

A Cross-National Comparison of Family Policy

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Preface

Background and Objective of the Study

This study was commissioned by the Central Policy Unit (CPU) of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HK SAR Government) in the mid-2007. The objective of the study is to advise CPU on policy recommendations to support families in Hong Kong through a comparative research on overseas experiences on the following aspects:

1. general trend of family policy reform in developed societies worldwide
2. The identification of various models of family policy in the context of different socio-political institutional settings in these developed societies
3. The relative advantages and difficulties of these models of family policy in relation to the socio-political backgrounds of these developed societies

Five countries, namely, the United Kingdom, France, Singapore, Germany and Sweden are selected for this study on the basis of their theoretical relevance in analyzing family policy reform within the context of socio-demographic challenges facing developed societies.

Methodology

This study is a comparative research based on secondary data. Data are collected mainly through library and internet research. Research findings are confirmed by various data sources, including official documents, scholarly

research reports, books and journal articles.

Research Team Members

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Executive Summary

Introduction

Family policies have changed significantly since the 1970s due to several universal challenges facing industrialised countries including the demographic change in family structure and family dynamics, the tightening of government budgets, and global economic integration. This comparative study aims to understand family policy reforms in various countries in the context of their socio-political institutions. Based on that analysis, this research will draw out the relevant implications for family policy in Hong Kong.

Definition of Family Policy

Family policy in this report refers to benefits and services provided by government for families with children and covers three dimensions:

1. *Cash support for families*, including family allowances, tax relief for children and means-tested cash benefits.
2. *Leave benefits for working parents*, including maternity and parental leave schemes
3. *Child care services* for families, including the provision and subsidies of child care facilities.

The Comparative Framework

Using a typology of family policy developed by A. H. Gauthier (1996), this study will discuss the impact of social and demographic changes in recent

decades on the choice of policy measures and instruments for implementing family policy in five countries. The major argument of this comparative model is that family policy making is always a product of the interplay between a country's socio-political institutions and socio-demographic changes.

This study has conducted an archival research based on secondary analysis of existing studies and international sources of information on family policy. Classic examples of each family policy model proposed by Gauthier are selected as the target cases of this report, namely, Britain (the Non-interventionist Model), France (the Pro-natalist Model), Germany (the Pro-traditional Model) and Sweden (the Egalitarian Model). Singapore is also selected because of its resemblance to Hong Kong as a city state.

The comparative study discusses the following aspects of family policy for each country:

- 1) social and demographic trends in recent decades
- 2) nature, objectives and goals of family policy
- 3) governmental and non-governmental institutions that are involved in family policy
- 4) benefits and services provided by the governments to families, including different forms of cash support for families and benefits for working parents and child care services
- 5) socio-demographic impacts of family policy with respects to the following three dimensions, namely, 1) family solidarity, 2) fertility rate and 3) gender equality

Universal Demographic Challenges Facing Developed Countries

Social and demographic changes have acted over time as major catalysts in the development of family policy. Such changes have posed similar challenges for most developed countries, but advanced countries have often responded differently due to their different socio-political contexts.

1. **Decline of the Traditional Family:** In many developed countries, marriage to one person for life is not always feasible or desirable given the changes in industrial or post-industrial society. Divorce and cohabitation become more and more attractive to the people as alternatives to marriage. High rates of separation and divorce have led to rising numbers of one-parent households, most of which are headed by mothers. Despite the increased availability of jobs for women, many women find that they cannot earn enough to support their children without government assistance. The implications for the development and future prospects of these women and, especially, their children, have become a matter of public concern. Besides, the increase in one-parent families has also raised welfare costs.

2: **Changing Gender Division of Labour:** Closely related to these structural changes are the changes in family roles, especially the role of women. The most significant change that affects the family roles is the increased labour force participation rate of women in the industrialised countries. The entrance of married women into the labour force enables them to support themselves without depending on their husbands and provides more opportunities to meet new people and to compare their personal situations against them. Inevitably, as more women work outside home, either because their incomes are needed to

support their family due to the rising cost of living, or because full and equal participation in society assumes the employment of women, the traditional role of men as family head is gradually undermined. Parenting roles of men and women are affected, as are the ways in which children become socialised in the family. If both women and men are employed outside the home and are expected to rear children, the issue of how children are cared for during the day becomes increasingly important.

Divergent Policy Responses in the Five Countries

Although social and demographic trends have led to major structural changes in family life, these trends themselves are not sufficient to cause the government to reform policies. Politicians need to be persuaded that something must be done and be pushed into action. Advocacy groups such as family associations and women's groups have organised and formed coalitions to launch campaigns in order to make an impact on policy makers. While similar social and demographic changes are occurring in developed countries, interest groups and their conflicts differ across nations. That is why the responses of different countries to these similar challenges vary.

Britain

Britain has been classified as having a Non-Interventionist Family Policy Regime because the government has been very reluctant to intrude into the market and the family. Throughout the post-war period, Britain has not sought to formulate an explicit and well-coordinated family policy. Cash support has been relatively more generous only for families in need, while state support for working parents has been relatively underprovided in terms of both parental

leave arrangements and public childcare provisions.

Much of the family change in Britain can be attributed to individual choice because of the government's non-interventionist family policy. The advantage of this policy is that it facilitates greater flexibility in the labour market and family relations; the downside is that it requires individuals to juggle their family responsibilities with the need to work. For decades, many women have had to work part-time to reconcile the conflicts between the need to provide childcare and employment.

As soon as the traditional family model weakens, the vulnerability of single mothers is exposed. During the 1990s, the growing number of single-mother families that relied heavily on social welfare created a heavier financial burden for the government. The New Labour Government thus initiated a series of welfare reforms that strived to restore the balance between "rights and responsibilities" of British citizens. While the policy reform continued to stress the importance of labour market participation, a major breakthrough is that the government has come to accept it has a public responsibility to support childcare by financing childcare services.

France

Because its fertility rate started to decline early, France has a very long tradition of family policy with Pro-natalist goals. The major concern of this model is the fertility rate, and the main task of French family policy is to encourage families to have more children.

To achieve this goal, great emphasis is placed on cash allowances to compensate for the economic cost of child rearing. Cash benefits provided to families are much diversified, including various types of allowances that accompany all stages of family life: birth grant, child allowances, single-parent allowance, housing allowance, moving bonus, etc. These allowances are generally targeted at families with three or more children and at low-income families. Noticing that more women are joining the labour force, the French government has also launched a number of policies and programmes, such as a comprehensive early childhood education system and maternity/parental leave programmes, that can help mothers to reconcile work and family life.

However, the interplay of the pro-natalist objective and reconciliation of work/family life has led to the development of a rather disarticulated system comprised of sometimes contradictory measures: service provision for women to keep them in gainful employment, but also monetary compensation for them to withdraw from the labour market. As France has had one of the highest fertility rates among the EU member states, we may conclude that French family policy effectively supports families to achieve a better work-life balance, and it has been conducive to a higher fertility rate.

Singapore

Singapore has since the mid-1980s shifted its primary focus towards delayed marriage, the declining fertility rate and population ageing. Much of its family policy has been focusing on encouraging marriage and childrearing. However, its pro-natalist family policy has met with overt failure. This can be attributed to the fact that the Singaporean state may have overloaded families (women in

particular) with too many responsibilities. The large burden of family responsibilities may induce intense pressure on individuals (and especially on women) in terms of resolving the reconciliation between work and private life. From this vantage point, the declining birth rate and delayed marriage can be interpreted as the effect of female resistance to the traditional, patriarchal family arrangements. Nevertheless, the Singapore government has in recent years become more supportive of work-life balance policies but their impacts remain to be seen.

Germany

Germany is a typical case of pro-traditional model, though its family policy experienced significant reform after the unification. Under the principle of “subsidiarity”, the government holds that family support is a private responsibility for families themselves and voluntary organizations. The major goal of German family policy was to preserve traditional family that is a two-parent household with a “at home” mother caring for the children. Actually, the German institutional framework provides strong incentives for couples to get married, particularly when one of the partners withdraws from full time employment after childbirth. As a result, only medium level of cash allowances and working benefits for parents were provided. The supply of public child care services for working mothers was even inadequate.

The lack of government support in resolving the reconciliation between work and family life for women led to the decreasing number of child birth. Due to consistently low birth rates and low female labour force participation rates, German government has begun to reform its family policy in recent years. The

emphasis is on supporting parents for work-family balance and increasing the number of births. A new form of dual breadwinner model of a full-time and a part-time working couple seems to be implicitly promoted in this reform. Since the reform is still in progress, whether it can attain its goals or not still need more time to assess.

Sweden

Sweden has generally been seen as a typical example of the Pro-egalitarian Family Policy Regime. Universalism and egalitarianism are the two central societal values. Because of a strong social consensus that each citizen is entitled to basic benefits regardless of their social and economic status, marital position and sex, care has long been a public responsibility borne by the so-called “caring state”.

The pro-egalitarian model of family policy aims to promote gender equality by transforming the traditional gender division of labour in families, liberating women from the burdens of family responsibilities, and equalising opportunities to participate in the labour market. The two pillars of the Swedish family policy are a generous parental leave scheme and a comprehensive public childcare system.

As a result of increasing gender equality in work and in the family, the breadwinner family model started to decline from the 1960s onwards. For decades, Sweden has experienced a relatively high fertility rate and high female labour force participation rate (with a moderate share working part time) even though marriage has weakened as a social institution and individualism has

replaced familialism.

Analysing the Convergence of Family Policy

It is obvious that these countries show a certain degree of convergence in their family policy as discussed next.

From preserving the traditional family model towards recognising diverse family forms

Developed countries have become less explicit about wanting to preserve the traditional breadwinner family model. Obviously, there is a major difficulty in sustaining the traditional family model in general and the patriarchal gender division of labour in particular since women are becoming more educated, are getting more involved in work and are less constrained by the traditional gender division of labour. Instead, it is common for family policy reforms to take into consideration the diversity of family forms. For example, Germany has recognised the need to shift from home-based childcare towards public childcare services, and France has offered both married and unmarried couples the same legal status.

From directly financing the family towards children-centred support

With the dissolution of the traditional family model because of more divorces and illegitimate births, supporting the family is becoming more difficult. While two-parent families are more likely to be able to take good care of their children, lone-parent families are often left with a choice of being either an earner or a carer. An increasing number of lone-parent families thus poses a major challenge to the “family-centred” family policy. As a result, helping and

supporting children directly is becoming a common theme in policy reform, replacing the old conception of supporting children through financing their parents. Indeed, more developed countries have followed the lead of Sweden to recognise children's entitlement to public support for infant and child care services.

Towards helping individual citizens to achieve work-life balance

With a high female labour market participation rate associated with a decline in the fertility rate, helping individual citizens (and women in particular) to balance the need to work and that for childcare is another major theme in family policy reform. Not surprisingly, granting a much longer and gender-neutral parental leave scheme is thus becoming a more common policy measure in Europe. Another major common policy is for the public to share the childcare responsibilities with the family either through public subsidies or public provision for centre-based childcare services.

Understanding the Differences in Family Policies

There are still major differences among the five countries even though they are converging towards a gender-neutral, children-centred family policy model. Discussed below are divergences in family policies as a result of differences in socio-political institutions.

The societal division of labour between state, family and market

A country's family policy objective depends on the institutional division of labour between the state, the family and the market. In the Non-interventionist Family Policy Regime, the market is often favoured over the state and the

family. British family policy reform in the past decade has actually been reinforcing the role of the market, for example, encouraging single parents to enter the workforce by subsidising their use of private childcare centres. By contrast, France (a Pro-natalist Family Policy Regime) and Germany (a Pro-traditional Family Policy Regime) continue to emphasise the role of the family by providing prolonged parental leaves. In Sweden, the state has taken over the childcare responsibilities by regarding childcare centre enrolment as an individual entitlement. In Singapore, family policy is subordinated to the national development strategy.

The political struggle between the feminist movement and traditional values

The political struggle between traditional values and the feminist movement is also a major factor in explaining the extent to which the family policy favours gender neutrality. Where feminism gains an upper hand, family policy works in favour of gender neutrality and work-life balance for women, as in the case of Sweden, and to a lesser extent, France. By contrast, where traditional values are strongly upheld by major political parties, as in Germany and Singapore, the preservation of the traditional family is preferred over the promotion of gender equality.

State capacity and the choice of policy instruments

The choice of policy instruments is best understood by referring to state capacity because this is directly related to how much resources the state can allocate to this policy area. We analyse next different types of policy instruments:

a) Explicit vs. implicit family policy

Strong and active states are more likely to find it feasible to use comprehensive policy packages with explicit goals. Sweden and Singapore represent two such cases. By contrast, Britain has not always been able to launch a comprehensive family policy with an explicit goal. Rather, British family policy only intervenes when there is a strong social consensus on the need for a policy solution for some severe social problems.

b) Legislation vs. financial incentives

A strong and active state is more likely to use both legislation and financial incentives as a policy instrument whereas a relatively weak state often uses financial incentives rather than resorting to legislation. The UK represents a typical example as it long refused to adopt the EU parental leave directive. Instead, it relied for a long time mostly on promotion campaigns to encourage voluntary participation among employers in granting parental leave. By contrast, both Singapore and Sweden are able to complement legislation with financial incentives to achieve their family policy objective as shown by their relatively quick reform of statutory parental leave schemes. Of the two Conservative Welfare Regimes, France has resorted more often than Germany to using legislation as a family policy instrument. This is associated with differences in their political arrangements in that France has a more centralised form of government whereas Germany has a more decentralised form.

c) Selective coverage vs. universal coverage

The Non-interventionist Family Policy Regime such as found in Britain tends to avoid universal coverage. When the government wanted to enlarge the

coverage of family benefits, it was inclined to benefit certain target groups. For example, all children will benefit from the enlarged coverage stemming from childcare reform and the launch of the Child Trust Fund. By contrast, the Egalitarian Family Policy Regime has always provided universal coverage as in Sweden. Both France and Singapore in effect treat women differently according to their income levels. In Singapore, the use of tax relief alongside limited subsidies actually provides high-income women incentives to work while channelling low-income women to homemaking and child caring.

d) Service provider vs. resource provider

In the Non-interventionist Family Policy Regime, as in Britain, family policy is less inclined towards intervening into private decisions concerning family affairs. Therefore, the government declines to play the role of a service provider but instead prefers to stimulate the demand for private childcare service through subsidising public-private partnerships. By contrast, both the Swedish and French government have taken on the role of a service provider, though Sweden has a much higher public childcare centre enrolment rate than France.

Analysing Policy Outcomes: The Hard Choice Among Family Solidarity, the Fertility Rate and Gender Equality

When we analyse the policy outcome of the five countries, a major observation is that none of these countries can achieve significant improvements in all three dimensions (family solidarity, fertility rate and gender equality) at the same time. In other words, in designing a family policy, hard choices have to be made over which objective to prioritise.

Both Germany and Singapore have shown relatively strong family solidarity but they also have the lowest fertility rate. Gender equality also shows relatively slow improvement. By contrast, Sweden, and to a lesser extent, France have relatively weak family solidarity but they have a relatively higher fertility rate and a relatively high level of gender equality. In terms of family policy outcomes, Britain is in the middle, with a relatively weak family solidarity, a modest fertility rate and a modest level of gender equality. From the five countries we studied, we conclude that it is very unlikely that the three objectives can be achieved at the same time.

This argument could be pushed further. The more the policy aims to retain the traditional family model that assumes women take care of the children, the lower the likelihood that women will have children in an industrialised setting. The preservation of the traditional family model seems to require putting too much responsibility on women, especially in terms of the resolution of work-life conflicts. Therefore, while the divorce rate may be lower, the marriage rate is not high and the fertility rate is very low.

Gender equality is associated with a rising female labour market participation rate. Though this is arguably more related to economic development than government policy, government policy is related to the likelihood of a high female employment rate. For example, Sweden provides public subsidises for childcare and this liberates women from their family responsibilities, thus achieving a very high female labour market participation rate. By contrast, in other family policy regimes, women are divided into two major groups according to their education and income level. Highly educated, high-income

women have more options for work-life balance, whereas less educated, low-income women are more likely to conform to the traditional gender division of labour and quit their jobs (or work part-time) after having children.

This comparative study has three major findings concerning family policy effectiveness. First, family policy can often achieve its explicit objective as long as the policy instrument is strong and comprehensive. Second, family policy is more likely to influence people's decision to work than to influence their decision to have children and their likelihood of embracing marriage and family. Third, family solidarity is often compromised by the decline in fertility rates and a lower level of gender equality whereas there seems to be no conflict between high gender equality and a high fertility rate.

Sketching the Hong Kong Socio-political Context

The Hong Kong policy context is closer to the liberal welfare regime. Market and family remain two major social institutions, and the state is expected to play a relatively smaller role. Accordingly, Hong Kong is also closer to the Non-interventionist Family Policy Regime, as those values such as self-reliance and voluntarism are also prevalent in Hong Kong. Nevertheless, the inclination towards preservation of the traditional family is still strong, although gender equality is gaining more support. In this way, Hong Kong may be classified as a Non-interventionist Family Policy Regime skewed towards the Pro-traditional Regime.

Hong Kong is also under the challenge of family changes facing most developed countries. While gender equality is improving, marriage and family

are both weakening as social institutions, and the fertility rate is very low. In other words, Hong Kong is experiencing similar socio-demographic challenges as those experienced in other developed countries. Therefore, policy reforms in those countries would be relevant for Hong Kong.

Based on our findings in this comparative study, we propose the following ideas that hopefully would contribute to further deliberations on family policies in Hong Kong. It is important to note that our recommendations do not suggest that Hong Kong government is ignorant or deficient in these aspects. Indeed, in the 2006-07 Policy Address the Chief Executive put a strong emphasis on “cherishing the family” (p.13). The recent establishment of the Family Council further demonstrated that Hong Kong will strive towards a well-coordinated family policy.

Ideas for Moving Family Policy Ahead in Hong Kong

We will propose the following six recommendations for the further development of family policies in Hong Kong:

1. Prioritises Different Objectives in Family Policy

While the government may have multiple objectives in the family policy, it is important that it sets a priority for these objectives, which may sometimes contradict one another. In our comparative study, family policy is often more effective when there is a clearly stated family outcome, be it stronger family solidarity, increasing fertility rate or higher gender equality. There should be a clear priority because we find that strengthening family solidarity may even further reduce the fertility rate, if no corresponding measure is provided to

enhancing gender equality, such as easing the work-life conflicts on the part on women. A serious consideration of the various trade-offs in the formulation of family policies should be on top of our policy agenda. Among various objectives, work-life balance deserves particular attention in Hong Kong.

2. Recognise the diversity of family forms

In order to enhance the policy effectiveness, the government should recognise that the increasing diversity in family forms because of an increasing diversity of individual choice concerning intimate relationships. The traditional family policy often presupposes a typical “family form”, that is, two-parent family established through marriage. However, with a larger number of families not organised according to the two-parent family model, the new family policy should recognise and accommodate their different needs.

3. Cater for the changing gender division of labour

Because of macro-sociological forces at work in developed societies, the gender division of labour is bound to be shifting away from the male breadwinner family model. A more feasible approach is to accommodate this social change by taking into consideration of the needs of different “individual members in families” rather the needs of the family as a whole. Therefore, instead of supporting the family through various cash support schemes, family policy package may include several policy measures that cater for the changing gender division of labour. For examples, gender-neutral parental leave accommodates dual earner families, public childcare is targeted at lone parent families, and a short paternity leave may help male breadwinner families.

4. Orient towards a children-centred approach

Hong Kong may follow an increasing number of countries that have shifted their family policy towards a more children-centred approach with strong reasons. Because of the diversity of family forms, we can no longer assume that children will be taken care of if their families are supported. Not only does supporting children usually encounter less political resistance, but children-centred policy initiatives also ensure that children actually get the desired mode of support as well as more equal opportunities for personal development.

5. Helping Citizens to Achieve Work-Life Balance

Hong Kong should accommodate citizen's needs of achieving work-life balance. With an increasing number of two-earner families and an increasing number of lone-parent families, there is an increasing pressure on women to resolve the conflicts between the needs to work and the childcare responsibilities. Helping women to resolve the work-family conflicts probably will make marriage and childrearing less burdensome for women. Therefore, Hong Kong should transform from treating childcare as being solely a private responsibility towards a public-private childcare partnership. Prolonging the parental leaves and providing childcare subsidies are both policy options suitable for Hong Kong.

