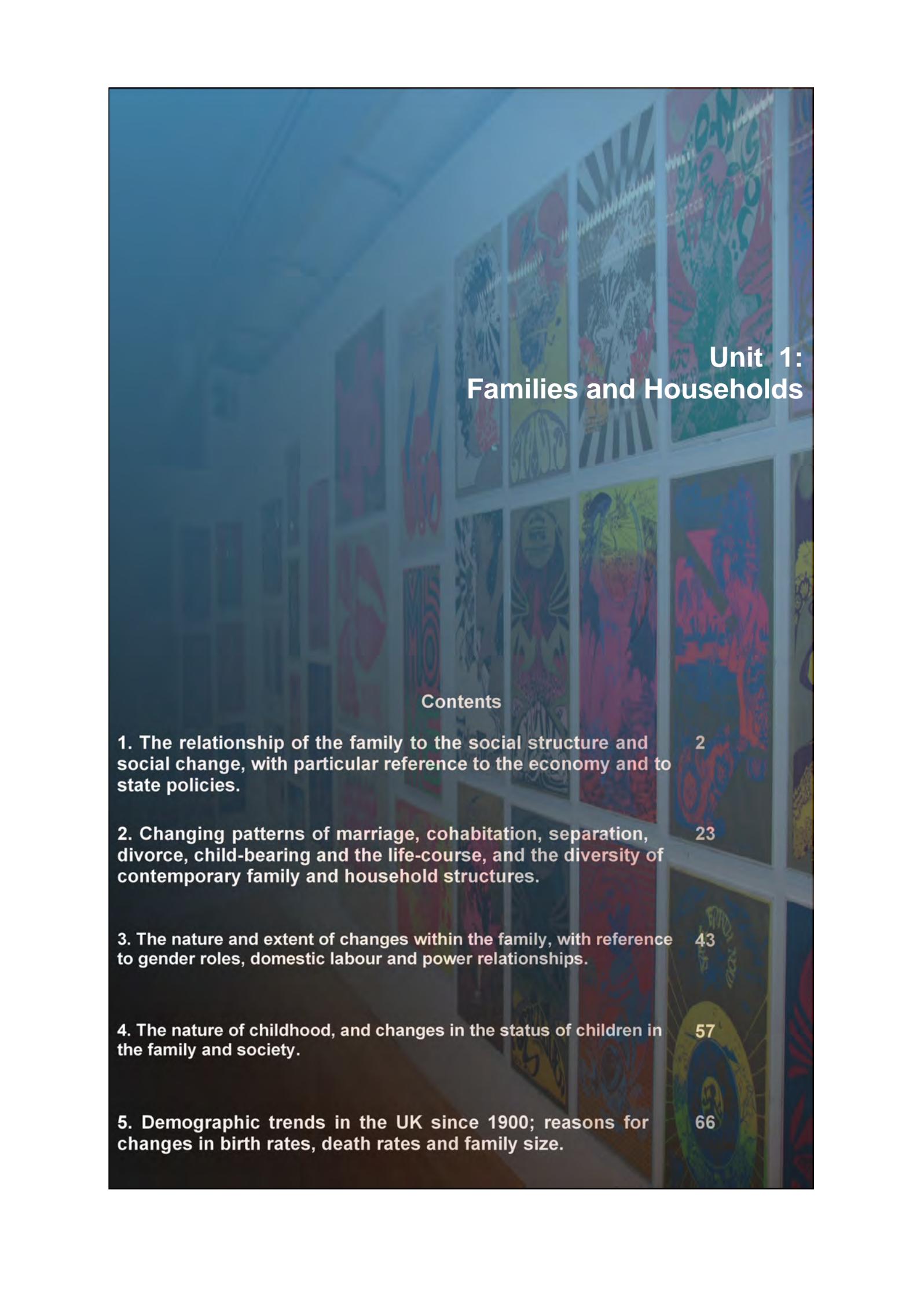


AS Sociology For AQA
[2nd Edition]

Unit 1:
Families and Households

Chris. Livesey and Tony Lawson



The background of the page is a photograph of a hallway. The walls are covered in a grid of colorful, abstract art panels. The panels feature various patterns, including geometric shapes, organic forms, and stylized figures. The colors are vibrant, including reds, blues, yellows, and greens. The hallway is lit from above, and the ceiling is visible. The overall atmosphere is artistic and modern.

