



UNIVERSITY  
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# Family Complexity: Separated Families & the State

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# Separated families & the state

## 1. Who is child support for – the state or children?

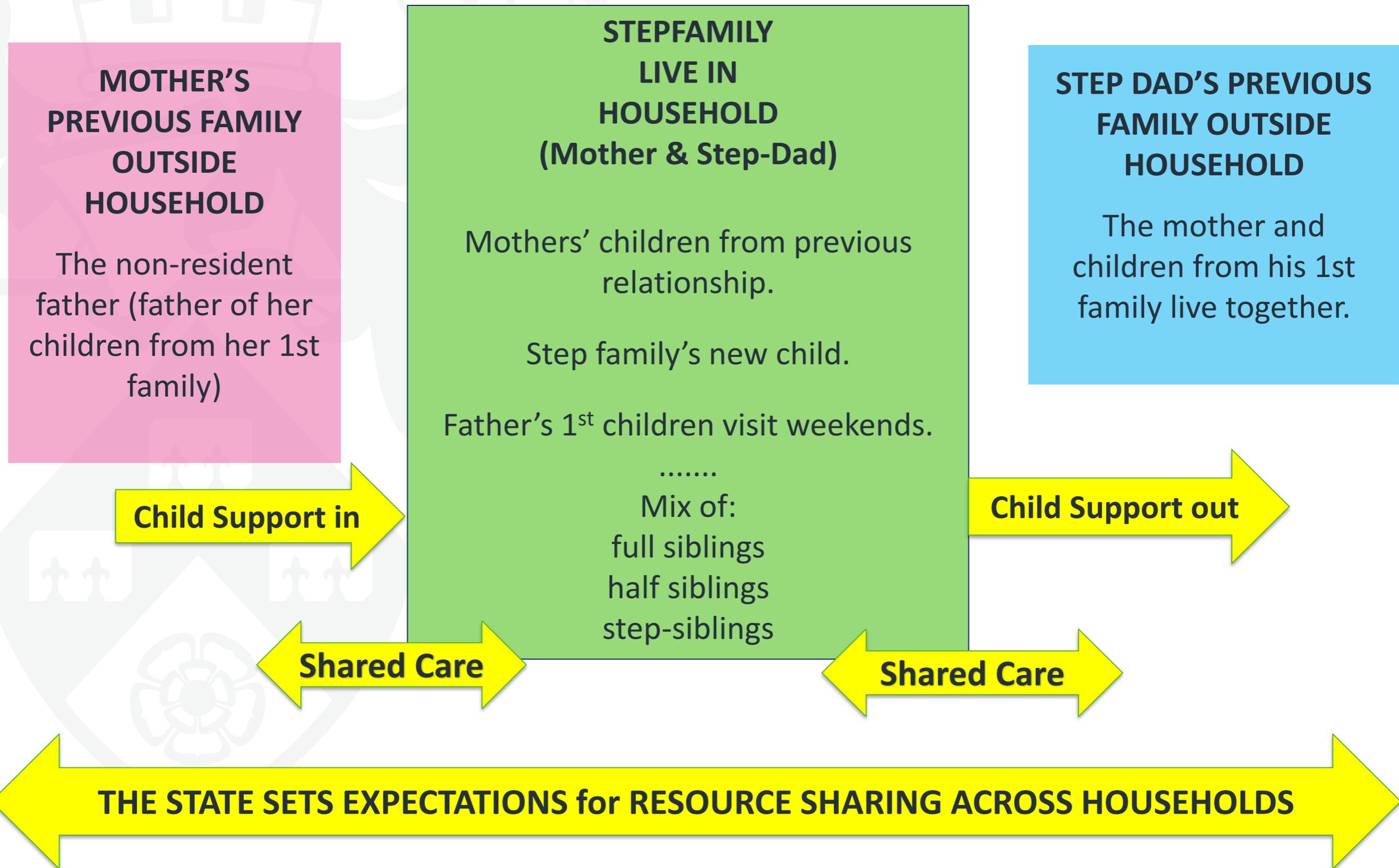
- What are the poverty reduction outcomes produced by child support when take account of policy principles and programme interactions?
- Is the UK child support scheme a good policy model?

## 2. What is state role in supporting shared care?

- Highly contested policy area – conceptually ambiguous term
- Good policy models unknown? What counts as good?
- How does shared care affect child support amounts (13 countries)?

Definition: Child support money paid by one separated parent (usually the father) for the financially supporting children post-separation

# Complex Separated Families



# 1. Who is Child Support for?

- OECD (2011) IF resident parent on Income Support, at least some child support should be **'passed through'** for child.
- Thus, child support payments should be complementary to benefits, not act as a full substitute for benefits. Helps reduce child poverty.

**Child support treated as substitute to benefits – no or part pass through**

New Zealand 1  
USA (Wisconsin) 1

**Child support treated as complement to benefits – full pass through**

UK 1  
Australia 1

**BUT** ... interactions between programmes means child support income may be used to calculate state benefits – thereby substituting benefits.