6. Mustering a Resource Pool for Family Policy

To launch new family policy initiatives often require new financial resources. Even though we have a sizable fiscal surplus at the moment, current revenues of the government should not be the sole source of funding for new policy

initiatives. A more realistic approach will be to examine how to more efficiently make use of existing financial resources. In this regard, the Hong Kong government should examine what public and private resources are available for better utilisation.

To tap into a wider pool of resources, the government may put stronger effect in promoting private enterprise in the adoption of family-friendly employment practices. Another form of private-public partnership is to make use of community resources to support families, for examples, by promoting social enterprises that provide family and childcare services. An example of possible source of public resource for family policy would be the revenues generated from the Foreign Domestic Helper Levy, currently collected to a sum of some HK\$1,000 million each year. One possible direction that merit further consideration is to put a stronger emphasis on the training for family and childcare services. Another possibility that the government could consider is to go beyond retraining and broaden the use of the levy revenues on initiatives that integrate training with the provision of family-related services, such as institutional childcare or elderly care services. Since the levy was collected from typically middle-class families hiring foreign domestic helpers, it makes sense that the levy could be directed to uses that would enable them to lessen their dependence on foreign domestic helpers.

摘要

前言

世界各國的家庭政策，自 1970 年代起受多項社會變化的挑戰，當中包括家庭形態改變，政府財政緊縮，全球經濟一體化等。本研究旨在探討各國家庭政策改革之社會背景，藉以為香港提出相關的政策建議。

家庭政策之定義

本研究之家庭政策，專指由政府向有兒童的家庭所提供之支援和服務，包括以下三個方面：

1. 財政支援—包括現金支援，稅務減免，對低收入家庭的援助
2. 假期—包括女士產假，男士產假，育兒假期
3. 托兒支援—包括提供資助和托兒服務

比較架構

本研究參考 A. H. Gauthier (1996) 的家庭政策比較架構，集中分析家庭政策與社會結構之關係，以文獻研究的方法，探討包括英國，法國，新加坡，德國，瑞典等五個國家的家庭政策改革，主

要比較以下五個方面：

1. 社會人口之變化
2. 家庭政策之目標
3. 與家庭政策相關之主要機構
4. 家庭政策之主要措施
5. 受家庭政策影響之社會結構的三個方面—家庭團結，生育，兩性平等程度

各國共同面對之家庭問題

各國共同面對之家庭問題，可歸納為以下兩個主要變化：

1. 傳統家庭模式愈受挑戰：由於單身，同居，離婚等社會趨勢，家庭模式愈來愈多元化
2. 兩性分工愈來愈平等：由於教育普及化，女性就業率提高，兩性分工由過去的“男主外，女主內”愈趨向平等

各國家庭政策之不同方向

本節將從社會文化和政治制度入手，逐一分析各國家庭政策之不同方向

英國

英國是“不干預家庭”政策的典型。在二次大戰以來，很少直接干預家庭事務，傾向對低收入家庭提供現金援助，較少直接提供托兒服務，對父母育兒假期的提供較少。英國的家庭變遷受政策的影響較少，受個人選擇影響較多。這種家庭政策，尊重自由選擇，卻無助父母平衡家庭與工作。因此，英國的女性較多半職工作，以平衡家庭與工作的需要。隨著離婚率上升，單親家庭愈來愈依賴社會福利，成為 1990 年代英國一大社會問題。工黨政府執政後，推出一系列改革，其中以就業政策配合家庭政策，透過資助托兒所服務，協助單親母親重新就業。

法國

法國家庭政策一向旨在提高生育率，並以現金支援為主，減少家庭育兒的財政負擔。隨著女性就業率上升，法國轉向加強公共托兒服務，又增加父母的法定育兒假期。法國長期以來生育率都是歐盟成員國中較高的。不過，法國家庭政策最不足的地方，在於太著重以現金支援母親在家照顧子女，間接使低收入女性就業意願不足。

新加坡

新加坡自 1980 年代中期以來，人口老化問題日趨嚴重。其家庭政策主要目標為鼓勵結婚和生育，不過政策欠成效。其實，新加坡的家庭政策傾向保持傳統家庭中的男女分工，形成女性在平衡工作和家庭時有較大壓力。由近年來高收入女性結婚率和生育率持續偏低，女性獨身或不生育的情況，可解讀為對傳統家庭模式的反抗。不過，新加坡政府在 2000 年開始改革其家庭政策，正視女性在平衡工作和家庭的需要，其效果可能會慢慢顯著。

德國

德國是“保護傳統”的家庭政策典型。雖然德國在東西德統一以後，大幅改革其家庭政策，但是德國一直以支持傳統家庭模式為本，即支持“男主外，女主內”的分工模式，故此家庭政策注重現金支援和育兒假期，托兒服務就相當缺乏。德國的家庭政策，一直缺乏對在職女士的支援，導致生育率下降。德國政府在近年大力改革其家庭政策，加強托兒服務以鼓勵女性工作，不過由於推行只有幾年，成效仍然有待考證。

瑞典

瑞典是“提倡平等”的家庭政策典型，以男女平等和公平分配為原則。在家庭政策方面，主要支援女性就業，提供較長期的有薪假期和大規模的公共托兒服務。瑞典的男女平等程度相當高，而

“男主外，女主內”的家庭模式的重要性也早於 1960 年代以後愈趨下降。在過去二三十年，瑞典都有較高的女性就業率，生育率也在歐洲平均數之上。可是，家庭團結度卻愈見下降。

各國家庭政策的共同發展方向

本研究發現各國的家庭政策改革中，有以下的共同方向：

由支援傳統家庭到確認家庭形態多元化

由於女性教育程度提高，就業率也提高，“男主外，女主內”的家庭模式愈來愈難以維持，各國政府都放棄堅持傳統家庭模式，轉向面對家庭形態多元化的事實。

由財政支援家庭到以兒童為本位

家庭形態多元化，其中單親家庭的增加，導致以“家庭”為本位的財政支援政策，未能收到原來“照顧”兒童的效果。有見及此，各國都傾向支援兒童，包括資助托兒服務，或成立兒童基金等。

協助國民平衡工作和家庭

由於女性就業率提高，“平衡工作和家庭”成為各國家庭政策的重點，其中包括為父母親提供更長的有薪育兒假期，並提供更普及和多元化的托兒所服務。

各國家庭政策的獨特方向

本研究發現各國家庭政策的獨有方向如下：

政府、家庭、市場的制度性分工不同

由於各國在政府、家庭、市場的制度性分工不同，在家庭政策的措施上也有顯著不同，例如：英國較偏重市場，法國和德國較偏重家庭，瑞典就較偏重政府。於家庭政策方面，英國較傾向鼓勵家庭透過就業來解決家庭所需，法國和德國以較現金資助來支援家庭的“照顧”和“生育”功能，瑞典就以政府替代家庭的“照顧”功能，新加坡則以經濟發展政策主導家庭政策。

女性主義和傳統價值的抗衡

家庭政策是否支持兩性平等，一個主要因素就是女性主義和傳統價值的抗衡。瑞典和法國就是女性主義運動較強的地方，家庭政策也較支援女性就業。在德國和新加坡，傳統價值較強，所以較注重維護傳統家庭模式。於家庭政策方面，瑞典的公共托兒服務十分普及，而德國的公共托兒服務就不足。

政府的力量主導政策措施的選擇

本節分析政府相對於市場和社會的力量，如何影響政策措施的不同選擇：

公開或隱藏政策目標

強勢政府較易以公開的目標，整合家庭政策，例如瑞典和新加坡都能在短時間內提出較大規模的改革。至於較弱勢的政府（相對於市場和社會），則要以較長的時間，先凝聚社會共識，再推行政策改革。

立法管制或財政誘因

強勢的政府較能以立法管制加上財政誘因去推行家庭政策，至於相對弱勢的政府，則較少強行立法，而較傾向提供財政誘因。英國就在 1980 年代就沒有跟隨歐盟立法訂定雙親產假，至於新加坡和瑞典，就能透過立法加上財政誘因，大規模改革家庭政策相比之下。法國政府也較德國政府強勢，較多採用立法管制。

惠及全民或部分社羣

英國政府的家庭政策，較傾向聚集部分社羣的需要，例如兒童。至於瑞典則傾向惠及全民，至於德國、法國、新加坡，其家庭政策措施一般都根據收入將女性分流，鼓勵低收入女性照顧家庭，高收入女性就業。

提供服務或提供資源

英國較傾向不直接由政府提供家庭服務，而透過提供資源以活化私人市場。至於瑞典和法國就直接提供公共托兒所服務。

政策效果的分析：家庭團結、鼓勵生育和兩性平等的取捨。

本研究在分析各國家庭政策的效果時，發現各國都無法在家庭團結、鼓勵生育和兩性平等三項都同時得到改善。換句話，家庭政策需要在三者間作出取捨。

德國和新加坡的家庭團結度相對較高，但生育率就最低，而兩性平等也改善得較慢。瑞典最能提高兩性平等，生育率也不低，但家庭團結就較弱。法國則生育率較高，兩性也相對平等，但家庭團結也較弱。英國的中家庭團結也較弱，生育率和兩性平等則中等。

由此可見，要維持傳統家庭分工最困難。這和女性教育程度和就業率的提高有不可分割的關係。如果家庭政策堅持傳統家庭的男女分工，則常會令結婚率和生育率下降。至於生育率，其實受社會文化因素的影響較大，受政策影響較少。在多個國家中，新移民和某些少數族群都有生育率較高的情況。

至於兩性平時，主要受社會經濟發展的影響較多。不過，家庭政策對提升女性就業率也有相當的影響力。其中瑞典的家庭政策就是最佳例子。至於其他國家，較常見的情況是高收入女性為了工作而遲婚或延遲生育，低收入女性為了家庭而放棄工作。

總括來說，本研究在家庭政策有效性方面有三個主要發現：

1. 家庭政策如何有明確目標，加上大規模的政策措施，較可能達到預定的效果；
2. 家庭政策對女性就業率的影響力，遠高於對女性結婚和生育決定的影響力；
3. 要維持傳統家庭的團結，往往會令生育率下降，也無助改善兩性平等，但兩性平等的提高，卻不一定導致生育率偏低。

政策建議

本研究發現香港的社會政治情況介於英國和新加坡之間。一方面，香港一直堅持「小政府」原則，另一方面，香港也維護傳統家庭的價值。至於社會人口變遷方面，香港同樣面對低生育率的問題。本港兩性平等情況持續改善，不過家庭團結程度就有下降的傾向。香港政府對家庭的重視，可見於特首在施政報告中提出成立家庭議會。

本研究基於各國的經驗，提出六項政策建議：

1. 為各項政策目標提出優先次序

各項有關家庭政策的目標，往往不能同時達到，所以必須排出優次。其中，本港應加強協助女性平衡家庭和工作。

2. 正視家庭形態多元化的趨勢

家庭政策如果太著重支援傳統家庭，就容易忽略了在職母親和單親家庭的需要。本港家庭政策應該照顧不同家庭形態的需要。

3. 顧及兩性分工的轉變

兩性分工愈來愈少受到「男主外，女主內」的傳統模式所影響。家庭政策應該照顧不同家庭中兩性分工的不同。其中，男士產假是值得考慮的措施。

4. 兒童為本的家庭政策

兒童為本的家庭政策，可保障在家庭形態多元化的發展下，兒童得到應有的照顧。其中，提供較具時間彈性的托兒所服務，以及兒童基金，是值得考慮的措施。

5. 平衡工作和家庭

雙職家庭和單親家庭中的母親，要面對工作和家庭雙方面的壓力。家庭政策應加大對女性的支援。其中，延長育嬰／育兒假期，以及資助托兒服務都是值得考慮的措施。

6. 集合政府、市場和社區資源

要推行新的家庭政策措施，不一定要提高稅收。政府可以檢討現有的資源，是否能有效地重新整合，以達致“取諸家庭，用諸家

庭”。其中，可以考慮的方面包括外傭稅是否可以投放於擴大家庭服務和育兒培訓方面，也可以考慮以公私合作的模式，在社區以社會企業的形式提供家庭和托兒服務。

Chapter 1: Background and Comparative Framework

Introduction

Family policies have changed significantly since the 1970s. This is due to several universal challenges facing industrialised countries including the demographic change in family structure and family dynamics, the tightening of government budgets, and global economic integration. However, there are still clear differences among countries in their family policy reforms. This research aims to understand the selection and impact of family policy within the context of socio-political institutions. On the basis of that analysis, this research will draw out relevant policy implications for Hong Kong concerning which policy measures are likely to produce what impacts in what kinds of social contexts.

Definition and Scope of Family Policy

Although a number of attempts have been made to find an established definition of family policy, there is still no consensus on its meaning. Some scholars have adopted very broad definitions that encompass nearly all types of public policies that directly or indirectly affect families. For example, Kamerman and Kahn suggested that family policy can mean “everything that government does to and for the family” (1978, p.3). Zimmerman regarded that family policy “aim[s] at addressing the problems families are perceived as experiencing in society and is constituted of a series of separate but interrelated policy choices that address such problems” (2001, p.4). If we adopt such a broad definition, policy areas such as housing, education, transportation and health would also need to be included in this study. While not denying that policies related to

these fields have potential impacts on the quality of life of families, it would be also extremely difficult, if not impossible, for a research project of this scale to handle such a broad approach. Therefore, we adopt a narrower definition put forth by Kamerman and Kahn in their later work. According to them, “the term family policy includes laws, regulations, benefits and programs (sometimes) deliberately and explicitly designed to achieve specific objectives with or for the family unit as a whole” (1997, p.3). Thus only policies that are specifically designed to affect family well-being would be covered in this study. We also follow here the common practice of using the term “family policy” to refer to families with children. Policies that deal with elderly or aging problems will be regarded as a separate domain and hence will not be included in this research. Therefore, family policy in this report mainly refers to benefits and services provided by government for families with children. More precisely, this includes:

1. Cash support for families, including family allowances, tax relief for children and means-tested cash benefits.
2. Benefits for working parents, including maternity and parental leave schemes
3. Child care services for families with children, including the provision and subsidies of child care facilities.

Family policy may be explicit or implicit. The goals of explicit family policy are targeted at families with the purpose of achieving specific family outcomes. The goals of implicit family policy are often left unstated. The policies may not be targeted at families but may have important impacts on families (Eshleman, 2003). In this study, we will focus mainly on explicit family policy,

though implicit family policy of crucial importance will sometimes also be touched on. We would also like to stress that although according to the above definition, the term “family policy” seems to suggest a comprehensive, explicit and well coordinated policy, in reality what is included under this label encompasses a combination of measures, policy instruments and laws that are not necessarily part of a coherent policy entity.

Family Policy – Universal Challenges and Divergent Responses

Social and demographic changes have acted over time as major catalysts in the development of family policy. In order to comprehend its development, we need to know how family life has changed in recent decades. Such changes have posed universal challenges to most developed countries, but advanced countries have often responded differently due to their different socio-political contexts.

Universal trends

Family life in many developed countries has commonly been altered by changes in social attitudes and demographic patterns. Life expectancies at birth are increasing, especially for women, and families and household size are becoming smaller. Women and couples are delaying childbirth as marriages are postponed and contraceptive methods are improved. In all modernised societies, people tend to produce fewer children because of the high cost of children in terms of time, money and emotional investment. As a result of the pressure of raising children and earning a living, families are becoming smaller and less stable units.

In many developed countries, marriage to one person for life is not always feasible or desirable, given the changes in industrial or post-industrial society. Divorce and cohabitation become more and more attractive as alternatives to marriage. High rates of separation and divorce have led to rising numbers of one-parent households, most of which are led by mothers. Despite the increased availability of jobs for women, many women find that they cannot earn enough to support their children without government assistance. This raises concern about the implications for the development and future prospects of these women and, especially, their children. Besides, the increase in one-parent families has also raised welfare costs.

Closely related to these structural changes are the changes in family roles, especially the role of women. The most significant change that affects the family roles is the increased labour force participation rate of women in the industrialised countries. The entrance of married women into the labour force enables them to support themselves without depending on husbands and provides more opportunities to meet new people and to compare their personal situations against them. Inevitably, as more women work outside home, either because their incomes are needed to support the family due to the rising cost of living, or because full and equal participation in society assumes the employment of women, the traditional role of men as the family head is gradually undermined. Parenting roles of men and women are affected, as are the ways in which children become socialised in the family. If both women and men are employed outside the home and are expected to rear children, the question of how children are cared for during the day becomes increasingly important.

The structural changes in the family sizes, forms and roles are to a large extent inter-related, making the situation even more complicated for the governments to handle. For example, the decline in fertility and the reduction in the time devoted to childbearing and childrearing make women less dependent on the formal marital relationship for their livelihood. The instability of marriage may in return accelerate the reduction in fertility levels and result in smaller family size. Another example is the relationship between population decline and the increase of women in the labour force. As the fertility rate decreases and the size of population declines, the resulting labour shortage becomes an acute economic problem. Participation of women in the labour force would partially relieve this problem but it would also make women less willing to have children.

Although social and demographic trends have led to major structural changes in family life, these trends themselves are not sufficient to cause the government to reform policies. Politicians need to be persuaded that something must be done and be pushed into action. Advocacy groups such as family associations and women's groups have organised and have formed coalitions to launch campaigns in order to make an impact on policy makers. Despite similar social and demographic changes among developed countries, interest groups and their conflicts differ across nations. That is why the responses of different countries to these similar challenges are likely to be different. Political structure is another factor that can explain the policy differences among different nations. Countries with centralised governments, such as Singapore, have been able to launch more radical social reforms more quickly than those with decentralised governments such as Canada and the United States.

Welfare regime mediating to cause divergent responses to common challenges

In analysing how countries responded to these universal challenges differently, it is useful to refer to a widely-cited theoretical framework called “welfare state regimes”. Esping-Andersen (1990; 1999) developed one of the most widely adopted classificatory frameworks in the comparative study of welfare provision institutions— the "welfare state regime" typology. He defines welfare state regimes as “the ways in which welfare production is allocated between state, market and households” (1999: p.73). This term is an organising concept that describes the social policies of advanced industrialised countries and government’s roles in managing and organising the economy, employment, and wages as well as providing social protection. His thesis is that welfare state and employment regimes coincide, and that variations in welfare state regimes ultimately direct societal change. Simply put, each country has a rather well-defined role for its state, market and family to perform respectively. For the whole socio-economic system to work, it is necessary for this division of labour between state, market and family to remain stable. There are three major types of welfare regimes:

- a. *The liberal welfare regime* relies mainly on the market as the major mechanism in allocating resources. Accordingly, both state and family are required to give way to the market mechanism. The state encourages its citizens to participate in the labour market for their livelihood and welfare provisions have a “residual” nature as a safety net of the last resort. As such, the state offers benefits mainly to a clientele of low-income, usually working-class, state dependents. The state is also restrained from

intervening into the market provision for family services. As a result, this regime stresses market solutions and responses to high rates of female employment, work/family tensions, and other child/women/family issues. Primary examples of this kind of welfare regime are found in the US, Canada, Australia and the UK.

A set of inter-related socio-political foundations of the liberal regime include 1) a set of traditional, liberal work-ethic norms, which encourage individualism and hard work; 2) a middle class that prefers the market to the state as resource allocation mechanism, coupled with fragmented, relatively weak labour unions; 3) the dominance of liberalism in the socio-political system, that believes the conditions for individual emancipation, freedom, equal opportunities and healthy competitiveness on the free market, on voluntarism and on the spirit of entrepreneurialism.

- b. *The conservative welfare regime* displaces the market as the predominant mechanism of resource allocation and relies on the family to play a central role in providing social services to its members. Accordingly, the state strives to maintain the family as a coherent and well-functioning unit. This also explains why this regime is “conservative”. This is because the social policy is so designed as to preserve or even reinforce the conventional male-dominated social hierarchy. On the one hand, social benefits are distributed in accordance with existing social status and groupings as acquired in the labour market. On the other hand, welfare policy is designed to maintain the traditional family (i.e. male as bread winner and female as housewife and mother). Hence, private insurance and

occupational fringe benefits play a marginal role, social insurance typically excludes non-working wives, and family services (such as day care) are conspicuously underdeveloped. Instead, this regime stresses the role of the traditional family, minimises the female labour force participation, and provides less direct investment in children. Austria, France, Germany and Italy are commonly included as examples of countries with this type of welfare regime.