Unit 1: Families and Households

Contents

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Individualistic terms - as arenas in which people play out their personal *narratives*, as it were. In this sense, we can identify two basic forms of individualistic experience:

1. Choice, in the individual sense of the word, whereby people are increasingly able to make decisions about their behaviour - from the basic choice of whether or not to form a family group to the variety of extended choices now available in terms of how people express their "lived experiences" in family relationships; think, for example, about the multitude of different family / household forms and relationships in our society - from childless couples, through step-families, to gay couples with children and beyond. This notion of choice links into the idea of:



Do we live in an era of almost unlimited choice about our family relationships?

2. Pluralism as the defining feature of postmodern societies. In other words, such societies are increasingly characterised by a plurality of family forms and groups which coexist - sometimes happily and sometimes uneasily. Within this context of family pluralism, therefore, postmodernists argue it's pointless to make judgments about family forms (in the way we've seen other sociological

perspectives make such judgments about the form and function of family groups). From this perspective, therefore, each family unit is, in its own way:

Unique and involves people working out their personal choices and lifestyles in the best ways they can. As **Stacey** (2002) puts it when discussing same-sex relationships "Under the postmodern family condition, every family is an alternative family". Because of this uniqueness, families are:

Difficult to define: As we've seen in the opening section, one of the problems we encounter when discussing families is the difficulties involved in trying to precisely define this group; *exclusive definitions* appear much too narrow and restrictive, in the sense they generally fail to account for all types of family structures, whereas *inclusive definitions* may be so widely-drawn in terms of what they include as "a family" as to be somewhat less-than-useful (to put it kindly) for students of AS Sociology (and their teachers, come to that). In this respect, **Elkind** (1992) has suggested the transition from modern to postmodern society has produced what he terms the:

Permeable Family which, he notes "...encompasses many different family forms: traditional or nuclear, two-parent working, single-parent, blended, adopted child, test-tube, surrogate mother, and co-parent families. Each of these is valuable and a potentially successful

Tried and Tested

- Explain what is meant by women's "triple shift" (2 marks)
- Suggest **two** functions, apart from primary socialisation, of the family (4 marks)
- Suggest **three** reasons for seeing the family as an oppressive and exploitative social group (6 marks)
- Examine postmodern arguments about the changing nature of family life in comparison with *either* Functionalist *or* Feminist arguments (24 marks)
- Assess the argument that the benefits of family life outweigh its drawbacks (24 marks)

family form". In this respect he argues: "The Modern Family spoke to our need to belong at the expense, particularly for women, of the need to become. The Permeable Family, in contrast, celebrates the need to become at the expense of the need to belong".

While **Elkind** doesn't necessarily see this latter state - the idea individual needs and desires override our sense of responsibility to others (and, in some respects, the "denial of self" in favour of one's children and their needs) - as generally desirable **Suematsu** (2004) is not so sure: "A family is essentially a unit of support. There were days when human beings could not survive without it. Those days are over".

Family and Social Policy: Observations

We can begin by noting that, according to **Calvert and Calvert** (1992), **social policy** refers to: "...the main principles under which the government of the day directs economic resources to meet specific social needs" and we can add some flesh to the bare bones of this definition using **Morris'** (2004) observation that social policy involves the government identifying and regulating three main areas of society:

1. Problems - an example of which might be something like an increase in the level of crime.

2. Needs - such as those of the long-term unemployed, single parents or the disabled.

3. Conditions - such as the provision of health care through something like a National Health Service.



Module Link Wealth, Poverty and Welfare

Both the concept of social policy and various sociological perspectives on policy are discussed further in the section “**Solutions to Poverty**”.