**Child support treated as full/part substitute to benefits – interactions**

New Zealand 1, USA (Wisconsin) 1.  
Australia 1, 2. Finland 2, Germany 2,



# 1. Who is Child Support for?

- UK has exceptional good? child support policy.

## **Child support full complement to benefits**

(full 'pass through' and not counted in benefit calculations):

- Helps improve child poverty outcomes – if paid by the parent!
- Effective enforcement therefore very important.
- BUT then there are fees..... that is another story.

- UK policy principles right – child support is for children.
- But ...overall poverty reduction outcomes also depend on generosity of income support benefits within countries.



## 2. State role re shared care

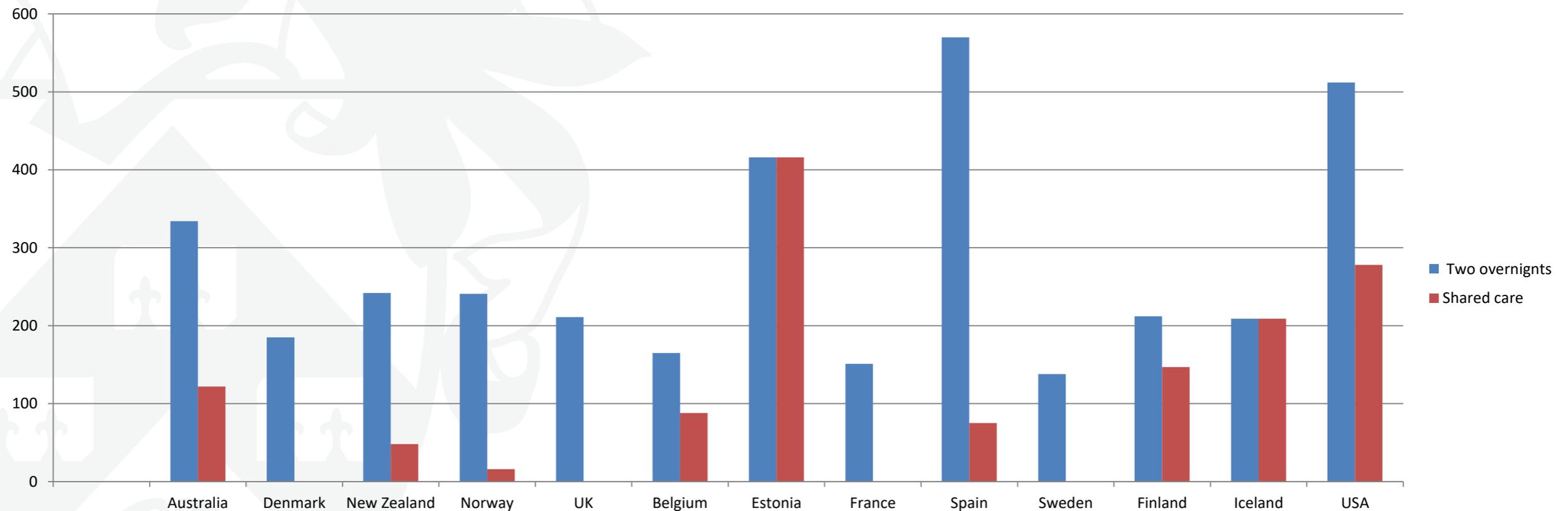
- Shared care highly contested and complex policy area.
- Assumption 'it' is increasing – but unknown what 'it' is?
- Prevalence rates hard to measure: estimates 3%-40%. Equal care = 1%.
- No good international evidence to guide policy.
- Parents need resources make shared care a reality – but social protection policies assume 'one family in one household'.
- How is Child Support policy doing? Tension: accounting for shared care good re gender equality BUT reduces child support and disadvantages the main parent. Child support potentially has a social protection function (e.g. UK) and this is compromised.
- New comparative evidence 13 countries (3).





## 2. State role re shared care

Amount of child support (in pppUS\$ / month) calculated from formal child support guidelines in each country for a model separated family: parents have two overnights stays (blue) versus joint physical custody (red).



Model separated family = 2 children aged 7 and 10, Dad earns male median full time earnings in his country and Mum male median full time earnings).

Source: (3) Preliminary analysis Hakovirta and Skinner (*forthcoming*).

# References



- 1. Skinner, C., Meyer, D. R., Cook, K. & Fletcher, M., 1 (2017) Child Maintenance and Social Security Interactions: The Poverty Reduction Effects in Model Lone Parent Families Across four Countries, *JRNL Social Policy*. 46, 3, 495-516.
- 2. Hakovirta, M., Skinner, C., Hilamo, M., Jokela, M. (in press) 'Child poverty, child maintenance and interactions with social assistance benefits among lone parent families: a comparative analysis' *JRNL Social Policy* 2019.
- 3. Hakovirta, M. and Skinner, C. (forthcoming) 'A comparative analysis of joint physical custody and child maintenance arrangements' in Laura Bernardi & Dimitri Mortelmans (eds.) *Interdisciplinary insights on shared physical custody*, Springer.