A set of inter-related socio-political foundations of the conservative regime include 1) a widespread acceptance of social rights that displace the liberal obsession with market efficiency and commodification; 2) the presence of a well-established Church that is strongly committed to the preservation of traditional familyhood; 3) the dominance of traditional conservatism in the socio-political system, with the unifying theme that traditional status relations must be retained for the sake of social integration.

- c. *The social-democratic welfare regime* is built upon a strong state in allocating resources and offering a full-range of social services. Juxtaposed to this welfare regime is a family model that plays a residual role in providing social services. Equal access and full participation in the labour market is viewed as one of the most desirable goals, as the state takes on the responsibility to emancipate its citizens from the traditional family. Therefore, the state extends its welfare provision to the middle class by promoting equality of the highest standards instead of an equality of minimal needs as is pursued elsewhere. In sum, this regime emphasises a strong governmental role, stressing gender equity, child well-being, high

rates of female employment and the reconciliation of work and family life, and minimising the roles of the market, and to a lesser extent, the family. Notable examples are Scandinavian countries such as Sweden and Norway.

A set of inter-related socio-political foundations of the social democratic regime include 1) a widespread acceptance of the principles of universalism and recognition of social rights; 2) powerful, all-encompassing, and centralised trade unions that, usually in liaison with a strong labour party, were willing to engage in central national-level, or industry-wide, negotiations with employers; 3) the dominance of the social democracy in the socio-political system, which promotes an equality of the highest standards.

From Welfare State Regime to Family Policy Regime

Although Esping-Andersen's theory is one of the most widely used comparative frameworks for the study of welfare provision institutions, it has been criticised by feminists as male-oriented in its emphasis on class to the neglect of gender (Siim, 1993). Feminists have noted that social insurance programmes, which have benefited working-class men, have tended to perpetuate a strict division between men as breadwinners and women as wives and mothers (Langnan and Ostner, 1991). Not only did Esping-Andersen fail to notice the above bias of the system, he also ignored the contribution to the common good of unpaid care-work to the family that is carried out mainly by women (Abrahamson, Boje and Greve, 2005). Besides, his typology was, at least initially, based on a study concerning the protection of workers from the risk of participating in the labor market and his categorisation was designed for employment-related

benefits. Hence, countries may fall into a different category for labor market policies than for family-related benefits (Baker, 1995). In fact, the broad theory of the welfare state is too general for a specific discussion of family policy. Hence, we need to find a more specifically targeted analytical framework that aims at classifying welfare states in relation to the field of family policy in order to carry on with our study.

The Four Models of Family Policy

Based on a comparative analysis of qualitative and quantitative materials from 22 industrialised countries, A. H. Gauthier (1996) traced the development of state support for families since the late 19th century. In her comparative study, Gauthier observed that there are strong inter-country differences in the degree of state intervention into family life and in the level of state support for families. Before World War II, Germany, Austria and Switzerland were focusing on maternity leave policies and Belgium and France on the provision of cash benefits to families. Sweden was already at that time acknowledging the right of women to employment whereas Britain and United States were targeting their interventions to the most needy and deserving families. In the post-war period, the role of the state as welfare provider expanded in most countries as they faced similar demographic changes. However, the earlier fundamental differences among nations have largely remained. Gauthier distinguishes four main models of contemporary family policy:

1. ***Pro-natalist model***: The issue of low fertility rate is the main concern of this model. Because of this the main task of this type of family policy is to

encourage families to have children by helping mothers reconcile work and family life. In this model, support of family is consequently seen as the responsibility of government and relatively high level of supports are provided for maternity leave and child-care facilities. Great emphasis is placed on cash subsidies, particularly for the third child. Working mothers are therefore not disapproved of, and conditions are created such that being employed is not an obstacle to childbearing. France is a good example of this model.

2. ***Pro-traditional model***: In this model, the preservation of family is the main concern. The government assumes some responsibility for supporting families but the most important sources of support are seen as the families themselves and voluntary organisations. In spite of the provision of working benefits for mothers, the traditional male-breadwinner model is encouraged and obstacles to women's employment such as taxation still persist. Under this model, only medium levels of cash subsidies and working benefits for parents are provided. The low level of provision of child care does not give working mothers the opportunity to combine employment and family responsibilities easily. This model of family policy is characteristic of Germany.
3. ***Pro-egalitarian model***: The main objective of this model is to promote greater gender equality. The governments take full responsibility in creating the environment to help women to combine paid employment and family responsibility more easily, and to allow fathers to play a larger role in child-caring. In contrast to the pro-traditional model, men and women are

treated as equal breadwinners and equal carers under this model. Liberal policies on marriage, divorce and abortion entail few restrictions on how people choose their family life and parenthood options. State support for child care and working parents are strong. Legislation on parental leave is one of the centre-pieces of this model. Examples of this model are Denmark and Sweden.

4. *Pro-family but non-interventionist model* (In this study we refer to this model as the non-interventionist model for it is difficult to find any example of “anti-family” family policy except in the extreme cases of some socialist countries in the past.) In this model, only families in need are taken care of by the government. Because the government believes in the value of family self-sufficiency and the functioning of the market, its support of families in terms of monetary transfer and social services is kept at a very low level. The participation of women in the labour force is not discouraged but limited benefits are provided by the state to support them. Working benefits for mothers such as maternity leave are regarded as the responsibility of private companies rather than the government. Examples that conform to this model are Britain and the United States.

In short, the nature of government intervention and the corresponding level of state support in these four models are to a large extent different. The provision of cash support has been high in the pro-natalist model, medium in the pro-traditional and the pro-egalitarian models and low in the non-interventionist one. The support for working parents has been low within the non-interventionist model, medium in the pro-natalist and the pro-traditional

model, and high in the pro-egalitarian model. The supply of child care services has been low in the pro-traditional and non-interventionist models, medium in the pro-natalist model, and high in the pro-egalitarian one.

Although Gauthier's typology is not as complex as others, its comprehensive scope and heuristic value is reflected by the fact that other studies have adopted this framework. For example, in their analysis of what the application of care does to the welfare regime typology, Daly and Lewis (2000) confirm Gauthier's distinctions when they refer to the Scandinavian States, Germany, France and Britain. Kaufmann's findings (1997) are also parallel to those of Gauthier. After analysing the family policy of four European countries, Kaufmann concluded in his article that "France, Germany, Sweden and England have different types of family policy" (1997:97).

A closer look at Gauthier's models shows that her classification scheme overlaps to a large extent with Esping-Andersen's classic typology. Even Gauthier has not disavowed this point (1996). Her pro-egalitarian model and non-interventionist one match Esping-Andersen's social-democratic welfare regime and liberal welfare regime respectively, while her pro-natalist and pro-traditional model correspond to Esping-Andersen's conservative welfare regime. The resemblance is by no means accidental. It lies in the historical and institutional contexts in which different types of social policies are constituted. Esping-Andersen argues that each regime type has distinctive historical roots and is promoted or supported by specific political coalitions. The point is that each welfare regime not only has its roots in history but also becomes a powerful mechanism for shaping the future. In face of the

challenges posed by universal forces such as population ageing and high divorce rates, each welfare regime will find its family policy priorities relatively fixed by the existing welfare provision institutions and institutional factors in the broader polity and economy (Esping-Andersen 1996; 1999). In other words, Esping-Andersen's welfare regime analysis understands family policy as one of the major tools in a whole package of social policies. On the one hand, the welfare regime typology illuminates why there are different policy objectives in different family policy models. On the other hand, the welfare regime analysis highlights the institutional foundation for the stability of different policy models. Because different countries have different institutions of welfare provisions, their family policies have different objectives accordingly. Also because their family policies have different objectives, their policy contents and outcomes are different.

The correspondence between these typologies is however far from perfect. Esping-Andersen is concerned mainly with the balance of power between the state, families and the market. Gauthier is basically more concerned with the relationships between the state and families, particularly the state's level of support for families and working mothers. Gauthier's models are thus formulated in terms of these criteria. Because of the differences in focus and concern, the welfare regime typology does not directly reflect the government's attitude towards family problems nor the objectives behind its support for families. Unlike Esping-Andersen's typology, Gauthier's classification explicitly reflects the objectives of different government family policies and directly targets the various types of services and cash benefits provided by the state to families. This classification scheme could also avoid the feminist

criticisms that have long troubled Epsing-Andersen's theory. Therefore, Gauthier's typology could be regarded as an improvement over the welfare regime model and as a more suitable analytical tool for studying family issues.

Comparative Literature on Family Policy

The value of Gauthier's family policy typology will be shown as we review the literature of comparative family policy in this section. In spite of the increasing interest in different policy responses of modernised countries to changing family life, literature that employs a cross-national perspective to analyse overall family policy is still limited. Many studies analyse the development of family policy in a specific country (e.g. Peden and Glahe, 1986; Salaff, 1988; Lewis and Gertrude, 1992; Jacobs and Davies, 1994; Kolinsky, 1998; Rebick and Takenaka, 2006). Some studies that attempt to use the comparative perspective focus on one of the fields of family policy such as childcare or family law (e.g. Kurczewski and Maclean, 1997; Millar and Rowlingson, 2001; Daly and Rake, 2003). One of the first comparative studies conducted before the Second World War was done by David Glass (1940) but his research concentrated on population policies of European countries rather than family policy issues. Interest in the comparative analysis of family issues seems to have faded to some extent after World War II (Gauthier, 1996). It was only in the 1970s when the impact of social and demographic changes caused concern in academic circles that interest in this field re-emerged. Kamerman and Kahn published their classic study of family policy in 14 countries in 1978. Taking into account the goals and instruments of policies, they proposed a three-fold typology of countries: 1) those with an explicit and comprehensive family

policy (e.g. France, Norway and Sweden); 2) those with family policy only as a field (e.g. Austria, Finland and Poland); and 3) those with an implicit and reluctant family policy (e.g. Britain, Canada and United States). In spite of the simplicity of their classification, Kamerman and Kahn are among the first to have developed a comprehensive typology of family policy.

In her study of family support, Wennemo (1994) found that the countries in continental Europe constitute one cluster of family policy. Family policy in these countries is seen as a way of maintaining the traditional family and related benefits are mainly directed towards men. The second cluster consists of the English-speaking and Scandinavian countries. These countries constitute a continuum stretching from Sweden where the state benefits low-income families and women to the United States where the government benefits males and families with high incomes. Denmark, New Zealand and Finland are positioned rather close to Sweden. Norway, Britain and Australia appear in the middle of the continuum and Ireland and Canada closest to the United States.

Hantrais and Letablier (1996) have proposed a typology of European welfare states on the basis of the family-employment relationship. In the first group of countries (the Nordic countries, France and Belgium), public policies allow for the reconciliation of employment and family responsibilities. In the second group of countries (Austria, Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands), governments mainly support the partial or temporary exit from the labour market of one of the parents in order to raise children. In the third group of countries (Britain and Ireland), state support is low and regulation regarding paid leaves is seen as an intrusion into the family's private life.

On the basis of the relationship between family and state, Lorraine (1996) put forward another typology concerned with state control of family life. The two extreme models in her typology are the authoritarian model and the laissez-faire model, which are only ideal types since they cannot be found in reality in any country in their pure form. In between the two extremes are five intermediate models, which are called “the enforcement of responsibilities in specific areas”, “the manipulation of incentives”, “working within constraining assumptions”, “substituting for and supporting families” and “responding to needs and demands”. These five models are put in an order that range from the relatively more authoritarian to the relatively more laissez-faire. Many of them are only hypothetical and they are not mutually exclusive in the real world of policy. That means a family policy measure could be categorised as “substituting for and supporting families” and “responding to needs and demands” at the same time.

Abrahamson, Boje and Greve (2005) abandoned the widely-used cluster analysis that many scholars have adopted in comparing family policy in different countries and employed instead a case-centred approach. Using France, Germany, Britain, Denmark and Sweden as their case countries, they formulated a typology of 4 models: the parental welfare model (France), the male breadwinner model (Germany), the residual poverty oriented welfare model (Britain) and the municipal social service state model (Denmark and Sweden). This classification of family policy is also similar to that of Gauthier though their number of case countries is much fewer than Gauthier’s.

As the above review of typologies of family policy has indicated, the models

outlined by Kamerman and Kahn are too simplistic. Wennemo's classification is rather clumsy, lacking a comprehensive or coherent comparative standard. Although the Hantrais and Letablier taxonomy is similar to that of Gauthier, their bases for comparison are much narrower. Lorraine's typology on the continuum of authoritarianism and laissez-faire is to a certain extent too complicated and too political. Some of the models are even ideal types that cannot be found in the real world. In contrast, Gauthier's model of family policy is more comprehensive when we compare it to the above typologies. Her study included all Western European countries as well as Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand and the United States. In total, 22 countries were covered in the analysis. In terms of geographical scope it definitely represents one of the most extensive studies of family policy published so far. Besides, findings of other scholars such as Kaufmann also match with her classification, thus demonstrating that Gauthier's models are by and large robust.

The Comparative Framework and Research Methodology

Based on the typology of family policy developed by Gauthier (1996), this research project compares family policies in France, Germany, Sweden, Britain and Singapore and will try to draw out what Hong Kong can learn from their relevant experiences. The comparisons conducted in this study aim not only at the policy objectives of each country but also at the benefits and services provided to families, as well as the impacts of these policies.

This study relies on archival research based on secondary analysis of existing studies and draws from international sources of information on family policy.

Classic examples of each family policy model proposed by Gauthier are selected as the target cases for this report. Singapore is also selected as one of the country cases because of its resemblance to Hong Kong in terms of economic development, living standard, size, and demographic mix. The comparisons will be undertaken in two parts. In the first part, in order to create a solid foundation for comparison, we provide a general overview of the family policy of each country in turn by discussing the following aspects:

- 6) social and demographic trends in the past few decades
- 7) nature, objectives and goals of family policy
- 8) governmental and non-governmental institutions that are involved in the making of family policy
- 9) benefits and services provided by the governments to families, including different forms of cash support for families and benefits for working parents and child care services
- 10) impacts of family policy on families.

In the second part, we will identify the similarities and dissimilarities among these countries by concentrating on the in-depth comparison of some key policy-related issues, particularly the nature of their policies, benefits and services provided to families and the outcomes of these policies. In general, the aim is to relate the impact of the family policies to the socio-political institutions. In particular, this in-depth analysis attempts to explain which family policy is more likely to have its intended impact in which socio-political settings. The structure of comparisons and the hypothesised values of the variables are summarized in Table 1.

When we make the comparisons, we will analyse the policies from the angle of the government as well as from the point of view of families. The first perspective consists in analysing the institutional settings and the components of family policy, such as the institutions responsible for the provision of family services and the total amount of money government spent on family allowances. The second viewpoint involves the level of support received by an average family, or by different types of family. Beyond the comparison of the policy goals, family services and programmes themselves, it is also important to assess the impacts of policies on the well-being of the families. However, measuring this impact is not an easy task. It requires us to identify the effects of family policies by controlling for the effects of confounding factors that may also affect families' well-being. It also requires access to reliable and meaningful indicators of families' well-being. In spite of these difficulties, we will try to capture some of the possible effects of family policies by comparing indicators of family policies across the selected country cases.

Table 1: A Comparison of Family Policy of the Five Selected Countries

Countries	Family Models	Objectives	Level of State Support to Families		
			Cash Support	Benefits for Working Parents	Child Care Services
France	Pro-natalist	Raise fertility rate	High	Medium	High
Germany	Pro-traditional	Preserve traditional family	Medium	Medium	Low
Sweden	Pro-egalitarian	Promote equality between men and women	Medium	High	High
Britain	Non-interventionist	Maintain minimum intervention to families	Low	Low	Low
Singapore	Pro-natalist	Raise fertility rate	Low	Low	Low

Sources: author's analysis

Chapter 2: Britain -- A Non-interventionist Family Policy Regime

Orienting towards a Children-Centre Approach

Introduction

Britain, along with English-speaking countries such as the US and Australia, has been classified as the “Liberal Welfare State Regime” (Esping-Andersen 1990) and the “Non-Interventionist Family Policy Regime” (Gauthier 1996) because the government has been very reluctant to intrude into the market and the family. A major feature of this cluster of countries is that the state leaves room for individuals to negotiate their employment relations in the market and their family relations in the household. As a result, these countries have been “laggards” in family policy as compared to other EU or OCED countries (Lewis 2006). Throughout the post-war period, Britain has not sought to formulate an explicit and well-coordinated family policy. Cash support has been relatively more generous only for needy families, while state support for working parents has been relatively lacking in terms of both parental leave arrangements and public childcare provision. For decades, women have worked part-time to reconcile the conflicts between the need to provide childcare and the need for employment. With marriage and family weakening as a social institution from the 1980s onwards, child poverty in lone parent families has stood out as a pressing social problem in Britain over the past two decades. Since 1997 the Labour government has therefore shifted family policy towards a more children-centred approach with the explicit goal of alleviating child poverty (Pascall 1998).

Policy Context: Family Conceptualised as a Private Domain Free from State Intervention

Britain is often cited as an example of the *Liberal Welfare State Regime* (Epsing-Andersen 1990; 1999) and the *Non-interventionist Family Policy Model* (Gauthier 1996; 2002), which is built upon individualism and voluntarism. The state is expected to play a lesser role than both the market and the family in supporting individuals' welfare and care. Under the principle of non-interventionism, both men and women were expected to make their livelihood through participating in the labour market, and to make their own arrangements regarding care for their children. Neither employers nor the state is held responsible for job security and work-life balance of employees. With "family privacy" being a firmly-established value in British culture (Ringen 1997), family relations were treated as a private domain that should be free from state intervention (Kamerman and Kahn 1997; Lewis 2006). Indeed, the problem of childcare was not regarded as an issue for state policy until the problem of child poverty in lone parent families posed a serious threat to government budgets and social solidarity in the 1990s. Not surprisingly, Britain is a social policy "laggard" among EU members with regard to gender equality and work-life balance.

The socio-political context

Individualism is inherent in the British value system, and family has long been regarded as part of the private sphere that the state should not intervene into. Kamerman and Kahn (1997:9-10) summarise some of the major socio-cultural foundations of the British social policy model as follows:

- An emphasis on laissez-faire ideology that limits the role of the state in

providing social protection

- A stress on individualism, self-reliance, the work ethic, voluntarism, and a strong private sector
- An inclination towards means-tested rather than universal benefits, with a particular stress on social assistance as a major policy instrument directed towards the very poor
- A strong commitment to the primacy of the family in child care and childrearing and the importance of family privacy
- A preference for a traditional family model based on male breadwinner and female homemaker

It is evident that both the Conservative government and the New Labour government have based their social and family policy on these socio-cultural foundations.

Non-interventionism under the Conservative government

In power from 1970 to 1997, the Conservative government's social policy framework was based on the voluntaristic tradition in labour market regulation (Hantrais 2000). The unifying theme was to ensure subsistence by providing low flat-rate payments or means-tested social assistance. The assumption behind this is a family model that women would be homemakers and, at most, secondary wage earners. The Conservative government was so determined to maintain a minimum level of regulation in the labour market that it consistently opposed EU proposals for social policy measures. Two notable examples were the Community Charter of the Fundamental Social Rights of Workers, approved by the European Council in December 1989, and the Agreement on Social

Policy appended to the Maastricht Treaty of 1992 (Bagilhole and Byrne 2000). In effect, that delayed the introduction of statutory maternity leaves and parental leaves in the UK (Hantrais 2000).

From welfare-to-work in the Labour government

Elected to power in 1997, the New Labour government shared the Conservative government's principle of private responsibilities though there are important differences in the means proposed to achieve them (Clarke 2003). Central to New Labour's welfare policy approach has been welfare-to-work, the idea being that labour market participation is the primary means to achieve social inclusion. Also introduced was the so-called "selective universalism" that shifted income redistribution in favour of children instead of adults. As a result, there have also been significant increases in cash transfers for children, initially through increases in universal child benefit and in the children's allowance elements of the means-tested social security benefits. (Dean 2004). The Labour government has become more proactive in promoting a children-centered family policy configuration. It reviewed the Child Support Act and published the first ever National Childcare Strategy Green Paper in 1998. From then on, Britain's family policy has become more explicit, including the introduction of the "Choice for Parents, The Best Start for Children: A Ten-Year Strategy for Childcare" in 2004.

Socio-demographic context

Britain is following the same pattern over the past three decades as that of the other developed countries such as smaller families, fewer marriages, more divorces, more cohabitation, declining birth rates, and more working mothers.

