**Assignment Brief**

*The Family*

Families are a cultural universal, but sociologists show that our ideas about families vary across cultures and societies. How government policy, too, affects families, and in particular to offset the challenging conditions experienced in some households, is a very topical focus for a research project.

While most of us think of the family as a positive thing, its effects on society are quite complex.  On the one hand, a good family life is one of the things which many of us will cherish most.  Families are life-enhancing in ways which are hard or impossible to find elsewhere.  This suggests that societies should find ways of promoting families and facilitating good family relationships, so that the individuals within them will flourish.  On the other hand, families are also sources of harm, in various kinds of ways.  Family relationships can be neglectful, or abusive.  Some of the worst things that people do, they do to the people closest to them.  If you come from a family background where others have committed offences, you yourself are far more likely than others to end up in the criminal justice system.

We don’t choose or earn our family backgrounds. Yet they can seem sources of great unfairness – privileging some children over others, for example, or putting some at far greater risk of harm or disadvantage.  Though we’d like to think that every child, born to every family, has an equal chance in life, we know that this is never really the case.  Government policies, in Wales and the UK, have mixed, often limited results in seeking to address this.

A comparative study of particular government policies on families in two or perhaps three countries would enable you to consider the influence of cultural differences in ideologies of justice and fairness. Policies on tackling child poverty or funding for childcare, for example, have been especially contested and on which it is possible to use a wide range of useful resources.

**Contacts**

<http://www.southwales.ac.uk/study/subjects/sociology/>