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

**STEPFAMILY LIVE IN HOUSEHOLD**
(Mother & Step-Dad)

- Mothers’ children from previous relationship.
- Step family’s new child.
- Father’s 1st children visit weekends.
  
  ......  
  
  Mix of:  
  
  full siblings  
  half siblings  
  step-siblings

**STEP DAD’S PREVIOUS FAMILY OUTSIDE HOUSEHOLD**

The mother and children from his 1st family live together.

**MOTHER’S PREVIOUS FAMILY OUTSIDE HOUSEHOLD**

The non-resident father (father of her children from her 1st family)

**THE STATE SETS EXPECTATIONS for RESOURCE SHARING ACROSS HOUSEHOLDS**

**Child Support in**

**Child Support out**

**Shared Care**

**Shared Care**
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