Since the 1990s, one of the most pressing demographic problems is the growth of single-parent families. The number of lone parent families in Britain has increased very rapidly from 570,000 in 1971 to approximately 1.3 million in 1991 (Clarke 2003). As of 2000, lone parent families make up 21% of all families with dependent children (Cousins and Tang 2003). Whereas growth in the numbers of lone mothers in the 1970s was largely due to an increase in the number of married couples getting separated and divorced, in the 1980s the most rapidly growing group among lone mothers was women who had never married. The illegitimate birth rate increased dramatically from 12% in 1980 to about 30% in 1996, and close to 40% by the end of the 20th century (Clarke 2003). This means that these single mothers are younger, less well-educated and less likely to be receiving financial support from the father of their child. The lack of state support also makes single mothers a disadvantaged group in the labour market. As of 1990, only 39 percent of lone mothers were in employment, compared with 60 percent of married mothers (Clarke 2003).

Single-mother families often depend on social welfare. In the 1990s, Britain has one of the largest gaps between the employment rates of married mothers and lone mothers. Lone mothers tend to depend on benefits, with the “Income Support, Family Credit and Child Benefit” supplying nearly two-thirds of an average lone parent income (Pascall 1999). As a result, there was a high incidence of family and child poverty, with nearly one in three children living below the poverty line in 1997 (Bradshaw 2003). Britain has had the highest child poverty rate in the EU, and saw its child poverty rate increase more than any other European country between the mid-1980s- and mid-1990s (Bradshaw 2002). This constituted a pressing problem, both as a financial burden for the

government and in the form of the decline in social solidarity. The Commission on Families and the Wellbeing of Children (2005) also identified “inequality and child poverty” as one of the major challenges facing the British family policy.

Policy Objective – Non-interventionism Emphasising Individual Responsibility for a Work-Family Balance

Until New Labour was elected to power in 1997, Britain did not have any explicit objectives in their social policy regarding family formation and family change. This is in sharp contrast with other European countries, which either explicitly promote gender equity (as in Scandinavia), encourage childrearing (as in France), or support the traditional breadwinner family model (as in Germany). Britain stood alone by adhering to a minimalist model rather than attempting to influence family change (Kamerman and Kahn 1997). Instead, individuals are held responsible for economic and family well-being through work, and family formation and solidarity belong to the private domain so that the state should not intervene. In sum, promoting private responsibilities has been the unifying theme in British social and family policy from the 1980s onwards.

Thatcherism in the 1980’s Conservative government

Under Mrs. Thatcher, the ideological foundation of the Conservative government’s social policy was liberalism. The major objectives include the following (Ringen 1997):

- Containing and reducing state expenditure on welfare benefits and universal measures

- Reducing citizen's dependency on state benefits and services
- Promoting occupational and private welfare benefits

As a result, the Conservative government systematically opposed further legislation which could increase the welfare dependency of families or impose additional burdens on employers. For example, the universal child benefit was questioned on the grounds that means-tested benefits would more effectively target families with greater needs. Subsequently, the value of the child benefit was frozen in 1987 (Ringen 1997). The Conservative government also declined to endorse the EC Social Charter in 1988, and opted out of the Social Chapter of the Maastricht Treaty in 1991 (Crompton 2005).

Associated with the non-interventionism is a clear trend of family change: from larger to smaller families, from many to fewer children, from marriage to cohabitation, and to increasing family instability with more frequent divorce and more single-parent (especially single-mother) families (Ringen 1997). Among these changes the growth of the single-parent family stood out as the most pressing problem because these single-parent families are disproportionately economically deprived and socially excluded. During the mid-1990s, European figures showed an average of 14 percent of families with children as having lone parents whereas the UK had 23 percent (Pascall 1999). The problem of lone motherhood dominated the British family policy agenda in the 1990s.

New Labour: social inclusion of lone mothers and poor children

When New Labour came to power in May 1997, family policy reform had the

explicit aim that lone mothers (among other welfare recipients) should support themselves through paid work (Pascall 1999). A desired outcome would be a reduction in child poverty by increasing family income through parental employment. While lone parents are held responsible for participating in the labour market, children are given rights to early education childcare (Lewis 2004). Cash transfer to low-paid working parents (i.e. the Working Families Tax Credit) has been introduced, and these also include allowances for childcare costs. To recapitulate, New Labour's family policy has been oriented towards alleviating child poverty in single-mother families.

Policy Contents – Government reserving family support only for needy families

Britain's has long had an implicit family policy. The primary strategy is anti-poverty, stressing social assistance and means-tested benefits. For decades, the state restricted its intervention into family relations to cases of abuses or severe distress (Gauthier 1996; 2000). As for the reconciliation between work and family, the state has been more inclined to let market forces operate instead of issuing statutory legislation. Family-friendly employment practices have therefore been based mainly on voluntary agreement between employers and workers (Dienel and Lohkamp-Himmighofen 2000). Means-tested cash support for needy families has long played a much bigger role in the family policy packages, while parental leave schemes and public childcare services have lagged behind. As of 2005, social expenditure on cash allowances accounts for 1.4 percent of the GDP, and care services 0.4 percent (Da Roit and Sabatinelli 2007). Britain's family policy as of 2005 is

summarised as follows (Da Roit and Sabatinelli 2007):

Cash allowances are divided into means-tested and non-means tested:

- **Birth grant** is means tested for beneficiaries of social assistance benefits. The one-off amount was 728 pounds.
- **Child benefit** is non-means tested for all parents of a child under 16 (or under 20 if still in school). The amount was 107 pounds a month for the oldest child, and 72 pounds a month for all other children.
- **Child Tax Credit** is non-means tested for all persons over 16 and responsible for at least one child. The amount is relative to the income and family situation.
- **Child Trust Fund** is a saving and investment account for children born on or after 1st September 2002 if they are receiving the Child Benefit. The government makes an initial payment worth 250 pounds for each child, and makes a further payment worth 250 pounds when the child reaches the age of 7. Low-income families (defined as being eligible for the full Child Tax Credit) will get an additional 250 pounds for the initial and further payment each (Child Trust Fund Homepage 2007).

Parental Leaves are divided into three schemes:

- **Maternity Leave** lasts for 26 or 52 weeks, depending on the time a mother has worked for her employer. The income replacement rate is 90 percent for 6 weeks, then a flat rate for 20 weeks (a maximum of 156 pounds each week in 2003). The remaining 26 weeks are unpaid. Only those who have completed 26 weeks of continuous employment with the present employer are eligible for the 52-week leave scheme. Other employed and self-employed women are entitled to only 26 weeks. In 2007, paid

maternity leave was extended to nine months (Family and Parenting Institute 2007).

- **Parental leaves** are up to 13 weeks per parent per child. It can be taken in blocks, up to 4 weeks a year, up to the child's 5th birthday. The leaves are unpaid. Eligible employees include those who have completed one year of continuous employment with their present employer.
- **Paternity leaves** can last for 2 weeks. They are to be taken during the first eight weeks after a child is born. The compensation is at a flat rate of 156 pounds each week.

Childcare

- Children under three years of age with special needs are entitled to public care facilities
- Children aged between 3 and 4 are entitled to part-time education.

The following sections will review the evolution of British family policy in the following order: 1) cash allowance; 2) parental leaves; and 3) childcare.

Cash allowance

The family allowance scheme has a long history in Britain, dating back to the First World War (Misra 2003). But this system of cash benefits to families gradually declined in real value after the Second World War until the New Labour government introduced relatively more generous cash support.

The Second World War prompted the development of social and fiscal policies to encourage women's employment, but this was soon replaced by a social security system in which women were expected to be dependents of men

(Cohen 1993). In the early post-war period, the UK established a universal tax-financed Family Allowance for all families with two or more children. This allowance, together with the Child Tax Allowance, was the principal basis of financial support for families until they were replaced in 1977 by the Child Benefit – a tax-free flat rate benefit paid to mothers for every dependent child up to age 16 to 19 if still in full-time education (Cohen 1993).

From the early 1980s, the Conservative government put more emphasis on social-assistance type means-tested benefits. Subsequently, the value of the child benefit was frozen in 1987 (Ringen 1997). As a result, the Child Benefit has gradually declined in real value. At the same time, there was an increasing popular support for means-tested benefits (such as the Income Support and Family Credit) over universal allowances (such as the Child Benefit), based on the theory that these could better target those most in need (Ringen 1997).

The New Labour government continues the Conservative Government's policy in the area of encouraging people to transit from welfare to work. In 2003, a new means-tested tax credit called the Child Tax Credit started to be paid to those registered for the Child Benefit. The new system replaced three old social security benefits and tax breaks which relate to children (Campbell and Roberts 2004). Under the new system, parents get only two types of child-related payment: 1) the Child Benefit is paid for 16-18 years after the birth of a child; and 2) the Child Tax Credit depends on the family's aggregate income. In 2004, about six million families will get the Child Tax Credit. The richest one million will not get Child Tax Credit but will continue to get the Child Benefit.

The introduction of the Child Tax Credit again indicates the twin goals of “making work pay” and “tackling poverty” in the British welfare reform. The Child Tax Credit will be paid regardless of whether anyone in the family is or is not earning, in effect encouraging welfare recipients to increase family income through finding paid work in the labour market. In October 2004, as compared with 1997, on average (HM Government 2004):

- Families with children will be 1350 pounds a year better off in real terms
- Households with children in the poorest fifth of the population will be 3,000 pounds better off a year in real terms
- A single earner family on half the average earnings with two children will be 3,790 pounds a year better off in real terms

To summarise, the evolution of British cash allowance policy shows that the state is traditionally much more generous towards the low-income earning family. As of 2004, the UK has among the highest child benefit package in EU countries for the family type that is comprised of a lone mother on half the average earnings with a preschool-age child requiring childcare (Bradshaw 2006).

Parental Leaves

The British government traditionally declined to regulate employment relations through legislation. It is the most evident in the Conservative government when it refused to endorse the EC Social Charter in 1988 and the Social Chapter of the Maastricht Treaty in 1991 (Crompton 2005). Only after the 1999 did the New Labour government adopt a parental leave scheme in response to the EC directive

Since the 1975, maternity rights have been introduced as part of the Employment Protection Act. Still, Britain has been ranked as the poorest in the European Community in this aspect (Ringen 1997). When the EU adopted the directive on the protection of pregnant women in 1992, the UK was the only member state without a universal right to maternity leave for women in paid employment (Hantrais and Letablier 1996). As an example, throughout the 1980s to early 1990s, employers were not required to give a woman any benefits attached to her contract of employment while she was absent from work due to pregnancy. Furthermore, until 1994 all rights except those relating to time off for antenatal care required at least two years of continuous employment (Ringen 1997). With the implementation of the EC Pregnant Workers Directive in 1994, pregnant employees qualify for a minimum of 14 weeks of maternity leave, irrespective of length of service.

During the mid-1980s, there was a policy discussion concerning parental leave and leave for family reasons. However, the Conservative government blocked the parental leave draft directive in 1985 (Ringen 1997). Legislation in this area was regarded by the government as inappropriately regulating the market. Instead, the government upheld the view that any provisions for parental leave should arise through the voluntary agreement between employees and employers. Other employment policies including flexible and family-friendly working arrangements were similarly blocked by the Conservative government committed to non-intervention in employment relations. A common theme was that the government encouraged voluntary adoption of family-friendly policies instead of mandating them through legislation.

By contrast, the New Labour government has been more proactive in family policy. In 1999, regulations were introduced providing a right to parental leave and improved existing maternity leave arrangements, based on the EC Directive 96/34EC (European Foundation 2006). Under the new leave scheme, mothers and fathers were given the right to take up to 3 months off work with job protection but without pay (Family and Parenting Institute 2007). Under the 1999 Maternity and Parental Leave Regulations, statutory parental leave was available only to parents whose children were born on or after 15 December 1999 – the date the regulation took effect. In 2001, the government announced its intention to extend the statutory right to 13 weeks' unpaid parental leave to all working parents with children under five years of age (European Foundation 2006).

The evolution of the parental leave scheme in the UK shows the strong influence of the tradition of voluntarism and non-interventionism. It could be argued that the introduction of the parental leave scheme would not have been realised without the pressure to synchronise social policy with the EU framework.

Childcare service

In the UK, men and women have long been expected to make their own arrangements regarding care for their children. The problem of childcare was not considered to be an issue for state policy until the New Labour government came to power in 1997 (Lewis 2006). A watershed in childcare policy was the launch of the first ever National Childcare Strategy in the Green Paper entitled “Meeting the Childcare Challenge” (Family and Parenting Institute 2007).

In the liberal regime, childcare has long been treated as a private concern and the responsibility of individual families (Lippe and Dijk 2002). After World War II, the provision of early childcare services was drastically reduced because of a political orientation towards the maternal responsibility for caring for young children. Public social educational services for children under three years of age have in fact been available only to children of economically and socially deprived households (Da Roit and Sabatinelli 2007). This is consistent with the guiding principle that the state only intervened in the private lives of families whose children were considered “at risk” (Finch 2006).

While the formal barriers to women’s labour force participation had been gradually removed in the post-war period, the state had done little to facilitate women’s employment by means of providing childcare. It is argued that these needs should be met by the employers rather than the state. The UK government rolled back the provision of day care, and public nurseries were closed down from the mid-1940s onwards. Services became restricted to children with particular health and social needs to the point where even one-parent families frequently no longer had access to this form of provision (Cohen 1993). A Ministry of Health circular published in 1945 noted that “[t]he right policy to pursue would be positively to discourage mothers of children under two from going out to work; to make provision for children between two to five by way of Nursery Schools and Nursery Classes” (quoted in Cohen 1993:517). During the 1960s, provision of places in public nurseries was increasingly restricted to parents with only one child “where there was no option but to go out to work” (Cohen 1993:517).

During the 1970s and 1980s, the rising employment rate of married women contributed to the increasing demand for day care. Still, the majority of the childcare arrangements still involved the use of relatives. To a lesser extent, childminders (providing care in the minder's own home) provide an alternative to working mothers (Cohen 1993). The use of relatives reflects the absence of affordable alternatives, according to a survey conducted in 1974 by the then Department of Health and Social Security (quoted in Cohen 1993: 519). Up to the 1980s, government policy emphasised that day care for working parents is a matter for parents themselves to provide (Cohen 1993).

During the 1980s, there was a major policy debate between the Conservative and the Labour party concerning childcare. While the Conservative party emphasised the parents' and employers' responsibilities, it was becoming more willing to provide additional assistance through the tax and voucher system. By contrast, the Labour Party proposed comprehensive child care services through partnerships with local councils, employers and community groups (Cohen 1993).

Under the Conservative government, during the early 1980s and the mid-1990s, public nursery day-care provision was allowed to fall by nearly half (Skinner 2002). In the mid-1990s, only two percent of childcare for children under the age of three was publicly funded in the UK, placing the UK with Germany and southern Europe as the European countries having the lowest level of publicly funded provision of childcare for those under the age of three (Skinner 2002). Instead, British childcare historically relied on the private sector to play the largest role, as evidenced by its unusually large for-profit sector as opposed to a

private non-profit sector (Lewis 2004; Skinner 2002). In the mid-1990s, there was a threefold increase in childminders and sevenfold increase in private nurseries in the UK (Skinner 2002).

With the introduction of the National Childcare Strategy, the promotion of childcare provision became a significant new initiative by the New Labour government to complement to the “welfare-to-work” reform. The unifying theme is that single mothers will receive help in obtaining paid jobs when their children are being cared for by publicly funded facilities. In 1998, the government announced the guarantee of a free, part-time early years education place for all four-year-old children by the end of 2000, and the same for all three-year-old children by the end of 2004. In 2001, the government announced its aim of creating 1.6 million new childcare places by 2004 (Lewis 2004).

New Labour has made a commitment to continue a public-private mix that stresses local partnerships between private, public, and voluntary providers (Lewis 2004). While a large number of different types of central funding have been available for the local partnerships, local authorities were required to promote partnerships between public, private and voluntary providers of care. However, since many funding streams are time-limited, the expectation is that the provider will eventually become self-sufficient by relying on a mix of fees and the childcare tax credits paid to parents (Lewis 2004).

From 1997 to 2004, the Government created 1.2 million childcare places, a net increase of 525,000 places (HM Treasury 2004). However, it is recognised

that a major problem is “being unable to find a childcare place that “wraps around” the free 12.5 hours per week of early education.” (HM Treasury 2004: P.23). With the government putting emphasis on part-time early year education, it is not surprising that public provision for full-time childcare is limited. As of 2001, the UK had 26% of children aged 1-2 in education/childcare, a comparatively low figure among EU members. Parents are still the main contributors to the costs of early childcare provisions, paying 75 percent to 93 percent of the costs. The Government pays most of the rest, plus a small contribution from employers. On average, childcare costs absorb around a quarter of a woman’s earnings (Plantenga and Remery 2005). The cost of full-time nursery places are categorised as “prohibitive” for low and middle-income families (Plantenga and Remery 2005: p.41).

To summarise, the development of public childcare in the UK is clearly lagging behind some of the European countries. Care often is provided only on a part-time basis and priority in allocation of public resources has been given to economically deprived areas, while well-off families are expected to turn to the market.

Family Policy and Demographic Change

While it is difficult to pin down the impacts of policies, Britain’s non-interventionist family policy has arguably contributed to some major socio-demographic trends. We organise the discussion around three major aspects: 1) gender equality; 2) fertility rate; and 3) family solidarity.

A modest level of gender equality

Because both men and women are expected to enhance their economic well-being by paid employment, the female labour participation rates have consistently been high in Britain. However, female employment has been disproportionately concentrated in part-time jobs, an indicator of a relatively low level of gender equality. Taking into consideration that women are primarily responsible for reconciling the need of paid employment and that of childcare, British family policy has not been effective in nor directed towards promoting gender equality among EU countries (Wise 2002).

Although working parents in Britain have largely been expected to make their own childcare arrangements, women's labour force participation rates have been rising since the 1950s and stood at 66 percent in 1984 (as compared to an EU 15 average of 55.5 percent) (Crompton and Lyonette 2005). The rate then increased markedly during the 1980s, reaching 72 percent by 2001. The economic activity rate among mothers with young child changed rapidly. In 1990, the economic activity rate among mothers with a child under 5 was 48 percent, but by 2001, the rate has risen to 57 percent (Crompton and Lyonette 2005).

Working half-time is prevalent in Britain (Lippe and Dijk 2002). Though the female employment rate has remained relatively high (61.2% in 1991 and 64.6% in 2000), females are more likely to be working part-time (43.5% in 1991 and 44.6% in 2000). As of 2005, 65.9 percent of women were employed, of whom 42.7 were in part-time jobs (Da Roit and Sabatinelli 2007). Compared with OECD countries, Britain has one of the highest percentages of

mothers employed in part-time work (youngest child under age 6). Throughout the 1990s, the gender pay gaps in the UK were slightly higher than in the Nordic states (Mayhew 2006).

In the absence of state support for childcare, the majority of women combine employment and family life. Expensive childcare in turn became a serious barrier to female labour market participation. For decades, women have tended to leave the workforce when they have young children and to return part-time, making their own arrangements for childcare (Hantrais and Letablier 1996). While married mothers are more likely to balance work and family with part-time work, lone mothers are even more disadvantaged because of the childcare obligation. This may explain why child poverty in lone-parent families has spread to become the most pressing social problem in the UK during the 1990s.

Relatively weak family solidarity

Under the non-interventionist family policy model, the universal trend of the decline of the traditional family model has been more evident in the UK than in many other OECD countries. The cohesiveness provided by two-parent families has been losing ground over the years as evidenced by the increasing numbers of lone parent families. During the 1990s, lone parent families accounted for more than one fifth of all families with dependent children, as a result of the high divorce rate and high rate of illegitimate births (Bradshaw 2001; Miller and Rowlingson 2001).

Marriage stability has also weakened while cohabitation has become more

common. In 1971, married couples accounted for 90 percent of families with dependent children, whereas as the figure dropped to 64 percent in 2001 (Williams 2004). Cohabiting couples, excluded from the statistical classification in 1971, rose to 12 percent of households in 2001, single lone parents from one percent in 1971 to 10 percent in 2001, and divorced lone parents from two percent in 1971 to nine percent in 2001 (Williams 2004). The dissolution of the traditional family is also evidence from the fact that around 40 percent of births occurred outside of marriage in the early 2000s (Williams 2004).

While the British family policy model has been non-interventionist, British society has moved towards individualisation of social relationships in general and family relationships in particular (Giddens 1993). A common family pattern is hardly found, as there is much diversity of partnering and parenting patterns across the UK (Williams 2004).

