

How far can policy change family life?

Evaluate policy effects across families and distinguish design, access, take-up and outcomes using a UK and Sweden comparison.

Core learning

- A policy creates options; it does not automatically change family relationships.
- Design, access, take-up and outcomes are four separate stages in the policy effect chain.
- A comparison between countries can reveal possibilities, but it cannot prove that policy alone caused a social outcome.

Concepts, studies and perspectives

- UK Shared Parental Leave: Shows how a policy can formally share leave while take-up may still be shaped by pay, eligibility, workplace culture and gender norms.
- Swedish parental benefit: Shows how policy design can reserve and support care time, but outcomes still depend on wider culture, employment and household resources.
- Comparative policy method: Comparison helps evaluation, but learners must avoid simple cause-and-effect claims.
- Functionalism: Policy can support family functions such as care, protection and socialisation.
- New Right: Policy may weaken self-reliance or reshape incentives around family responsibilities.
- Feminism: Policy may redistribute care, but only if pay, take-up and workplace norms allow gender roles to change.
- Marxism: Policy may support the reproduction of labour power while leaving class inequality intact.

Concept	Meaning	Exam use
Mechanism	The process connecting cause and outcome	Use it to move beyond description
Differentiated effect	Policy or social change affects groups differently	Use for AO3
Evidence limit	What the data cannot show	Use to qualify judgement
Judgement	A reasoned answer to the question	Use in conclusions and paragraph endings

Source / accuracy note

Source notes: GOV.UK states eligible parents can share up to 50 weeks of Shared Parental Leave and up to 37 weeks of pay; Försäkringskassan states Swedish parental benefit is paid for 480 days for one child, including 390 income-based days and 90 minimum-level days.