

#40DayChallenge Day 21

Outline and explain two ways in which social policies have reinforced the functions of the family (10)

One way in which social policies have reinforced the functions of the family is through by giving preference to the neo-conventional and nuclear families through a range of policies. Policies such as maternity leave, up to 9 months paid leave and 12 months leave from employment in total have helped to reinforce the instrumental and expressive roles. This is because it is assumed that the mother will stay at home and look after the children whilst the male goes out to work. This reinforces the instrumental and expressive roles as suggested by Parsons, which also serves to socialise children into typical gender roles as girls may see their mother staying home and looking after the children whilst boys will see it as the role of the father to go out and work. However, recent changes to shared parental leave have seen parents have the option to share the 12 months leave, which whilst still reinforcing an instrumental and expressive role, is more pragmatic as it allows these roles to be shared between the two parents creating a greater economic flexibility.

A second way in which social policies have reinforced the functions of the family is illustrated by the New Right/Neo-liberal perspective of individual responsibility. This conforms to the economic support function of the family as suggested by Murdock. Neo-liberal economic policy proposes lower taxation and decreased social spending by the state to enable individuals to make autonomous choices about how they spend their money. Examples of this include indirect policies such as increasing the tax thresholds for individuals, re-introduction of the married person's tax allowance by the Conservative government – an allowance that can be transferred from one partner to another if the first does not earn enough to be taxed – and caps on the number of children that parents can claim child benefit for (maximum of 2 from 2017). What these policies do is aim to give working families more money to support their families, whilst simultaneously withdrawing dependency on the state to provide for their children. This reinforces the economic function of the family to provide for it's members.

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