Relatively stable fertility rates

The British non-interventionist family policy model has not been concerned with child births and fertility rates. In the absence of a consistent policy configuration over the years, the fertility rate saw a sharp decline relatively early in the 1970s. This was correlated with the early increase of female labour participation as compared with other European countries. From 1977 to 1987, the total fertility rate dropped from 2.93 to 1.81 (Cousins and Tang 2003). From the 1980s onwards, the fertility rate remained relatively steady and high, as compared to other European countries. The fertility rate has been

fluctuating around 1.7 throughout the 1990s, falling to 1.66 in 2000 (Bradshaw 2002). As of 2005, the fertility rate was 1.80 (Da Roit and Sabatinelli 2007)

Still, we are cautious about drawing a correlation between the non-interventionist family policy and the relatively high fertility rate in the UK because the UK has been a high in-migration country. For example, Coleman (2006) found that recent immigrants tend to have more children than native born people in the UK: the overall fertility rate among ethnic minorities was 2.14 for the years around 2001, compared with 1.65 for whites (p.437). In the early 2000s, 18 percent of births in England and Wales were to immigrants (Coleman 2006: 406). In sum, it is difficult to claim that the non-interventionist family policy facilitates a higher average fertility rate in the UK as compared to the EC average.

Concluding Remarks

British non-interventionist family policy has been evident from the 1980s onwards. Much of the family change can therefore be attributed to individual choice. The advantage is the scope of flexibility of the labour market and family relations but the downside is the exposure of certain underprivileged social groups to high socio-economic risks. The under-regulated labour market has enhanced labour market flexibility, and individuals respond by combining their family responsibilities with the need to work. Men, because of their relative lesser responsibility for childcare, are more likely to engage in full-time employment. By contrast, women are forced to prioritise childcare over full-time employment. This does not help to lessen female dependence on the male breadwinner for support. As soon as the traditional family model

weakens, the vulnerability of single mothers is exposed. This may explain why single mothers have become such a pressing social problem in the UK. During the 1990s, the increasing number of single-mother families that relied heavily on social welfare added substantially to the government's financial burden. The New Labour government thus initiated a series of welfare reforms that strived to restore the balance between "rights and responsibilities" of British citizens. The policy reform continued with the non-interventionist policy model that stresses the importance of labour market participation by encouraging mothers to get paid jobs. Still, a major breakthrough is that the government has accepted that there is public responsibility for childcare by providing more financial support to childcare service providers. To conclude, Britain has changed the course of its family policy towards a more pro-active approach since the mid-1990s, partly because the "old" family model could no longer produce a sustainable balance between the family, state and market, and partly because the European Union has been pushing stronger for a more explicit work-life balance family policy. Still, the pro-active approach in family policy continues to be confined within the liberal welfare regime because the role of the market remains prominent as evident in the welfare-to-work policy for single mothers alongside the promotion of private childcare facilities.

Chapter 3: France – the Pro-natalist model of Family Policy

Orienting towards Work-Life Balance

Introduction

France is a typical example of pro-natalist model in Gauthier's (1996) typology. The major concern of this model is the fertility rate and because of this the main task of French family policy is to encourage families to have more children. To achieve this goal, great emphasis is placed on cash allowances to compensate for the economic cost of child rearing. Cash benefits provided to families are very diversified, including various types of allowances that accompany all stages of family life: birth grant, child allowances, single-parent allowance, housing allowance, moving bonus, etc. These allowances are generally targeted at families with three or more children and on low-income families. Noticing that more and more women are joining the labour force, the French government has also launched a number of policies and programmes, such as the comprehensive early childhood education system and maternity / parental leave programmes, that can help mothers to reconcile work and family life. As a result, French family benefits remain among the most generous in Europe, equalizing income across family types and guaranteeing a minimum standard of living to families with children regardless of parental occupation, marital status or class. However, the interplay of the pro-natalist objective and reconciliation of work / family life has led to the development of a rather disarticulated system of sometimes contradictory measures: service provision for women to keep their gainful employment but also monetary compensation for them to withdraw from the labour market.

Policy Context: Early Decline in Fertility Rate and Long Family Policy Tradition

The Socio-political context

The history of French demography is atypical in the Western World. France was the first European country to experience a falling birth rate (King 1998). Unlike the other European countries, France did not experience a strong population growth in the 19th century and first half of the 20th century. Around 1830, trends in the birth rate had already started to stagnate (Kaufmann 2002). In 1801, France was the most populous nation in Europe, containing about one-sixth of the European continent's inhabitants. By 1936, the French population had increased by 50%, but in the same period, the population of Italy and Germany nearly trebled and in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, the population had nearly quadrupled. The fall in the birth rate could be partly explained by the practice of French peasants who deliberately limited the size of their families in order to reduce the effect of a Napoleonic law that required the splitting of the family assets among all heirs. Other reasons may have included the rise of individualism following the French Revolution of 1789, the declining influence of Roman Catholic surveillance on family behaviours and the huge loss of human life in large-scale wars such as the Franco-German War (1870-1871) and the World War I (1914-1918) (Encyclopædia Britannica 2007).

Pro-natalist movement

In response to the decreasing birth rates, two social movements emerged that were to be extremely influential in state pro-natalist initiatives. During the late 1800s, the first group, "natalists", appeared. It was mainly composed of

doctors, high civil servants, statisticians, demographers, political leaders, etc. Convinced by demographic studies that France's national power depended on having a growing population, it called for state support of the family in order to increase the birth rate. Although this group was concerned with the number of births, it tended to be relatively indifferent to moral concerns about family forms (Lenoir 1991). At about the same time, a second group, the "familialists", began initiatives to promote large families. This group was comprised mainly of Catholic leaders and social activists, and it saw the trend towards smaller families as the result of declining morals (Pedersen 1993a). The familialists explicitly aimed at restoring a moral order founded on respect for "natural" hierarchies and Christian values. Its ideal was a large family with a patriarchal head (Lenoir 1991).

Long family policy tradition

Both movements contributed to the state's gradual development of an explicit family policy in France. Because of the comparatively low fertility rate before the Second World War, France was one of the first countries to develop an explicit family policy (Baker 1995). In 1920, a law was passed to prohibit the use of methods of contraception (Hantrais 1993). In 1923, another law was passed to prosecute abortionists and their clients (King 1998). With the introduction in 1939 of the Family Code (*Code de la Famille*), the institution of the family became an independent component of French public policy. The Family Code increased family benefits by providing family allowances, birth premiums, supplemental allowances for mothers in urban areas, interest free loans to young married couples and housing subsidies (Hantrais 1993; King 2001). These provisions, which were clearly intended to increase the birth rate,

set the foundation for an expansion of family policy in the post-Second World War years. Successive governments in the post-1945 period have shown their commitment to family issues, placing the family high on the agenda of social reforms. Although there seems to be a consensus among most political parties and interest groups about the desirability of promoting fertility, their attitudes towards the role of women in the family still differs. By and large, more right-wing and centrist actors tend to emphasise the traditional division of labour within the family, endorsing policies such as part-time work and long paid parental leaves that place the primary burden for care-giving on women; more left-wing actors tend to emphasise reconciliation of family life with work, endorsing day care centres and child-minder allowances that would allow women with children to participate more effectively in the labour market (White 2004).

The socio-demographic context

After the Second World War, public and government support for pro-natalist measures was still strong, due to the belief that German occupation could have been avoided if only France's population had grown more rapidly in the years prior to the war (McIntosh 1983). However, like most other Western European countries, family structures changed rapidly since the 1960s. The birth rate started to decline again after the post-war baby boom. Between 1965 and 1989, the total fertility rate of France fell by over one child per women (in 1965, 100 women gave birth to 290 children; in 1989, the figure had declined to 180 children) (Muller-Escoda and Vogt 1997: 59). On the other hand, women entered the labour force in large numbers from the 1960s. The women's labour market participation rate rose from 34% in 1960 to 43% in 1990

(Revillard 2006: 139). Many people worried that this could cause the birth rate to decline even further. Besides, other important demographic changes were also taking place including a rise in divorce rates and a drop in marriage rates. The divorce rate, which had remained steady at around 10% until 1965, rose to 20% in 1978 and 26% in 1982 (Ibid. 2006: 148). The number of marriages per thousand dropped from 7.8 in 1972 to 4.8 in 1988 (Muller-Escoda and Vogt 1997: 57). Those demographic trends, combined with the long family policy tradition, led to a pro-natalist revival in the 1970s and 1980s, when many of the programmes in force today were established. Although birth rates in Western Europe were also declining since the 1960s, the French government distinguished itself from most other Western European governments by pursuing policies explicitly designed to encourage fertility. The natalists and the familialists, who were active in promoting the birth rate in the 19th century and the early 20th century, instigated a pro-natalist revival that continues to influence family policies today.

Policy Objective: A Pro-natalist Regime Skew towards Work-Life Balance

As a proto-type in the pro-natalist model of Gauthier's typology, French family policy has three main goals: 1) to increase the fertility rate, 2) to help families financially so as to offset the cost of raising children and 3) to provide financial assistance to poor families so as to offset social inequalities (Dang, 2004). Among these objectives, fertility, of course, is the first priority. Hence, we can find that pro-natalism cuts across different areas of government. For example, the national health care system provides thorough coverage of maternity and infant health care. Employment laws call for relatively lengthy maternity and

parental leaves. The Government-supported pre-school system provides low cost child care. Tax policy favours those with more children. Even the national rail system provides a price cut on train fares to families with three or more children or (Breton and Prioux 2005).

In recent years, another goal has been assigned to French family policy: to reconcile family obligations arising from the upbringing of children and parents' employment. Whereas cash allowances for the compensation of the direct cost of child-rearing remains a contentious issue in French family policy, government support has also been skewed towards compensating indirect costs in other ways. In response to the increasing number of women participating in the labour force, the government has carried out measures to help women to stay in employment. Since the 1980s, more child care facilities such as nurseries have been built to provide sufficient public child care places for young children. To ease the financial burden of hiring child-minders, the government also provides relevant subsidies to those families that hire them. Thus, encouraging fertility does not necessarily mean that we should require women to withdraw from the labour market. Women with children are given a choice of whether to stay in their employment or to quit their jobs to care for their children at home. In this sense, we should reconsider whether it is still appropriate to classify France as an example of a conservative welfare regime that advocates the male bread-winner model (Esping-Andersen 1990; 1999) for France appears to recognise the reality of women's role as both mothers and paid workers. However, it would also be too hasty to conclude that French family policy is dictated by a concern to promote the dual-earner model. In fact, France represents a modified male-breadwinner model in that

characteristics of both the male-breadwinner and the dual-earner models co-exist. The French model provides a mixed mechanism of strong support for women's employment with a benefits system skewed toward families with single income earner. These contradictory policies are indeed the result of the familistic objective that aims at ensuring the well-being of the child, particularly children in large families. While the extensive provision of public child care and child-minder allowances have been key factors in enabling women to remain in the labour market, an underlying objective of the French government has been to ensure that children are properly cared for, regardless of whether their mothers work outside the home or not (Hantrais 1993).

Apart from the child-centered concern mentioned above, another distinguishing characteristic of French family policy is its systematic focus on promoting large families with three or more children. Believing that population renewal and growth must depend on couples who intend to produce more children, successive French governments since the early 20th century have intentionally shaped family policies to achieve larger families (Hantrais 1997). As a result, family allowances paid to the third and subsequent children nowadays are greater and there is no allowance paid to the first child. Women workers can also obtain longer maternity leave after the birth of the third child.

Policy Contents – Sophisticated Family Welfare System with Generous Government Support

Family allowances, maternity leave and parental leave in France are part of the French social security system which is under the supervision of the Social

Security Ministry. The *écoles maternelles* (nursery schools) for children aged three to six are operated by the Ministry of Education. Family allowance and public child care facilities are mainly financed by the National Family Allowance Funds (*Casse National d'Allocations Familiales*) which were established in the 1920s (Baker 1995; King 1998; CLEISS 2007). All employers are required to pay into these funds through the payroll taxes for their employees, though not all benefits are dependent on people's work history. When compared with other Western countries, French family benefits are clearly generous because many of them are universal. As of 2003, social expenditures on cash allowances accounted for 2.1% of the GDP and child care 0.6% (Da Roit and Sabatinelli 2007b). This proportion of GDP expenditure was the seventh highest among the European Union (EU) member states (Da Roit and Sabatinelli 2007a).

The system of French family benefits is rather sophisticated. Due to its complexity and the fact that it is revised regularly, even some potential beneficiaries have trouble learning what they are eligible for (King 1998). Those benefits that can be enjoyed by French families in 2007 are summarised as follows (CLEISS 2007):

■ **Cash Allowance:**

1. Family allowances are paid to families with two or more dependent children and are payable without any means-tested measure. In 2007, the allowances for two children are €119.13 and €152.63 per additional child per month.

2. Family income supplement is a mean-tested benefit payable to families

with at least three children over three years of age.

3. Single parent's allowance is non-means-tested and is provided to any single parent who has at least one dependent child. Monthly payment for a pregnant woman without children is €61.18 and for a single parent with one dependent child is €748.24, increased by €187.06 per additional child.

4. Infant accommodation benefit (*Prestation d'accueil du jeune enfant* or PAJE) consists of five categories of allowances:

a) Birth or adoption grant is means-tested and aims to cover the expenses related to child birth or adoption.

b) Basic allowance is a means-tested benefit that is paid from childbirth to the child's third birthday. It amounts to €71.06 per month

c) Supplement for free choice of working time is not means-tested. It is provided to parents who either stop or reduce their paid employment temporarily in order to look after their children. The full rate of this benefit amounts to €30.72 per month.

d) Optional supplement for free choice of working time is also a non-means-tested measure and is granted to families with at least three children and one of the parents stops working completely to look after the children. The full rate amount of this benefit is €58.95 which is higher than "the supplement for free choice of working time" but is paid for a shorter time.

e) Supplement for free choice of custodial care is paid to the household which hires a registered child-minder to look after a child under six years old.

5. Other benefits: In addition to the above allowances, there are also other special purpose benefits available including flat rate family allowance (non

means-tested), family support allowance (non means-tested), education allowance for a disabled child (non means-tested), back-to-school allowance (means-tested), daily parent's attendance allowance (non means-tested; pay to any person looking after a child under 20 suffering from a disease or a severe handicap), family housing allowance (means-tested) and moving bonus (means-tested).

■ **Maternity and Parental Leaves**

1. Maternity leave for an employed woman are six weeks before and ten weeks after the birth of the first two children, eight weeks before and 18 weeks after the birth of the third child, 34 weeks (12 pre-natal weeks) for twins and 46 weeks (24 pre-natal weeks) for triplets or more. The amount of the daily benefit is equal to her basic daily wages but should not exceed the social security ceiling (€1.8 per day).

2. Parental leave can be obtained at the end of maternity leave. Either mother or father can take the leave until the child reaches the age of three, with entitlement to resume the previous job. During this period, they receive no salary from their employers but they can apply to the government for the relevant allowances described above.

3. Paternity leave for a father is 11 days in a row or 18 days in a row in case of multiple births.

■ **Child Care Services**

France is now characterised by a dual pre-school system that is mainly composed of *écoles maternelles* (nursery schools) and *crèches* (day care centres). All children aged between three to six go to *écoles maternelles*

which are tuition-free. In addition to this older age group, about 30% of two-year-old children attend these schools also (Da Roit and Sabatinelli 2007b: 22). Opening from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm, these schools are routinely closed on Wednesday but are supplemented by a half-day Saturday session from 8:30 am to 11:30 am. All of them have canteen facilities (Fagnani 2002; White 2004).

Crèches usually cater for children under the age of three and are administered by the Ministry of Social Affairs. In 2006, about 10% of children under age three went to *crèches* (Da Roit and Sabatinelli 2007b:22). These schools usually open from 7:00 am to 7:00 pm, Monday to Friday (White 2004).

Owing to the early decline in its birth rate, France is one of the first countries to develop an explicit family policy and there have been significant improvements to it in the post-1945 period (Gordon 1988). The following section will review such historical development in the following order: 1) cash allowances, 2) maternity and parental leaves and 3) child care services

Cash allowances

Family benefits in France were first initiated by the private sector. At the beginning of the 20th century, family allowances were introduced by employers with the aim of improving workers' living standard. They were only granted to married workers and the amount was based on the number of children in the household (Muller-Escoda and Vogt 1997; Jordan 2006). The state became involved in the system of family allowances in 1932 by passing a law that made the allowances compulsory for all companies (Muller-Escoda and Vogt 1997). This shift from private initiative to state-led social policy was an important step

in the institutionalisation of family policy in France. In 1939, the Family Code was introduced that discontinued the allowance for the first child but increased the allowance for the third and additional children, making the allowance system explicitly pro-natalist (Baker 1995). France also created a single-income allowance (*allocation de salaire unique* or ASU) in 1941 for single income-earning families that served as an income supplement for those women who remained at home (Pendersen 1993b). Such measures indeed promoted a male-breadwinner model of the family that favoured a married couple with three or more children and a strict gendered division of labour.

The male-breadwinner model of the family remained embedded in French family policy until the 1960s when demographic and economic changes forced a re-assessment of the policy. Since the 1960s, major social and demographic changes such as the decreasing number of marriages and the increasing number of divorces, of single parent families and of couples living together outside marriage have taken place. At the same time, due to the rising labour shortage caused by the rapid economic growth of post-reconstruction Europe, the demand for female labour increased dramatically. To cope with these changes, the French government began to shift away from the male-breadwinner model to a mixed strategy of supporting women's employment while ensuring that this would not disrupt fertility patterns. In other words, the government has attempted to reconcile work and family life. In 1972, a mean-tested child care allowance was created to offset part of the cost of child-rearing for working women (ibid. 2006). The allowance was turned into a young child allowance (*allocation pour jeune enfant* or APJE) in 1985 paid to a family with a child under the age of three (Muller-Escoda and Vogt 1997). Meanwhile, the

single-income allowance was abolished in 1978 (Fagnani 2002). Furthermore, two types of allowance, the allowance for child care at home (*allocation de garde d' enfant à domicile* or AGED) and the allowance subsidising the employment of a licensed mother's assistant (*aide à la famille pour l' employ d'une assistante maternelle agréée* or AFEAMA) were established in 1986 and 1990 to subsidise parents who hire child-minders (Revillard 2006). These measures helped women with children to join the labour market while reducing the impact of employment on the decision to have children.

Nevertheless, tendencies to promote a traditional gendered division of labour still exist in family policy. The government also offered options for mothers who wanted to stay at home to care for their children. In 1985, the parental leave allowance (*allocation parentale d' education* or APE) was created. It was paid to one of the parents who reduced or stopped their working activity to raise a third child. In 1994, the allowance was made available starting with the second child and it was extended to part-time employment (Breton and Prioux 2005).

To reduce the complexity of the French family benefit system, the government launched a reform in 2004. The APE, AFEMA and AGED were merged into a new allowance called the infant accommodation benefit which is divided into a basic allowance and complements (Revillard 2006).

Generally speaking, the underlying rationale of the French benefit system is to ensure that people with children are not subject to too great a decline in their standard of living when compared with persons who have no children (Dang

2004). Because of its pro-natalist nature, the main beneficiaries of this system are large families on low incomes.

Maternity and parental leaves

The history of maternity leave can be traced back to 1909 when the government implemented its first maternity law to ensure a working mother's leave of eight weeks with the right to return to one's job afterwards. In 1913, the government passed the Strauss law to create a compulsory post-natal leave of four weeks, with a daily allowance (Cova 1991; Revillard 2006). In 1917, another law was passed to reduce the working time by an hour a day for mothers to nurse their babies. The law also required employers with more than 100 employees to establish nursing rooms in or near the workplace (Cova 1991). Since 1988, maternity leave has been counted as a period of employment in calculating the length of pensionable service and it cannot be used to justify reductions in long service benefits or bonus payments (Hantrais 1993). The length of maternity leave today varies by the number of children in the family, with more generous benefits directed to larger families.

France has played a leading role among European countries in making arrangements for parental leave. Unpaid parental leave was first introduced in 1977 which enabled the working parents to suspend their employment for up to two years to take care of a child under the age of three (Revillard 2006). This benefit was only implemented in firms employing at least 200 workers when it was first created. In 1981, it was extended to firms with 100 employees and in 1984 to all employees. In 1986, the leave period was extended to three years for each child at the end of maternity leave (Hantrais 1993). Although

employers were not required to pay for parental leave, with the introduction of APE in 1985, parents were allowed to apply for allowances from the government to cover their wage loss.