This deceptively-simple characterisation, if you stop to think about it for a moment, tends to obscure the fact that social policy is a potentially vast area to cover, even if we restrict ourselves to considering only those policies *directly* affecting families. It involves, for example, thinking in terms of three broad perspectives:

- **The Past** - in the sense of identifying and evaluating policies from both the distant past (such as the various *Factory and Child Labour Acts* of the 19th century) and the recent past (such as the *Child Support Agency*, created in 1993 to ensure parents living apart met “their financial responsibilities to their children”) that have impacted on family life, relationships and structures.
- **The Present** - in the sense of identifying policies currently being *implemented* by the UK government (such as the creation of Civil Partnerships in 2005 that gave homosexual couples similar legal rights married heterosexual couples) and assessing their impact, thus far, on family life.

child support agency

Since its creation in 1993 by the then Conservative government the CSA has had a “troubled history”. The **National Audit Office** (2006) found the agency spent “70p to collect every £1 of child support” (an improvement on the previous year when it cost more to collect monies owed than it received). It is currently (2007) due to be replaced after a costly series of reforms...

- **The Future** - something that involves thinking about policies currently (2007) being *proposed* - such as placing strict limits on the smacking of children – whose possible impact on family life cannot, as yet, be adequately judged.

Rather than trawl through this vast ocean of social policy, this section looks initially at some illustrative examples of government policies in the post-2nd World War period – material we can use to provide a flavour of the range and scope of social policy in the UK as it relates specifically to families. In this respect social policy has historically involved attempts to “manage social problems, needs and conditions” – with arguably the most significant policy development in the UK of the 20th century being the development of:

The Welfare State: The 1942 **Beveridge Report** proposed a range of policies that had a profound impact on family life in a wide variety of ways – from improved health care (a *National Health Service*), through the “extension of childhood” as children were compelled by law to remain in education (*compulsory State Education*) to economic provision for old age / retirement through State pensions (a *National Insurance system*).

Compulsory education was recommended by the **Beveridge Report** as part of the Welfare State (so now you know who to blame...)

Module Link Wealth, Poverty and Welfare

The ideological background to - and examples of - social policies introduced under the general heading of the Welfare State are discussed further in the section “**Welfare Provision**”.

Within the general context of the Welfare State (the umbrella term for social policy that’s generally been adopted in the UK) we can note a range of policies aimed specifically at the family group:

Family planning: Things like the availability of **contraception**, **abortion** (available for a period of 24 weeks under the 1967 Abortion Act, 1967) and **fertility treatments** (IVF) under the National Health Service have variously impacted on birth rates and family size.

Pregnancy: Working women are entitled to **maternity leave**, *Statutory or Contractual Maternity Pay* and the right to resume their former job. *Statutory maternity leave*, **before April 2007**, ran for 26 weeks with the option of a further 26 weeks if certain conditions were met. Since this date leave is now consolidated into 52 weeks. For women in employment there is an entitlement to *Statutory Maternity Pay* “for up to 39 weeks of the leave”. Statutory or contractual maternity pay after April 2007 is paid by the employer at 90% of the individual’s weekly earnings with no upper limit for the first 6 weeks of leave. For the remaining 33 weeks maternity pay is either £112.75 or 90 per cent of the individual’s average earnings. This payment is, however, subject to income tax and national insurance. Where an employer is not party to the Statutory maternity leave scheme the alternative is **Maternity Allowance** paid by the government (the payments are the same as we’ve just noted, although the payment isn’t liable for income tax or national insurance, with the maximum payment fixed at £112.75 per week). After April 2007 this allowance is paid for 39 weeks.

In 2003, fathers gained the right of up to two weeks of **paternity leave**, during which they could claim *Statutory Paternity Pay* from their employer (from 2005, £106 a week or 90% of their average weekly earnings). Also in 2005 the right to “adoption leave and pay” was introduced and a range of social policies govern adoption rules for prospective parents.

