

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.

Suggested teaching sequence

- Connect and diagnose prior knowledge
- Explicitly teach distinction between pattern and mechanism
- Model one evidence-to-explanation paragraph
- Use routes for supported, core and stretch application
- Finish with exam judgement and retrieval

Misconceptions to tackle

- Assuming the same effect for all families
- Treating a policy as a complete cause
- Listing theories without applying them
- Evaluating by saying “however” without showing why it matters

Subject background

Teach learners to separate social policy design from access, take-up and actual outcomes. This is the conceptual hinge for strong AO3.

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.