The creation of paternity leave for fathers in 2002 can be regarded as an important step in promoting gender equality in family relationship. Fathers were granted full paid leave of two weeks within four months following the birth of a child (Fagnani 2003). However, the non-compulsory nature of this benefit made it difficult for fathers to claim and this policy was also strongly criticised by employers (Fagnani 2003; Revillard 2006).

In France, maternity, parental and paternity leave are funded through a social insurance programme called the Local Sickness Insurance Funds which also covers sickness and disability benefits. The insurance programme started as early as 1928 by the law on social insurance of 1928-1930 (Revillard 2006). Nowadays, it covers all pregnancy-related costs and pays benefits for maternity, parental and paternity leaves (CLEISS 2007).

It is important to stress that these protective measures were originally designed for pro-natalist reasons and not to achieve feminist goals. Despite the fact that these measures were not made to help women but primarily for families, they resulted in facilitating mothers' labour force participation. Given the long tradition of maternity and parental leave, we may conclude that the model of women combining maternity and waged work emerged early in France.

Childcare services

Compared to other European countries, except the Nordics ones, the situation regarding child care is quite satisfactory in France, although the coverage of child care facilities for children under three is not broad enough. The first *salle d'asile* (nursery school) was opened in 1826 by a charitable organisation with the purpose of providing better food, hygiene and medical care for children to reduce infant mortality (Leprince 1991; White 2004). In 1881, with the introduction of free primary schooling, the *salle d'asile* were fully integrated into the public education system, becoming known as *écoles maternelles*. *Crèches* first appeared in 1844, after which their numbers rapidly increased. Unlike *écoles maternelles*, *crèches* were long considered to be a welfare institution, primarily concerned with health and hygiene (Leprince 1991). Hence, by the end of the 19th century, child care had developed into a system regulated by and under the authority of government that supported working mothers and their children.

In the first half of the 20th century, the number of day care facilities for young children built by local communities and organisations grew slowly. It was only after the Second World War that the pre-school system underwent rapid development. After post-war reconstruction was completed, a labour shortage affected the economy, especially the tertiary sector, and female employment was encouraged. The increase in the participation of married women in the labour force stimulated a strong demand for the expansion of public child care facilities. In 1970, the government began to introduce subsidies for the *crèches* and promised to build more day care centres for children (White 2004). Hence, the spending on infrastructures of pre-schools grew by 72% between 1974 and 1980.

The proportion of spending on non-parental child care within the family policy budget also greatly increased from the 1970s onward: 2% in 1970, 12% in 1980 and 25% in 1990 (Revillard 2006: 140). The number of child care places in *crèches* increased on average by 6400 places per year between 1981 and 1996, bringing the total number of places to 201,000 in 1996 (Fagnani 2002:110). By the mid-1980s, nearly all children aged over 3 attended *écoles maternelles* (Muller-Escoda and Vogt 1997).

However, the expansion of day care for children slowed down in the 1990s. Since 1994, the increase in funding allocated to *crèches* has been modest when compared with the much higher funding granted to the child-rearing benefits such as AFEMA which help families to hire child-minders (Fagnani 2003). According to Fagnani (2002, 2003), the change in the child care policy was mainly due to the fact that the government intended to fight unemployment by helping families to hire child-minders and by encouraging mothers to stay at home to look after their children.

In recent years, because of pressure from the women's movement and the growing demand for public child care facilities, the government decided to increase the number of places in *crèches* again. In 2001, 228 million Euros were devoted to public child care facilities (Fagnani 2003). Despite the huge financial resources allocated to this sector, the coverage of *crèches* is still insufficient. Only 10% of children under age three were cared for in *crèches* in 2005 (Da Roit and Sabatinelli 2007b: 25). The shortage of places affects low income families the most because they cannot afford to hire child-minders. This means that low-paid female workers are more inclined to leave the labour

market and to apply for the child care allowance after the birth of a child.

Family Policy and Demographic Changes

In this section, we will explore the relationship between family policy and demographic changes in France. The discussion will be centered around three major issues: 1) gender equality, 2) fertility rate and 3) family solidarity

Relatively fair gender equality

Although France has launched a number of measures to reconcile work and family life in recent decades, women's employment rate is only about average compared to the other EU countries. In 2006, the employment rate of women aged 15 to 64 was 57.7%, which was only slightly higher than the average rate for EU member states (57.4%) (Eurostat 2007). This situation is mainly due to the fact that gender equality is not always as important as the demographic goal of increasing fertility. That is also why the effects of different measures within the family policy are mutually contradictory: some favouring and some discouraging mothers' labour force participation.

Some may argue that women's labour force participation rate has increased since the 1960s and it reflects the rising status of woman. However, the rise in the employment rate of women in France has done little to change the understanding of the traditional role of woman in the family. The involvement of women in paid work has not resulted in a corresponding level of involvement by men in unpaid domestic work. Women still assume the main burden of household tasks (Fagnani 2003). Public opinion survey data regarding child

care and women's labour market participation parallel these discussions and again reveal the general acceptance of more traditional views of the family. The ratio of people supporting the idea that women should be given financial support to stop work to take care of children as opposed to the state providing more child care was roughly 80 to 20 percent in 1987. The ratio shifted slightly to 70 and 30 percent in 1993 (White 2004: 265).

Parental leave is another good example to illustrate this point. Before the unpaid parental leave was introduced in 1977, it had been labeled "mother's leave" in the government draft bill, which clearly reflected the model of gendered division of labour that inspired the government. In 1988, APE was created to compensate parents who left work to take care of their child at home. It was equally accessible for men and women, but due to the low allowance level and the gender salary difference, by 1993, 95% of the recipients of this allowance were women (white 2004: 266). Even today, the take-up rate by fathers for parental leave is still very limited (Da Roit and Sabatinelli 2007b).

Relatively high fertility rate

Being a classical example of pro-natalist state in Gauthier's typology of family policy, France has been well-known for its continuous support of pro-natalist measures. According to the classical economic theory of fertility, at the individual level, the demand for children is a function of the cost of children, income and preference for children. In this model, state support for families may influence the demand for children by reducing the cost of children through the provision of child care services and child care subsidies, or by increasing household income through cash transfer (Gauthier 1999). Judging from this

perspective, France seems to have been successful in creating an environment that is favourable to fertility.

France had the lowest birth rates in Europe between 1830 and 1945 but showed a substantial increase after a comprehensive family policy had become effective. In line with trends all over Europe, the fertility rates of France dropped again since the mid-1960s. However, owing to the pro-natalist support of the state, the French birth rate has been above the European average since 1945 (Kaufmann 2002). By shifting its objective from supporting the direct cost of having children to reconciliation of work and family life, family policy measures in recent decades have helped to keep the fertility rate at a comparatively high level. Coinciding with economic growth and a decline in the unemployment rate, the birth rate in France started to rise again in the mid-1990s. The fertility rate which stood at 1.65 in 1994 increased to 1.89 in 2001, which is the second highest (behind Ireland) within the EU (Fagnani 2002: 106). Since 2000, France has become the third most populous country of Europe, behind Russia and Germany (Wikipedia 2007). In 2006, the fertility rate for France reached 2.0, superseding Ireland to be the most fertile country in the EU (Eurostat 2007). Hence, we may conclude that the relatively high fertility rates since 1945 can be explained, at least in part, by the French family policy.

Relatively weak family solidarity

Since the 1980s, French family policy has been characterised by neutrality with respect to family forms and to woman's decision to join the labour force or to stay at home to rear children. The socialist President Mitterand announced in

1981 that everyone should be able to choose the way of life he or she desires. This position was restated almost ten years later by Permanent Secretary Dorlhac (Muller-Escoda and Vogt 1997). The neutrality of the state was also expressed by the Supreme Court decision in 1989 which recognised that both married and unmarried couples had the same legal status (Kaufmann 2002). As a result, individuals are more and more liberated from family responsibilities and family as a social institution has been weakened.

Weak family solidarity is clearly reflected by the demographic trends. In France, the marriage rate is declining and the number of divorces is increasing. The marriage rate fell from 4.82 per 1000 persons in 1996 to 4.34 in 2006. The mean age at first marriage has increased from 29.9 in 1998 to 31.7 in 2006, partly due to the fact that couples are increasingly likely to spend several years cohabiting prior to marriage (Eurostat 2007). The number of divorces over the last ten years also increased. The divorce rate was 2.1 per 1000 persons in 1995, compared with 2.2 in 2005. As a result of these trends, the percentage of births outside marriage grows at an even faster pace, from 41.67 % in 1998 to 50.49 in 2006 (Ibid 2007).

Concluding Remarks

Because of the early decline in her fertility rate, France has a very long tradition of family policy that has always had pro-natalist goals. It has provided generous financial assistance to large families with low income, and also makes women's gainful employment and family responsibilities more compatible through the expansion of day care services for young children and through

financial assistance to families to hire child-minders to look after children. France has gone the furthest, outside Scandinavia, in making public child care available. The French generous family benefit system also guarantees a minimum income for families with children, particularly applicable to low-income families. At the same time, it now has the highest fertility level within the EU. Thus, we may conclude that French family policy can support families in realising their social and economic goals, and it has been conducive to achieving a higher fertility rate.

Chapter 4: Singapore -- A Pro-natalist Family Policy Regime with a Confucian Twist

Introduction

Singapore has been very much concerned about delayed marriage, the declining fertility rate and the ageing population since the mid-1980s. Much of its family policy has focused on encouraging marriage and childrearing. Using Gauthier's classification scheme (1996), we label Singapore as a case of a Pro-natalist family policy regime. However, it should be noted that Singapore also shares some similarity with the non-interventionist regime and the conservative regime. On the one hand, Singapore shares a major characteristic of the non-interventionist regime in that its financial support for family policy is relatively limited. On the other hand, Singapore shares a conservative orientation towards the preservation of the traditional family. Singapore may thus represent a typical East Asian developmental state where social policy is meant to complement economic development policy. Singapore's demographic trend over the past 30 years is similar to that of most newly industrialised societies. Throughout the 1970s to the 1990s, the declining birth rate has become an acute social problem; by 1990 Singapore was reportedly more than 200,000 babies short of its population replacement level (Singapore Bulletin 1999). Not surprisingly, Singapore's family policy has revolved around pro-natalist initiatives, i.e. promoting child births. Still, Singapore has shown a strong orientation towards preserving the traditional family model, emphasising the family's responsibility (especially women's) for caring for both

the younger and older generations. Hence, we characterise Singapore's family policy as a pro-natalist family policy regime with a Confucian twist. However, while the Singapore state has a clear objective, it has allocated comparatively limited financial resources to implementing the family policy. This limitation is obviously associated with the apparent inability of Singapore family policy to arrest the decline of the fertility rate and the weakening of family solidarity.

The Policy Context -- The Developmental State Subordinating Family Policy to Economic Policy

There have been debates over whether East Asian social policy can be analysed using comparative frameworks based on the experience of Western societies. Attempts have been made to classify the East Asian countries as a separate model, such as the East Asian Welfare model (Aspalter 2006) and Welfare Orientalism (Goodman et al 1998). While analysing East Asia as a unique group helps illuminate the differences between the East Asian countries and the Western countries, it makes the cross-country policy learning more difficult by particularising the experiences of East Asia. We therefore analyse Singapore by highlighting its relationship to the existing comparative framework while bearing in mind that it has some unique features.

The socio-political context

In analysing East Asia social policy, we must not overlook the active and strong role of the developmental state in economic and social development (Tang 2000). The nature of the developmental state has ample implications for East Asian welfare policy because social policies are subordinated to economic

policy (Tang 2000; Aspalter 2006). Tang (2000) outlined three common characteristics of these East Asian countries: 1) small governmental spending; 2) flexible labour market as a result of a low level of regulation; and 3) the use of social security as an instrument to target politically important interest groups (p.139). From this characterisation, it is obvious that East Asia countries lie between the Liberal Welfare State Regime and the Conservative Welfare State Regime. They are close to the Liberal Regime because of their insistence on labour market participation for the economic well-being of individuals. They are close to the Conservative Regime because of an interest in preserving the existing hierarchical arrangements of social groups. Their conservative orientation is also enhanced by a cultural disposition to regard family as the social institution primarily responsible for caring for individuals (Croissant 2004).

The Singaporean state has openly claimed it adheres to non-interventionism in policy of both the market and the family (Lim 2000):

“Every Singaporean is imbued with the sense that rewards can only be brought about through hard work, based on the principles of meritocracy and self reliance. We do not believe in social handouts. We believe the family is the basic building block of our society. It should be the first line of support in our social safety net if the individual needs help. Only if the family cannot help would we consider help from the community and the government.” (P.1)

However, the Singapore state has been known to be heavily involved in regulating and directing the local economy (Kingsbury 2005). In addition, the

Singapore government has also been active in providing some public goods through its statutory boards, two notable examples being the Central Provident Fund (CPF) and the Housing and Development Board (HDB) (Tremewan 1998; Mauzy and Milne 2002). All in all, Singapore can hardly be classified as a Liberal Welfare State Regime or a Non-Interventionist Family Policy Regime, despite its rhetoric of liberalism. Thanks to the strong grip on power of the People's Action Party (PAP), the Singapore government has been selectively intervening into economic and social affairs where and when it sees fit. Actually, the Singapore government has not been refrained from regulating marriage and family on the ground of economic development (Kingsbury 2005; Aspalter 2006).

In addition to the feature of subordinating family policy to economic policy, conservatism is another major characteristic of Singapore family policy because of the government's interest in preserving the traditional gender division of labour (Tan 2001; Teo 2007). For the Singapore state, the "family" and the "nation" are fundamentally connected. This conservatism is often used to justify state intervention into the family (Teo 2006). Throughout the 1960s to the 1980s, official discourse indirectly reinforced within individual and collective mindsets the gendered priorities that not only distinguish male roles and qualities from females ones but also establish hierarchical relationships among these roles and qualities (Tan 2001). Even when Singapore tries to shift towards a more open and participative socio-political system, the government is still aiming to preserve traditional family (Teo 2007). The Singapore state has made efforts to organise the gendered division of labour according to the traditional order, i.e. assuming women to be responsible for

cares for the younger and the older generations in the family (Yun 2004). Therefore, we classify Singapore into the Pro-natalist Family Policy Regime with a conservative (in the form of Confucianism) rhetoric.

The socio-demographic context

Over the past 30 years, the trend towards delayed marriage, decreased fertility and population ageing has increasingly come to be perceived as urgent problems in Singapore (Teo 2006). While Singapore's population increased from 2.07 million in 1970 to 2.81 million in 1992, the total fertility rate dropped from 3.03 to 1.76 (Teo and Yeoh 1999:81). During the late 1980s to the early 1990s, three socio-demographic trends were found to be interrelated: 1) an increasing proportion of single women over the age of 30; 2) an increasing proportion of single women among more highly educated women; and 3) a widening gap between actual births and required births needed to attain a replacement-level fertility rate (Quah 1990). The passing of the 1990s saw little increase in the fertility rate in Singapore. Quite the contrary, Singapore's total fertility rate had dropped further to 1.42 in 2001 (Wong and Yeoh 2003: 15). This trend is seen as a threat to the society as a whole, which also explains why Singaporean family policy has shifted towards the pro-natalist model since the mid-1980s.

Policy Objectives -- From Birth Control to the Promotion of Childrearing

Singapore's family policy has long been subordinated to its economic development policy. The policy objective can therefore be classified into three distinct phases (Wong and Yeoh 2004):

Anti-natalist phase, 1966-1982

This was the post-independence period. The government began the “family planning programmes” for fear that the economic development would be hindered by an unsustainably large population. At that time, major problems included an urban housing shortage, large-scale unemployment, and a net population increase as death rates fell and birth rates remained high. The government’s development strategy was to attract foreign investment, heavily invest in the public sector, create economic opportunities and promote public education. For fear that public investment and economic development would be unsustainable with a large population, the government attempted to slow the trend of population expansion.

The Family Planning and Population Board was instituted in 1966 with a mandate to reduce Singapore’s birth rate and net reproduction rate, with zero population growth as its eventual goal. Promoted as a “survival” strategy, the government encouraged families to “Stop at Two (children)” by offering incentives and disincentives. Incentives for voluntary sterilisation included priority in primary school registration and the reimbursement of delivery fees. Disincentives for having more than two children included delivery fee increases, and no paid maternity leave for women on the birth of their third and subsequent child (Wong and Yeoh 2003: 6-7).

Eugenics phase, 1983- 1986

The early 1980s saw a dramatic dip in fertility rates. The rise in the female labour market participation rate and the rise of the nuclear family model were regarded as the major factors contributing to declining fertility rates. In face of

below-replacement fertility, Singapore's family policy encouraged graduates to marry earlier and have more children, and discouraged lesser-educated women from having children. A major concern then was over a growing number of graduate women choosing to marry later or not to marry at all. Premised on the assumption that intelligence is genetically inherited, the then-Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew worried that the number of babies born to the more educated families will decrease, and the number of babies born to the less educated families will increase (Yeoh and Wong 2003: 8).

As a policy response to promote marriage and birth among more educated families, an enhanced tax relief and priority for primary school admission were introduced for highly educated women who gave birth to three or more children. The Social Development Unit was set up in 1984 to encourage matches among graduates. To discourage lesser-educated women from having children, a sterilisation incentive of S\$10,000 was given to women with no "O" levels below the age of 30 to stop having children after their first or second child. Not surprisingly, the discriminatory overtones of the policy made it highly unpopular. Therefore, the Eugenics phase lasted only for a few years (Yeoh and Wong 2003: 8-10).

Pro-natalist phase, from 1987 to the 2000s

Over the past two decades, pro-natalist initiatives have been the dominant theme of Singapore's family policy. The pro-natalist initiative was announced in 1987 in response to the fear of an ageing population in Singapore. In 1987, the primary slogan was "Have Three or More Children if You Can Afford It." A set of initiatives was launched in the 1980s and 1990s to boost interest among

married couples in having more than two children including childcare, primary school registration, housing allocation and taxation. In the 2000s, two major initiatives were announced, namely the “Children Development Co-Saving Scheme” and the “Third Child Paid Maternity Leave Scheme” (Yeoh and Wong 2003: 11-16). We will discuss these policy contents in more details in the next section.

From the mid-1980s onwards, Singapore’s family policy has revolved around the pro-natalist theme. In addition, its family policy is becoming more and more skewed towards the pro-tradition model. In Singapore, family is culturally assigned to be responsible for the welfare of children and women, and the state protects the welfare of individuals mainly through the support for the family as a whole. In addition to encouraging more births, Singapore’s family policy trumpets the social desirability of marriage and the family’s duty to care for the young and old. With the traditional family model under severe challenges, the Singapore government set up the National Family Council in 2006 in order to “advance the agenda of building resilient families in Singapore” (National Family Council 2007: p.7)

Policy Contents – A Shift towards More Direct Support for Dual-Earner Families with Children since 2000

For the past two decades, Singapore’s family policy has aimed to encourage childbirths and preserve the traditional family model. There are many ministries and statutory boards involving in promoting the “ideal” family form. The definition of an ideal “family” emphasises the following: nuclear family

formation by marriage between man and woman, children resulting from this union (with a desirable number); well-educated mothers who returned to work after childrearing are particularly desirable; care giving for both young and the elderly should be done within the household, but can be done by foreign domestic workers (Teo 2006).

Throughout the 1970s to the 1990s, the family policy measures were mainly in the form of tax relief and promotion campaigns. The Singapore government also did not have a unifying institution for formulating and implementing family policy but instead relied on several statutory boards (including the Central Provident Fund and the Housing and Development Board) to implement its family policy. In the 2000s, the Singapore government has become more willing to provide direct support for families, as indicated by the launch of the “Children Development Co-Saving Scheme” (or the so-called Baby Bonus Scheme) and the “Third Child Paid Maternity Leave Scheme” in 2000. As of 2007, the family policy contents of Singapore are summarised in the following (Singapore Government Website 2007):

Financial Support is organised into various schemes, each with different eligibility requirements. We will outline the financial support scheme under two major categories: 1) cash allowances and 2) tax relief:

Cash Allowances

- **Parenthood Tax Rebate** is available to tax-paying residents of Singapore who have a legitimate 2nd, 3rd or 4th child in the family born on or after 1 January 2004. The maximum amount is S\$10,000 for the 2nd child, and

\$20,000 for the 3rd and 4th child each.

