

Lesson Notes: Individuals, Families & Theories

Key Questions

- What disciplines study individuals and families?
 - What theories help us understand families?
 - What is a theory?
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What is a Theory?

A **theory** is a set of ideas that explains how and why something happens. It helps us **understand, explain, and predict** behaviour in individuals and families.

Disciplines that Study Individuals and Families

1. Sociology

Definition: The study of society, social relationships, and institutions.

Examples in Family Studies:

- How culture affects parenting styles
 - Divorce rates in different societies
 - Gender roles in families
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2. Psychology

Definition: The study of human behaviour and mental processes.

Examples in Family Studies:

- Parent-child attachment
- Emotional development in children

- Effects of stress on relationships
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Theoretical Perspectives in Family Studies

1. Functionalism

Definition: Society is a system where all parts work together to maintain stability.

Family Example:

- Parents provide care and income
 - Children learn values and social skills
 - ➔ Each member has a role that keeps the family stable
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2. Systems Theory

Definition: A family is a system where all members are connected and affect each other.

Family Example:

- Conflict between parents affects children
 - A change in one member impacts everyone
 - ➔ The family works as a whole unit
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3. Symbolic Interactionism

Definition: Focuses on daily interactions and the meanings people give to them.

Family Example:

- Saying “I love you” builds emotional bonds
 - Family traditions create shared meaning
 - ➔ Relationships are shaped by communication
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4. Exchange Theory

Definition: Relationships are based on costs and rewards.

Family Example:

- People stay in relationships when benefits outweigh costs
 - Support, love, and care are seen as “rewards”
 - ➔ Decisions are based on personal gain
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5. Life Course Approach

Definition: Studies how life stages and events influence people over time.

Family Example:

- Becoming a parent changes responsibilities
 - Divorce affects different age groups differently
 - ➔ Timing and life events matter
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6. Conflict Theory

Definition: Focuses on power, inequality, and conflict in relationships.

Family Example:

- Disagreements over money or decision-making
 - Power differences between family members
 - ➔ Not all family relationships are equal
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7. Feminist Theory

Definition: Examines gender inequality and roles in families.

Family Example:

- Unequal division of housework
- Expectations placed on mothers vs fathers
 - ➔ Highlights gender-based inequalities

8. Ecological Perspective

Definition: Families are influenced by their environment and surroundings.

Family Example:

- School, culture, and media influence behaviour
- Economic conditions affect family life
 - ➔ Families are shaped by external factors

Connection to Learning Goals

These concepts help students:

1. Plan Research

- Understand different ways to study families
- Choose the right perspective

2. Ask Strong Questions

- Example: *How does culture affect parenting?*
- Use theories to guide questions

3. Use Different Sources

- Sociology → statistics, surveys
- Psychology → experiments, case studies

4. Make a Hypothesis

- Example: *Families with strong communication have healthier relationships*

Quick Summary

- **Sociology** = society & relationships
- **Psychology** = behaviour & emotions
- **Theories** = tools to explain family life
- Each theory gives a **different way to understand families**