From **April 2007** *Statutory Paternity Pay* was set at “£112.75 or 90 per cent of the individual’s average weekly earnings if this is lower”. Tax and National Insurance is deducted from this amount in the normal way. However, a range of



exclusionary conditions apply for Statutory Paternity Pay (including things like employment status – whether or not you are employed or self-employed - the length of an individual's current employment, their current level of weekly earnings and so forth).

Childhood: Government both pays a range of benefits to parents with children (including *Child Benefit* paid to parents raising children under 16) and also regulates parental behaviour through the **Child Support Agency** (CSA) created in 1993 (although currently (2007) in the process of being replaced by a "new Agency"); the CSA was given the power to ensure non-resident parents made a financial contribution (*Child Maintenance*) to the care and upbringing of their child/ren.

The **Childcare Act** (2006) was designed to improve the general level of childcare services available from local authorities in areas like health, social services to parents and prospective parents and so forth.

Education: Although educational policies (since 1944) are not directly designed to impact on family life they do have a number of *indirect* effects – from allowing individual parents to work, through the provision of **free school meals** to those in poverty, to things like **Educational Maintenance Allowances** (introduced in 2004 and paid to those aged 16 – 19 staying in full-time education whose parents have a combined income of less than £30,810) and **Child Benefit**. In relation to pre-school education, *free nursery provision* was introduced for all 3 year olds in 2004.

Module Link

Education

The nature and impact of post-war government educational policies is discussed in the section "**State Policies**".

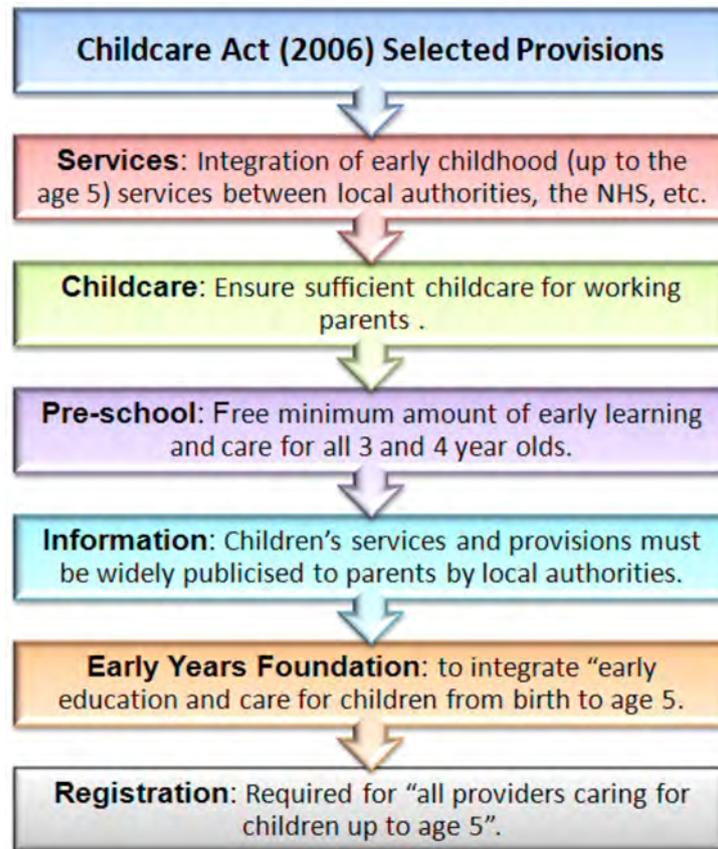
On a more general level we find a wide range of social policies designed to regulate family behaviour in a very broad sense. Examples here include:

Marriage rules governing things like who can marry whom (both *bigamy* – being married to more than one person at the same time – and *incest* are illegal), at what age people can legally marry (16 if both parents agree, otherwise 18), the legal rights and responsibilities involved in a marriage contract and so forth. Although gay couples cannot legally marry, since 2005 they have been allowed to form a **Civil Partnership** that gives each partner legal rights similar to married heterosexual couples.

Divorce: This is legal in the UK, but not in all countries throughout the world.