- **The Baby Bonus Scheme** is available to all parents. The Scheme benefits the 1st to the 4th child born on or after 1 August 2004. Parents will get cash support of \$3000 each for the 1st and 2nd child and \$6000 each for the 3rd and 4th child. The 2nd to 4th children will also enjoy government contributions in the form of a dollar-for-dollar matching for the amount of savings that parents contribute to their child's Children Development Account (CDA). Parents can save in the CDA any time until the day before the child's 6th birthday. The savings will be matched by the government to the cap of S\$6,000 for the 2nd child and S\$12,000 for the 3rd and 4th child. The savings in the CDA may be used in various ways, including education and medical expenses for any children in the family.
- **Centre-based Child Care Subsidy** of up to S\$150 per month per child is available to Singapore Citizen children and Permanent Resident children below 7 years of age attending licensed child care centres. The subsidy rates are relative to the programme type and working status of the mother. To be eligible, a mother must work at least 56 hours per month.
- **Centre-based Infant Care Subsidy** became effective from 1 August 2004, giving a monthly amount of up to \$400 to Singapore Citizen infants aged 2 to 18 months (for the 1st to the 4th child) attending licensed infant care centres. The subsidy rates are relative to the programme type and working status of the mother. To be eligible, a mother must work at least 56 hours per month.

Tax Relief

- **Working Mother's Child Tax Relief** is available to mothers who have

earned income, with children under the age of 16 (full-time students above the age of 16 are also included). The amount of relief is relative to the mother's income: 5 per cent of the mother's earned income for the 1st child; 15 percent for the second child; 20 percent for the third child; and 25 percent for the fourth child. The maximum total amount for each child is S\$25,000 each year.

- **Qualifying Child Tax Relief** is available to all parents who support children under the age of 16 (full-time students above the age of 16 are also included). The annual amount of relief is S\$2,000 for each child, up to four children. The maximum total amount for each child is S\$25,000 each year.
- **Concession on Foreign Maid Levy** is available to maid employers who live with a child under the age of 12, and/or with an elderly over the age of 65. The Foreign Domestic Worker levy is reduced from S\$265 to S\$170 every month.
- **Grandparent Caregiver Tax Relief** is available to a working mother who is married, divorced or widowed. She may claim a tax relief of S\$3,000 in respect of **one** of her or her spouse's/ex-spouse's parent or grandparent who takes care of her child.

Parental Leave is divided into two schemes:

- **Government-Paid Maternity Leave** has extended the maternity leave from 8 to 12 weeks with effect from 1 October 2004 for all births. The scheme applies to all working mothers. For the first 2 confinements, the first 8 weeks of maternity leave will continue to be paid by the employer. The additional 4 weeks, capped at \$10,000 (including CPF contributions),

will be funded by the Government. For the third and fourth confinements, the Government will fund the full 12 weeks of salary, capped at \$30,000 (including CPF contributions).

- **Statutory Childcare Leave** gives all employees the right to two days of childcare leave each year, under the conditions that the child (including legally adopted children or stepchildren) is below seven years of age; and the employee has worked for the employer for at least three months. Childcare leave for each parent is capped at two days per year regardless of the number of qualifying children.

Public Childcare

Public provision of centre-based childcare is not an established practice in Singapore, as it is more common for working parents to seek help from relatives and/or hire foreign domestic helpers for home-based childcare (Quah 1998). Indeed, the state assumed the family will bear the childcare responsibilities as evidenced in various tax relief schemes, including the Concession on Foreign Maid Levy and the Grandparent Caregiver Tax Relief. Indeed, it was estimated in the early 2000s that there was one foreign domestic helper (or the so-called “maid” in Singapore) in every seven households in Singapore, amounting to a total number of 140,000 (Yeoh et al. 2004:11).

In more recent years, the government began to support parents who use centre-based childcare through the subsidy schemes. Still, childcare centres are not widespread in Singapore. As of 2005, there were 190,035 children aged 0-4 and 239,320 children aged 5-9 (Singapore Department of Statistics

2006a:Table1), and there were 713 childcare centres offering a capacity of 59,433 places (with an enrolment rate of only 74.4 percent) in Singapore (Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports 2006). In short, the established childcare practice in Singapore is for children to be taken care of in the household rather than in childcare centres.

The following sections will review the evolution of Singapore family policy in the following order: 1) financial support; 2) parental leaves; and 3) childcare.

Financial support

Though the Singapore government has long justified its intervention into families by drawing a connection between the well-being of the family and the well-being of the nation (Teo 2006), the Singapore government has long insisted on the ethics of self-reliance (Lim 2007). Avoiding the use of direct financial support, the Singapore government mostly relied on various tax relief schemes, alongside the housing and medical benefits, as its major family policy instruments. While the childcare subsidy dates back to the mid-1980s, its scale and scope is comparatively small. For example, when the childcare subsidy scheme was first introduced in 1987, a total of \$4,986,850 was paid out (Quah 1998:134).

Only in the 2000s have relatively more generous financial incentives been given with the explicit goal of encouraging childbearing because the total fertility rate dropped to 1.48 in 2000 (Teo 2000). A notable example was the launch of the Baby Bonus Scheme in 2001. When first introduced, the Baby Bonus Scheme applied only to a couple's second and third children; starting in August 2004,

the first and the fourth children also qualified for certain amounts (Teo 2006). In subsequent years, new financial incentive schemes were introduced, including the Parenthood Tax Rebate and the Infant Care Subsidies (which offer an amount more than double than of the previous Childcare Subsidy Scheme). It is the most obvious that the government aimed to promote childbearing with the introduction of the Third Child Paid Maternity Leave Scheme—in place from 2000 to 2004 (subsequently replaced by the Government-Paid Maternity Leave)—that extended paid maternity leave to the third children (Teo 2006).

In addition to the pro-natalist initiative, the preservation of the traditional family model is also a major theme. Various direct and indirect financial support schemes are unified towards the promotion of an ideal family type in Singapore, as evidenced by the fact that that marriage and legitimate children are the eligibility criteria. For example, married, divorced or widowed women with children are granted a tax relief on the Foreign Maid Levy but this is not available to married or unmarried men, or to unmarried women—even if they are the ones in a given household to pay the levy. In sum, these financial support schemes presuppose the traditional family established by a man and a woman who get married and have children.

Parental leave

This policy area again demonstrates that the Singapore government is primarily concerned with childrearing as well as the preservation of the traditional division of labour in families. Before the mid-1980s, Singapore's government discouraged large families. That explains why maternity leave was restricted to only two children, and income tax relief to only three children (Teo and Yeoh

1999). From 2000 to 2004, the Third Child Paid Maternity Leave Scheme stipulated that women would have paid paternity leave for their first three instead of just the first two children. From 2004 onwards, this scheme has been further enhanced to include the 4th child, and the paid leave period extended from 8 to 12 weeks (Teo 2006). It should be noted that, maternity leave presuppose mothers take care of the children while parental leave schemes (as institutionalised in some European countries) are relatively gender-neutral.

Public childcare

The Singapore government has avoided the role as a provider of childcare services as home-based childcare is more commonly accepted (Quah 1998). With an increasing female labour participation rate, Singaporean families have become increasingly reliant on foreign domestic helpers, extended families and, to a lesser extent, private childcare centres for childcare (Tan 2001).

The evolution of childcare policy in Singapore again shows how family policy is subordinated to economic development policy. In 1986, the Economic Committee recommended that, in order to attain a higher female labour market participation rate, Singapore must create an conducive environment for mothers to work, a major policy recommendation being to “provide more childcare facilities at affordable prices” (as quoted in Quah 1998: 127). Nevertheless, the government avoided becoming a childcare service provider and instead encouraged non-profit organisations and private entrepreneurs to set up childcare centres. As a result, there was a rapid expansion in childcare services, as evidenced by the increase in the number of pre-school children enrolled in childcare centres from 1,406 in 1981 to 19,011 in 1996 (Quah 1998:

129).

Nevertheless, family-based childcare remains the most common arrangement. In 1996, for every 1,000 children below the age of five, there were about 120 children attending childcare centres – a mere 12 percent (Quah 1998: 129). Even though childcare subsidies were offered, the childcare fees remain high for working parents in the low income group. For instance, while the Childcare subsidy was S\$150 per month per child, childcare centres charged fees ranging from S\$255 to S\$470 per month (Quah 1998: 132). In other words, this policy, coupled with the Concession on Foreign Maid Levy, in effect divided women into two groups: 1) less educated, lower-income mothers are given little choice but to stay at home when grandparents are not available for taking care of the children; and 2) more educated, higher-income mothers are allowed to choose among the use of foreign “maids” and childcare centres to take care of their children.

With the total fertility rate falling below the 1987 level in the current decade, the government re-oriented policy towards a more holistic approach in order to reduce the obstacles that married couples face in raising children. While the Singapore government has since the mid-1980s promoted more births, it has become more proactive and provided more direct financial support for parents in the 2000s. For example, the Centre-based Infant Care Subsidy was introduced in 2004 to make centre-based childcare more affordable. While the impacts of these new initiatives remain to be seen, in the following sections we will discuss whether the Singapore family policy has been effective throughout the 1980s to the 2000s.

Family Policy and Socio-Demographic Change

While it is difficult to pin down the impacts of policies, Singapore's family policy has arguably contributed to some major socio-demographic trends. We organise the discussion around three major aspects: 1) gender equality; 2) fertility rate; and 3) family solidarity.

Relatively low gender equality

Singapore has relatively low gender equality, even though there has been a consistent rise in the female labour market participation rate over the years. When Singapore started its industrialisation during the late 1960s, the labour force participation rate of married women was 19.9 percent, as compared to 90.4 percent for married men. The female labour participation rate rose from 24.6 percent in 1970 to 52.7 percent in 1999. The statistics for males during the same period were 67.6 percent and 77.8 percent. By 1999, married women represented 56 percent of the female workforce (Yun 2004). By 2005, the female labour force participation rate stood at 56.6%, a relatively low figure as compared to other developed countries (The Clearing House 2007). An even more striking pattern is that there is a relatively large male-female income gap: in 2005, the average wage level for females was only 72% of the average wage level for males (The Clearing House 2007).

The Singapore government has not in fact actively promoted the idea of gender equality. Instead, Singapore's family policy is skewed towards the preservation of the traditional family model (Pan 2001; Yun 2004; Teo 2007). The relatively high cost of foreign maids and limited childcare facilities mean

that less educated mothers are less likely to participate in the labour market (Yun 2004). This in effect maintains the traditional gender division of labour that assumes women to be carers for the family. As a result, women are burdened with disproportionate tension in striking a work-life balance. Not surprisingly, the proportion of dual-career couples in Singapore is much lower than that many Western countries. In 2005, dual-career couples comprised 44 percent of married couples in Singapore, much lower than the comparable figures for Australia (54 percent in 2006), Canada (54 percent in 2005) and the US (51 percent in 2005) (Singapore Department of Statistics 2006b: 2).

Relatively weak family solidarity

The disproportionate burden on women is associated with the weakening of family and marriage institutions in Singapore despite the government's emphasis on family values. Weakening family solidarity is indicated by the increasing number of divorces -- from 3,634 cases in 1990 to 6,909 in 2005 (The Clearing House 2007). An even more telling trend is delayed marriage and in many cases a failure to marry at all (Jones 2007). In Singapore, the singlehood rates for males aged 40-44 has increased from 8% in 1980 to 17% in 2005, and for females aged 40-44, from 6% in 1980 to 15% in 2005 (Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports 2006). The figure is particularly high for Singapore Chinese women (21.6% at ages 30-34 and 15% at ages 40-44 in 2000) as compared to Singapore Malay women (12.1 % at ages 30-34 in 2000 and 8.2% at ages 40-44) (Jones 2007).

Another noteworthy trend in Singapore is that delayed marriage and non-marriage is positively correlated with education and proportions remaining

single in the case of women but is inversely correlated for men. This suggests that 1) highly educated women and less educated men have difficulties finding suitable marriage partners; and 2) the opportunity cost of marriage and family formation is greater for highly educated women (Jones 2007). The persistence of the traditional view of female obligations may explain why highly educated women are less inclined to get married. In sum, the retreat from universal marriage may actually hint at the weakening of traditional family relationships and the increasing unwillingness of women to accept the traditional division of labour (Jones 2007).

Relatively low fertility rate

Alongside delayed marriage and non-marriage, Singapore has a very low fertility rate, as the total fertility rate decreased from 1.83 in 1990 to 1.24 in 2005. Again, the fertility rate is particularly low among the more educated and Chinese (Jones 2007). In Singapore, it is argued that the traditional gender division of labour in families provides a disincentive for educated women to have children (Yun 2004; Teo 2007; Jones 2007). A reasonable explanation is that: as women are primarily responsible for the work-life balance, childrearing will become a less attractive option when work is getting more rewarding.

Actually, the increasing proportion of dual-career couples is positively correlated to the decreasing family size in Singapore. In 2005, dual-career couples comprised 44 percent of married couples in Singapore, an increase from 41 percent in 2000 and 27 percent in 1980 (Singapore Department of Statistics 2006b:1). In general, dual-career couples are better educated and have fewer children than their sole-career counterparts. For couples with wives aged 45

years or above, the working wives in dual-career couples had an average of 2.2 children in 2005, compared with 2.5 children for non-working wives in sole-career couples (Singapore Department of Statistics 2006b: p.5). Among the younger group of dual-career couples with wives aged 35 years old or below, about four in ten had no children in 2005, whereas the figure was two in ten for their sole-career counterparts (Singapore Department of Statistics 2006b: p.6).

In sum, Singapore's pro-natalist policy initiatives are not having the intended effects, mainly because better educated women seem to prioritise career over childrearing. Nevertheless, some of the major policy initiatives have only been implemented since the early 2000s, and so it remains to be seen whether and how the fertility rate will be affected by these new policies.

Concluding Remarks

The Singaporean state has an explicit set of pro-natalist family policies but these have met with little success. Because of the People's Action Party's strong hold on power, the Singapore Government actually has a relative high autonomy in launching social reforms. It is evident that its family policies underwent several major reforms in response to perceived societal needs over the past three decades. Whenever the government sees fit, there are ample policy tools and financial resources available for policy reform. However, while the civil society may not be powerful enough to resist, individual citizens are not always willing to cooperate. In the case of the pro-natalist family policy, the overt failure can be attributed to the fact that the Singaporean state may have overloaded families (women in particular) with too many responsibilities. The

large burden of family responsibilities may put considerable pressure on individuals (and especially on women) in terms of resolving the reconciliation between work and private life. From this vantage point, the declining birth rate and delayed marriage can be interpreted as female resistance against the traditional, patriarchal family arrangements. Nevertheless, the Singapore government has in recent years been more supportive of work-life balance policies but the impact remains to be seen.

Chapter 5: Germany – A Pro-traditional Family State in

Transformation

Introduction

According to the classification of Gauthier (1996), Germany is a typical case of pro-traditional model (Here we only refer to the former West Germany and the unified Germany; former East Germany adopted a completely different family policy that needs to be tackled separately and is beyond the scope of this report). It also represents a conservative welfare regime in Esping-Andersen's typology where family policy skewed towards preserving the traditional form of family (Esping-Andersen 1990, 1999). Under the principle of "subsidiarity", the government only held some responsibility for supporting families but the most important sources of support were regarded as the families themselves and voluntary organizations. Major goal of German family policy was to preserve traditional family that is a two-parent household with a "at home" mother caring for the children. As a result, only medium level of cash allowances and working benefits for parents were provided. The supply of public child care services for working mothers was even inadequate. The continuing stress on the traditional family type actually forced women to reconcile employment and family life. The lack of government support in resolving the reconciliation between work and family life for women unavoidably led to the decreasing number of child birth.

Due to low birth rates and economic inefficiency created by male-breadwinner model, German government begins to reform its policies towards families in

recent years, which aims at supporting parents to balance work and family responsibilities and increasing the number of births. Since the reform is still in progress, whether it can attain its goals or not still need more time to assess.

Policy Context: A Conservative Welfare State under the Shadow of Nazism

The Socio-political Context

A major theme of German socio-political context has been the principle of subsidiarity, whereas the shadow of Nazi family policy also influenced German family policy in the post-1945 period.

Principle of Subsidiarity

According to Esping Andersen (1990), conservative welfare states like Germany have two main characteristics. The first one is the preservation of status differentials and the second one is the emphasis on the role of the church. In Germany, Catholic or Christian democratic traditions are strong. Catholic parties always regard high rate of female participation in workplace as not preferable because they think it would hamper the traditional male-led household model that forms the moral foundation for a good society (Jordan 2006). Therefore, Germany has traditionally followed the principle of subsidiarity which rules that the families and the voluntary organizations have to shoulder most of the responsibility for social provision. The principle also assumes that the “higher level” social institutions such as the government should be subsidiary to the family. For a long time, the state was restrained by this principle from building more child care facilities for working mothers

because providing public child care was viewed as an obstacle for the families to develop their self-help capacities (Ostner, Reif and Turba 2005). “The state will only interfere when the family’s capacity to service its member is exhausted.” (Esping-Andersen 1990: 27). As a result, most of the social services in Germany, including child care services that could help working mothers reconcile work and family life, are provided by non-governmental sector, particularly by the Catholic and the Protestant welfare organizations. Although the state is willing to provide full financial support to these voluntary institutions, the separation of finance from provision has unavoidably kept the level of state involvement in social services low (Ostner 1993).

The “relational” aspect of the German welfare state provides a corollary to the principle of subsidiarity. Just like the Confucian concept of relational identity, German believes that they are embedded in different types of social relations. To German, relational obligations are prior to individual rights. Hence, they are attached to status and relations, such as father and son, employee and employer, but not to individuals. The state relies on such kind of strong family obligations of each family member as the cornerstone of the society. This principle explains why Germany still expects husbands and wives, parents and children by law to mutually take care of each other if necessary. However, because of the importance of the family as a institution, family solidarity always takes precedence over the principle of subsidiarity. Therefore, the state should also provide direct or indirect cash allowances and working benefits to the families to guarantee their minimum standard of living (Ostner, Reif and Turba 2004).

Because of these attitudes, German family policy strongly favours marriage as the basis of the family. The tax system privileges those couples who are married, with fathers to be the breadwinners and mothers to be the care-givers at the home (Ostner 1993). Under German legal system, married fathers are granted full rights of fatherhood. Children born out of wedlock were assumed to be fatherless in early 20th century because it was argued that a man should have married the mother if he really wanted to “recognize” their children. It was only when the Law on the Legal Status of Illegitimate Children was passed in 1969 that the non-marital father was given the status of a “father”. However, he was only granted a legal relationship with his child through economic obligations but not rights. Non-marital fathers were required to pay maintenance for the child and for the unemployed mother but the mother could still decide upon sole or joint custody and even contacts between the father and his child. With the passing of the 1997 Custody and Child Support Laws, the status of marital and non-marital children has been equalized. Nevertheless, non-marital fathers still could not enjoy joint custody without the consent of the child’s mother (Ostner 2002).

Shadow of Nazi population policy

The non-interventionist nature of German family policy was further reinforced by the shadow of racist policy of the Nazi Germany before 1945. The Nazi population policy aimed to achieve “racial purity” of Aryan race, leading to the eradication of the “inferior races”, particularly the Jews. After the Second World War, fierce attacks of such kind of extreme racist policy had led to a strong reluctance of the German government to act as a regulator of the family. The government chose not to intervene, as it might have been interpreted as

infringement of civil liberties (Reiter 2005). In fact, the breakdown of the Nazi government had left Germany without demographers and demographic institutions (McIntosh 1986). That is also why the formulation of family policy is comparatively slow and the political debates of family issues are weak in Germany.

The Socio-demographic context

German fertility rates are among the lowest in the world. Like many other European countries, Germany experienced a great drop in birth rates after the baby boom of the late 1950s and early 1960s. From 1960 to 1985, the total fertility rate decreased tremendously from 2.37 to 1.28 (Monnier 1990: 128). In about 25 years, the birth rate was reduced nearly by half. In 1995, 25 % of German couples who were married in 1975 still had no children after 20 years of marriage. By 1996, 4 out of 10 highly educated women aged 35 to 39 in the former West Germany regions had never had children (Fagnani 2002: 106). Additionally, the mean age of women at the birth of their first child rose from 24.9 in 1965 to 26.2 in 1985 (Schiersmann 1991: 52). All these figures reflect that women were either postponing their child birth or even abandoning plans to have child. Despite the falling birth rate, the German government seems not to be very worried about these demographic trends until recently.