Economic Policies: Although things like taxation, insurance and pay / inflation policies (amongst many

other things) impact indirectly on family life, we can note further examples of economic policies that had - or continue to have – a more-direct impact:



Council housing: As part of the post-war housing reforms the government built and rented out good quality, affordable, housing ("council housing") to those on low incomes. Over the past 20 years, however, successive governments have progressively sold this housing to private owners (at large discounts from the market price) and housing associations.

Housing: A combination of policies (ranging from the abolition of *Mortgage tax relief* in 2002 to control over interest rates) contribute to the contemporary phenomenon of adult children living in their parents' home – as demonstrated by **Self and Zealey** (2007):

Tax Credits and Benefits: A wide range of economic benefits are available to family members (too many to explore in any great detail here). These include things like:

Job Seeker's Allowance (between the ages of 18 -24). If this is claimed continuously for 6 months the recipient must enter the New Deal scheme which involves a choice from subsidised employment; work experience with a voluntary organisation / environmental task force or full-time education. Refusal to take any of these options results in the Allowance being stopped.

Child Tax Credit paid to parents caring for children in full-time education or training.

Working Tax Credit is paid to individuals and couples on low incomes (the exact levels and benefits are assessed according to a **means-tested** formula)

Old Age / retirement: State pensions currently (2007) start at 65 for men and 60 for women and payments depend on National Insurance contributions paid throughout the individual's working life. Pensioners who rely solely on a State pension are one of the most likely groups to experience poverty (roughly 20% of all pensioners are classed as poor). Means-tested Income Support is available for pensioners who, at 52%, are the largest recipient group of Social Security expenditure (the next largest group - 26% - are the sick and disabled).



Pensioners receive some free services (such as a Buss Pass, television licence and help with heating). Home help, district nurse / health visitor, day centre care, social workers and meals-on-wheels are also provided for those aged 65 and over. Where the elderly are unable to care for themselves there is the choice of entering a private nursing home or being forced to rely on their children for care and accommodation ("Care in the Community").

it does and should do, influence the way we look at, understand and, in some instances, try to influence its shape and development.

In this respect, just as most of us (probably) have some sort of opinion about "families" and "family life", governments (and sociologists) also have opinions about this institution. In this final section, therefore, we can look briefly at a range of social policies that have – or continue to – affect family life in the UK as a way of illustrating a general "ideology of the family" in our society.

To this end, therefore, although it's something of an oversimplification, we can for the sake of argument characterise post-war government policies in the UK as conforming to what **Dean** (2006) characterises as a:

Managerial State: That is, the role of government, in terms of social and economic policies, has broadly been one of trying to *manage* the various ways family groups and relationships have developed in our society. Policy, in this respect, has been formulated and enacted within the general ideology of "privacy" we've just noted. In other words, governments have attempted to set general *boundaries* for people's behaviour by trying to encourage some forms of behaviour (such as marriage) and discourage others (such as single-parenthood) without necessarily becoming directly and coercively involved in how people live out their family relationships.

Module Link

Crime and Deviance

Family life is covered by *general social policies* relating to the criminal law. Although, for example, we tend to talk about things like domestic violence as if it represents a special legal category, it's actually a form of criminal assault. Areas such as child abuse, rape and bigamy are also covered by crime policies. We should also remember that areas such as marriage and civil partnerships involve legally-binding contracts...

An example of a *coercive state policy* is something like China's "one child" system, introduced in 1979, that **Rosenberg** (2007) notes "...limits couples [in cities] to one child. Fines, pressures to abort a pregnancy, and even forced sterilization accompany second or subsequent pregnancies".

Family and Social Policy: Explanations

"The family", as we've suggested throughout this section, is a complex institution – not just in terms of its different structures (nuclear, extended, single-parent...) but also its relationships (marriage, cohabitation, the roles played by adults and children and the like). The picture is further complicated, as far as social policy and social change is concerned, by the fact that although the family, in its broadest sense, has generally been seen by successive UK governments (both Labour and Conservative) as a:

Private institution - one in which family members should, as far as possible, be left alone to work-out their relationships and differences, the family is also a social group influenced by both:

Legal norms – marriage, for example, is a form of legal contract between two adults of the opposite sex and:

Moral norms – in the sense that our ideas (both as family members and in the wider sense of sociological theorising) about what a family *is* and *should be*, *what*

Module Link

Power and Politics

The concept of "The State" and theories about its role in contemporary societies is discussed in more detail in the section "**The Role of the Modern State**".



The notion of "family management" (in basic terms the idea that the role of social policy in UK society, as it relates to the family, is one of attempting to specify certain conditions under which stable family groups can flourish) is a significant one for a couple of reasons:

Successive UK governments have generally adopted a "hands-off" approach to family life.

Firstly, it maintains the idea that “families” are, by-and-large, *private institutions* that are able to function in ways that benefit both individual members and society in general.

Secondly, however, it recognises there is a *public role* for government that, in general, consists of attempting to create the general social conditions under which this private institution can flourish.

These two ideas are, up to a point, complimentary in that, as we’ve suggested, social policy within a managerial context is just that – an attempt to manage people’s behaviour by indirectly encouraging some forms of behaviour and discouraging others.

Finch (2003), however, highlights a central assumption of this idea when she notes: “Governments are always in danger of presuming a standard model of family life for which they can legislate, by making the assumption that most families do in fact operate in particular ways. In reality it is very difficult to detect a standard model, in either a descriptive sense (what people do) or a normative sense (what they ought to do)”.

This “standard model” assumption characteristic of post-war governments in the UK, has led, **Finch** argues, to the further assumption that: “The aim of policies should be to facilitate flexibility in family life, rather than shape it into a particular form...to ensure that people have maximum opportunity to work out their own relationships as they wish to suit the circumstances of their own lives. It is not the proper role of governments to presume that certain outcomes would be more desirable than others”.

Finch’s arguments strongly suggest that social policies are created and enacted within the context of certain *ideological beliefs* about the family group, the relationship between its members and its general relationship to wider society and groups.

Barlow and Duncan (2000), for example, argue that New Labour family policy was initially underpinned by the desire “to encourage what are seen as desirable family practices, and to discourage other, less-favoured, forms”. This desire was, in turn, based around what they identify as a combination of two intellectual frameworks (**Libertarian** and **Communitarian**), the basic beliefs of which have shaped family policy over the past 10 years.

Following Neale (2000) we can identify the basic beliefs contained in each framework in the following terms:

We can note a couple of things about the ideas we’ve just identified:

Firstly, although the ideological fit is by no means exact, New Labour family policies have reflected a general mix of **Functionalist**, **Neo-Functionalist** and **New Right** principles.

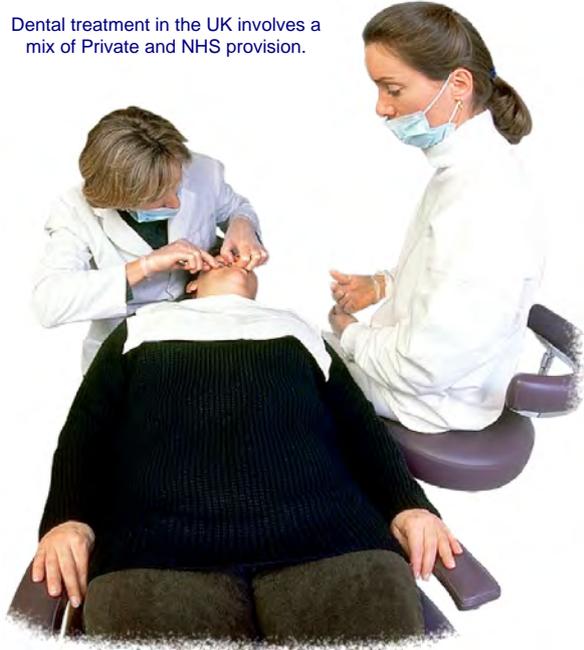
Secondly they represent ideals that, in practice, may not be fully enforced or subscribed to by governments. In addition, where government policy on the family is a mixture of different intellectual ideals (a Communitarian belief, for example, in a Welfare State system

Libertarianism	Communitarianism
Focus	
The relationship between individual and the state (national orientation).	The relationship between the individual and their community (local orientation).
Individuals	
People behave rationally and are driven by self-interest (for both themselves and their families).	People (should be) driven by moral consensus, shared values and sense of belonging to part of a wider community.
Politics	
Emphasis placed on individual choice, independence from “State interference”, self-reliance and provision.	Emphasis on ideas of commitment to welfare of others (not just immediate family) and duty (based on notions of common good – individuals benefit from community involvement).
Diversity	
Encouraged – people develop family forms and relationships that are “right for them”. A non-judgmental approach (no type of family is inherently better than any other).	Discouraged – some types of family are dysfunctional and damaging (to both individuals and communities). A judgmental approach (some forms of family are encouraged, others discouraged).
Control	
Family relationships and structures controlled by legal contracts (marriage for example), rights, incentives, sanctions.	Family relationships and structures shaped by “collective moral prescriptions” (ideas about how people should behave). These originate at government level.
Welfare	
State welfare systems should be restricted to enforcing legal / social obligations (for example, using the law to ensure maintenance payments by an absent parent). Families encouraged to “provide for themselves” through insurance etc.	State welfare system is a tool through which social policies and changes can be effected. Welfare systems have both a practical dimension (providing help and support for families) and moral dimension (channelling most support to particular types of family arrangement).

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combined with a more-Libertarian belief in individuals taking responsibility for their own welfare – through personal insurance schemes for example) we frequently see policies developing that attempt to straddle the two frameworks. For example, in terms of health individuals have free access to hospital consultants – but they can also pay for private consultations if they have the money and inclination.

Dental treatment in the UK involves a mix of Private and NHS provision.



Neale (2000) goes slightly further by arguing “In developing policies for families, new labour appears to have combined the most negative aspects of these two frameworks...there is a libertarian assumption that people are inherently individualist in their behaviour but a communitarian requirement that they behave in uniform fashion. The welfare response is to combine 'carrots and sticks' forms of persuasion with top down, moral prescriptions on how to live the 'good' life”.

In general terms, therefore, the relationship between the family and social policy in contemporary UK society can be broadly expressed in terms of two processes:

Direction: Firstly as a relatively simple one-way process whereby governments create policies and people – within family groups in this instance – react to, adapt to and cope with the implications and effects of such policies.

Outcomes: Secondly as a rather more complex process in terms of policy outcomes (the consequences of various social policies relating to the family) in that because the family, as we've noted, tends to be seen as a private institution into which governments do not directly involve themselves, the intended policy outcomes are not entirely predictable. We should also note here that not all sections of the UK population are treated equally in this respect. Some sections—largely the poor and the powerless – are subject to greater levels of government intervention in family life than others (not just the obvious rich and powerful candidates, but also the vast majority of middle class families).

Families and Households

The idea that social policy outcomes can be unpredictable leads us to our final observation here – that unpredictability partly results from the fact that social policy is not necessarily a one-way “top-down” (from government to individuals) process.

As **Neale** (2000) notes: “Families are also sources of change in themselves that can impact on wider society and on state policy. They are bound up with changes in the way individuals...perceive and negotiate their personal relationships and seek to mould their identities as partners, parents, friends, employees and so on”.

Tried and Tested

- Explain what is meant by “social policy” (2 marks)
- Identify and explain **two** needs (other than those noted in the text) addressed by social policy (4 marks)
- Suggest and explain **three** beliefs that have shaped family policy over the past decade (6 marks)
- Examine the ways in which social policies and laws may influence families and households (24 marks)
- Assess the view that the family should be a private institution (24 marks)



The various ways that individual and family relationships develop can have an impact on how governments develop social policy - the recent introduction of Civil Partnerships in the UK, for example, is a good illustration of this process.

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