Total female labour force participation rate in Germany is rather low when compare with the other developed western countries. In 1970s, the figures remained stagnant around 49%. By 1986, it had only slightly increased to 51.6% (Federkeil 1997: 96). In order to spare time to take responsibilities for housework and child care, many women work part-time. In 1980s, about 90 %

of part-time job were occupied by women (Ostner 1993: 110). But how could Germany relieve the pressure of labour shortage that was brought by the reconstruction works following the Second World War and the economic blossom that many European countries had experienced in the 1960s? The answer is immigration. Germany has a tradition of flexible immigration policy that allowed the state to import immigrants on a massive scale from less developed European countries such as Turkey, avoiding the pressure to activate women into the labour market. In the 1960s, Germany imported a large number of foreign workers who did not possess the right of long term residence. By 1973, there were about 2.6 million foreign workers living in Germany, making up 11.9 % of the total labour force (Jordan 2006: 1123). Not only did the flexible immigration policy help to resolve labour shortage, but it also help to preserve the male-breadwinner model by limiting women to enter the labour force.

Policy Objective: Male-breadwinner Model in Adjustment

Due to the principle of subsidiarity, the main target of German family policy after World War II was to preserve the male-breadwinner model as the fundamental concept about gender roles (Reiter 2005). Ideally, the father in this model assumes the role of breadwinner who earns money to support the family. Mother assumes the role of care-giver who takes care of her children and of her family members in need of care at home. Before and after a longsome period of child-raising, she can also take part in professional life that is preferably part-time. Besides, because of unpleasant historical experience of Nazi population policy, German family policy was also deliberately designed to

avoid the interference of the state into the private life of the family (Ostner 2004). Thus, in contrast to the Nordic countries such as Sweden, both Federal and local government in Germany were unwilling to embark on an incentive programme for childbearing. Consequently, child care facilities, particularly those built for the children under the age of three, had been to a large extent inadequate in the former West Germany.

Another objective of German family policy was to preserve the institution of marriage. Measures were specifically formulated to encourage childrearing to take place at home, with mothers focusing extensively on child care and family responsibilities. It was mainly because German traditionally believes that married couple households provide the optimum environment for child development (Trzcinski 2000). These attitudes are also reflected in German constitution and laws. Article 6 of the constitution has put marriage and family under the special protection of the state. Following this logic, German family laws also emphasize the principle of non-discrimination against family that consists of a married couple with their children, in relation to non-family and non-martial households. The legal status and privileges of cohabiting couple are significantly lower than those of the married couple. To put it more precisely, unmarried couples are seldom mentioned in German legislation. Even when they are mentioned, it only aims at preventing them from being given priority over married couples (Federkeil 1997).

Perhaps the German family policy has been successful in achieving the goal of preserving the traditional family form, but it has also resulted in an under-development of child care facilities and an organization of public, social

and working life that is not exactly family-friendly. In recent decade, the German public has finally become aware of the country's low birth rate and its economic and societal implications. The drastic consequences of the inadequate provision of child care services and of the low birth rate on the Germany economy and the society have force the German government to re-evaluate its family policy measures (Penus 2006). From mid-1990s onwards, the government reacted by launching some reform measures to adjust the benefits of parental leave and to put more financial resources into full-time child care and schooling. The new reform objectives of the family policy are: 1) to support parents to balance work and family responsibilities by encouraging flexible working time and extending parental leave; 2) to increase birth rate and 3) to tackle child poverty by helping their parents to enter and stay in employment. A new form of dual breadwinner model of a full-time and a part-time working couple seems to be explicitly implicitly promoted in this reform (Ostner 2004).

Policy Contents – “Symbolic” Family Policy Focusing on Economic Compensation

Although Germany has a constitutional commitment to the family, there is no one overall integrated policy regarding all family issues. Since 1953, a Ministry was established to co-ordinate related policy measures (Kaufmann 2002). The Ministry is now called the Federal Ministry of Families, Seniors, Women and Youth, which is responsible for childrearing benefits, advanced maintenance and child allowance legislation. However, because of structural isolation of this Ministry through federalism and weak political debates in

family issues, the power of the Ministry is limited. That is why Kaufmann (2002) described family policy in German as “symbolic”.

German family benefits are relatively generous in European context but are not among the leaders. As of 2003, social expenditures on cash allowances accounted for 2.3% of the GDP and the care services 0.8% (Da Roit and Sabatinelli 2007: 28). Summary of those family policy measures are as follow:

Cash Allowance

1. Child benefits are universal in Germany and can be claimed either through a direct cash allowance or through a tax deduction. Families are entitled to €154 for the first, second and third child and to €179 for the fourth and additional child. The families may also choose to deduct the amount from the family income before taxation. Due to progressive taxation, child benefits in the form of tax credits usually favour high income family. The benefits are paid until the children reach the age of 18 but it can be extended to the age of 27 if the child is in schooling or training (Ostner 2004:17-18, Da Roit Sabatinelli 2007: 26).
2. Children’s allowance for low income families is a mean-tested benefit that grants to poor families to ensure their minimum standard of living. The maximum amount of allowance equals €140 per month (Peus 2006: 6).
3. Childrearing benefit is means-tested and provides to parents who work less than 30 hours per week to look after their children. A two-parent

household whose annual income exceeds €30000, or a single-parent household whose annual income exceeds €23000, is not entitled to this benefit. The qualified parents can choose between €300 per month for two years and €450 per month for one year. From the seventh month onwards, the benefit for each child depends on annual net income and is reduced on a sliding scale basis (Peus 2006: 6-7).

Maternity and Parental Leaves

1. Maternity leave for an employed woman is job-protected and lasts for 14 weeks (6 weeks before and 8 weeks after childbirth) with full wage replacement.
2. Parental leave for parents is also job-protected and could be taken up to three years after birth. Parents are allowed to share the time of leave between them and they can postpone a part of parental leave until the eighth birthday of the child. Parents may apply for the mean-tested childrearing benefit stated above during the parental leave and could do part-time job that is not more than 30 hours per week.
3. Company leave of sick child is entitled to working parents who take leave to look after their sick children. The leave is up to 10 days per child per year with a maximum of 25 days for two or more children for a two-parents household (Ostner 2004: 19, Peus 2006: 9).

Child Care Services

Until recently, Germany has done little to develop public child care facilities, partly due to the influence of the principle of subsidiarity, partly due to the decisions of German families to care for their small children themselves.

Hence, coverage of day care centres for children under the age of three is low. Only 8.5% of them go to day care centres in 2002 (Da Roit and Sabatinelli 2007: 28). Since the parents are entitled by law to a place in kindergarten for their child, the coverage of kindergarten is much higher. In 2002, 89.8% of children aged between three to six were accommodated in kindergartens (Da Roit and Sabatinelli 2007: 28).

The majority (91%) of day care centres open full day but many kindergartens, particularly those located in the former West Germany regions, offered only half-day services (Da Roit and Sabatinelli 2007: 28). Moreover, in most kindergartens, lunch is not provided and young children are expected to eat at home. Generally, kindergartens are heavily financed by the government but the tuition fees vary significantly, according to the family income, the number of children in the family and the number of hours the child spend in kindergarten (Peus 2006).

The above paragraphs have outlined the current measures and programmes of German family policy. In the following section, we will review the historical development of family policy in the following order: 1) cash allowance, 2) maternity and parental leave and 3) child care services.

Cash allowance

Family allowances in Germany are characterized by a dual system of direct cash benefits and tax-free allowance that had been formulated after the Second World War. Since 1945, German government has believed that families should be compensated for the cost of children and the responsibility of parenthood.

Therefore, family policy in Germany has been intentionally designed to focus on economic compensation. In 1955, because of high inflation rates after the war and comparatively low birth rate, a universal child allowance, which was funded by the contribution of employers and the self-employed, was paid to the third and subsequent children. The allowance was extended to the second child in 1961. Since the employers refused to contribute to the fund again this time, the payment of allowance for the second child was assumed by the government (Schiersmann 1991). In 1964, allowance was extended further to the first child and higher amount were paid for larger families to a maximum of five children (Baker 1995). In 1975, the amount of allowance was DM50 for the first child, DM70 for the second and DM120 for the third and additional children (Schiersmann 1991: 57). In 1982, a means-tested system was introduced by the Christian-Liberal government and an income limit was set for the second and subsequent children (Baker 1995).

Tax exemptions for children also play an important role in German family policy. Since the establishment of the Federal Republic of Germany in 1949, German families were granted tax exemptions of DM600 for the first, second and third child. Because these exemptions reduced taxable income in a progressive tax system and thereby favoured the high income families, they were abolished and replaced by a flat-rate child allowance in 1975 by the Social Democratic Party. However, it was reintroduced in the 1980s again by the conservative-liberal government and the amount of exemptions was increased to DM2484 per child in 1986. By 1990, the tax exemption was raised again to DM3024 per child (Schiersmann 1991: 58-59, Federkeil 1997: 87).

In 1996, the dual system of direct child benefits and tax exemptions underwent a major change. Before 1996, families were allowed to enjoy both child benefits and tax deduction. Under the new regulations, families were forced to choose only either one of them (Trzcinski 2000). Cash allowance and tax credits were from then on integrated into one family allowance system.

Maternity and parental leaves

The introduction of maternity and parental leave is a central theme in any discussion of family policy measures. Although maternity leave has been established as early as in the 1920s as a female worker's right, it was not until 1974 that it was formally legalized by the Protection of Mother Act (Schiersmann 1991, Ostner 2004). Under this law, working mothers are eligible for a job-protected maternity leave of six weeks before and eight weeks after the childbirth. During the leave period, the eligible women received up to DM25 per day from the government. The difference between the government allowance and the average salary of the woman was paid for by the employers (Trzcinski 2000: 27).

On the basis of the maternity leave, the Federal Child Care Benefit Act came into effect in 1986. It granted parents ten months of parental leave for child rearing. The duration of leave had been extended several times to three years in 1992 (Schiersmann 1991, Baker 1995). A child rearing benefit was also established in 1986 to compensate for the loss of income of working parents (Trzcinski 2000). The parental leave was specifically designed to provide parents with a choice between working and staying home, as well as which parent should assume responsibility for child care. In other words, it was

implemented to encourage one parent to be the primary and full-time care-giver of the child. However, owing to low allowance level, overwhelming majority of the recipients of these benefits were women. In 1987, only 0.68% of those on leave were father (Ostner 2002: 159). In the 1990s, the proportion of fathers enjoying these benefits slightly increased. For example, in 1995, of the total 723,477 people who received child rearing benefits, 18,105 (2.5%) were men. Although the law passed in 1986 allowed the parents to take up a part-time job that was less than 19 hours per week, only 3.9% of the women on parental leave work part-time (Trzcinschi 2000: 29).

Since unification, German government has played a more active role in helping parents combine employment and family life. In 2000, a major reform was launched to change the parental leave system. More options were now be available for the parents to choose. The parents could share the three years leave between them and they might take the leave at the same time. If they chose to take their leave in one year only, a 30% higher cash benefit would be granted to them. Parents could also split the leave, for instance, took two years off after the childbirth and then took the rest of the leave before the child reached the age of eight. Besides, income thresholds for the receipt of the benefits were also lowered. The annual income limit of a two-parent family was reduced from €1,130 to €30,000 (Ostner 2004: 20). Although the financial resources the government put into the reform were not that high, the flexibility offered by these changes opens up new possibilities for men to become care-givers at home. Even if the new policy measures may not be attractive enough to the fathers, who are more often the higher income earners in the family, they should be more effective in encouraging the mothers to enter

the part-time labour market. A dual breadwinner model of a full-time and a part-time working couple is hence implicitly promoted.

Childcare services

Until recently, Germany has not put much effort in developing public child care, as there is a strong beliefs in Germany that children, particularly those under the age of three, should be look after by their mothers. Hence, child care services were not intentionally designed to help parents to reconcile work and family obligations. Generally speaking, public child care is limited to half-day care for pre-school above the age of three. Provision of places in day care centres for children under the age of three has been extremely inadequate. For example, only 1.5% of children under the age of three were cared for in day care centres in 1982 (Schiersmann 1991: 56). Although the figure rose to 8.5% in 2002, the proportion was obviously low when compared to the other developed western countries (Da Roit and Sabatinelli 2007:28). The development of kindergarten is much satisfactory. While in 1960 only 32.8% of the children aged between three to six were accommodated in the kindergartens, in 1985 the figure increased to 80% and in 2002 to 89.8% (Schiersmann 1991: 56, Da Roit and Sabatinelli 2007:28).

Because of the non-interventionist nature of German family policy, the majority of child care institutions are run by voluntary organizations, particularly the churches. As early as in the 19th century, the so called *Bewahranstalten* and *Kleinkinderschulen* were built by the Catholic and Protestant churches for the children of the poor. In 1958, the churches operated 75.3% of all kindergartens in Germany and the government only 21%. Although the share

of the churches gradually declined to 58.6% in 1990, they are still the main providers of child care institutions in Germany (Fix 2000: 309).

Since the early 1990s, the lack of child care facilities is considered by the public as a major challenge to policy making in supporting of the family. After the unification in 1990, the East German system of child care, which had done much better in helping mothers to combine employment and family life, appeared to be an alternative to the unified Germany as a more desirable model. The steady decline of fertility rates since the 1960s had also arisen more public concern. To resolve the problem of a rising demand for child care services, the Federal government began to carry out series of measures since mid-1990s. A new law that required the local government to provide kindergarten places to every child became effective in 1996 (Da Roit and Sabatinelli 2007). In 2003, the Federal government launched an initiative called “Local Pacts for Families” which aimed at encouraging the local communities to build more child care facilities and to create a more family-friendly working environment (Reiter 2005). The Federal government also passed a law in 2005 to increase the provision of care for children under the age of three. To achieve these goals, 230,000 additional places will be needed to build, of which 68,000 places are in the form of family day care (Da Roit and Sabatinelli 2007: 29)

Family Policy and Demographic Changes

The purpose of German family policy to preserve traditional family form is to a certain extent associated with some major socio-demographic trends. The discussion will be focus on the following three major issues: 1) gender equality, 2) fertility rate and 3) family solidarity

Relatively low gender equality

As a pro-traditional and conservative welfare state, it is no surprise that gender equality in Germany is relatively low. Many Germans today still believe that a child under three years of age needs to be cared for by its mother at all times. Those who allow others to look after their young children are labeled as “bad mother” (Fagnani 2002). The negative attitudes towards working mothers in Germany are prevalent, especially in the former West Germany. Besides, combining work and family life was difficult for women due to lack of child care facilities and the inconvenient school opening hours of many child care institutions. Instead of facilitating women’s employment opportunities, the government provided parental leave and child rearing benefits for parents, which encouraged mothers to stay at home looking after their children, depending on the financial support of fathers and on the means-tested benefits. Hence, the male-breadwinner model in Germany is further consolidated.

In recent years, female employment rates have been increasing gradually from 55.3% in 1995 to 60.6% in 2005. This could be partly explained by the reform of public child care launched in mid-1990s, which has created more school places for pre-school children to help working mothers combine employment and family life. Besides, the percentage of employed women is fairly high. For instance, in 2006, 62.2% of women were employed, compared to the EU average of 57.4%. However, many of them are likely to be working part-time. In 2006, 45.6% of working women in Germany are part-time workers. The proportion was the second highest (behind Netherlands) of all 25 EU member states and was well ahead of the EU average of 32.6% (Eurostat 2007). These figures are just corresponded to the dual breadwinner model of a full-time and a

part-time couple that the government has recently promoted.

Relatively low fertility rate

The demographic development in Germany had been characterized by low birth rates since the 1970s. The fertility rate fell steadily from 1.99 in 1970 to 1.25 in 1995. The figures have not changed much since then, varying between 1.32 and 1.38 from 1996 to 2006 (Monnier 1990: 128, Eurostat 2007). Hence, we can see that the fertility rates in Germany have been below replacement level of 2.1 for more than three decades. The fertility rate in 2006 was 1.32, which should be the lowest among the developed EU member countries. Only those former socialist countries in Eastern Europe such as Bulgaria and Poland had lower birth rates (Eurostat 2007).

Low birth rates in Germany can be partly explained by the lack of public child care facilities, which is one of the direct results of the German family policy. Although more school places for young children have been built in recent years, the coverage is still comparatively low. The inadequate places of child care institutions had made it difficult for working woman to reconcile work and family life. While some women chose to stay at home to take up the responsibilities of childcare and housework, some decide to develop their own profession and remain childless (Peus 2006).

Relatively strong family solidarity in threat

The German institutional framework provides strong incentives for couples to get married, particularly when one of the partners withdraws from full time employment after childbirth. Central to this is the dual system of cash benefits

and tax-free allowances that compensate the economic cost of child rearing. The legal status of marriage is protected by the constitution and laws. The existence of unmarried cohabitation seems to be largely ignored by German legislation. Since the custody law assumes single parents and cohabiting families as somehow “deviant families”, it is still difficult for the non-martial fathers to gain sole or joint custody. Therefore it is common for cohabiting couples to get married when the woman became pregnant. That is why the percentage of children with married parents has been relatively high when compared with other European countries. In late 1990s, only 10% of all children born out of wedlock remained in entire childhood in a single parent family (Trzcinski 2000: 23). Proportion of children born out of wedlock in Germany is also comparatively low. In 2006, 29.96% of live births were born out of wedlock in Germany, compared with 50.49% in France, 55.47% in Sweden and 43.66% in United Kingdom (Eurostat 2007).

However, even a strong male-breadwinner model like Germany still cannot avoid the tide of individualization that has flooded nearly all industrialized societies since the 1960s. Marriage is regularity and the majority still marries but it is no longer a norm. In 1980s, the marriage rate still remained stable and it had even slightly increased from 5.9 in 1980 to 6.4 in 1989 (Federkeil 1997: 81). Nevertheless, the figures began to drop in the 1990s. The marriage rate was 5.27 in 1995 and it declined in a steady pace to 4.71 in 2005, which was slightly lower than the average rate of 4.82 of the EU. Parallel to the declining trend of marriage rate, the number of divorces also increased in the 1990s and in early 21st century. Divorce rate grew from 2.1 in 1995 to 2.7 in 2005 (Eurostat 2007). It seems that though the German family policy is by and large

successful in keeping the number of births outside marriage relatively low, it remains helpless in preventing families from divorces.

Concluding Remarks

Family policy in Germany reflects a classic case of pro-traditional model. Generally speaking, the measures and programmes of family policy work to have an implicit impact of discouraging women from entering the labour market. Family law, especially by refusing custody to unmarried fathers, makes cohabitation unattractive. Moreover, public day care is quite under-developed so that it is difficult for working mothers to reconcile family obligations and employment. Although the government has begun to notice these defects of the system and had carried out some reform measures since mid-1990s, whether they could succeed in resolving those problems is still questionable.

Chapter 6: Sweden -- A Pro-egalitarian Family Policy Regime Firmly Based on Universalism

Introduction

Sweden has generally been seen as the ideal-type of what has been termed the Social Democratic Welfare State Regime (Esping-Andersen 1990), the Pro-egalitarian Family Policy Regime (Gauthier 2002), and the Scandinavian Model of Social Policy (Boje and Strandh 2003). Universalism and egalitarianism are the two central societal values in the Scandinavian model. Because of a strong social consensus that each citizen is entitled to basic benefits regardless of social and economic status, marital position and sex, care has long been a public responsibility borne by the so-called “caring state” (Osterberg 1990). The pro-egalitarian model of family policy intends to promote gender equality by transforming the traditional gender division of labour in families, liberating women from the burdens of family responsibilities, and equalising opportunities for labour market participation. The two pillars of the Swedish family policy are a generous parental leave scheme and a comprehensive public childcare system. As a result of increasing gender equality in work and in the family, the breadwinner family model started to decline from the 1960s onwards. For decades, Sweden has been characterised by a relatively high fertility rate and high female employment rate (with a moderate share working part time) even though marriage has weakened as a social institution and individualism has replaced familialism.

Policy Context: Swedish Welfare Regime founded on the Principle of Big State, Small Family

Sweden is a typical example of the Scandinavian family policy regime, or the so-called pro-egalitarian model, which is built upon egalitarianism and universalism (Gauthier 1996; 2002). Even though family policy involves politically sensitive questions about gender roles and the boundaries between the state and the family, the Swedish state has for decades actively promoted gender equality in both the labour market and the family. With an extensive individualisation of a wide range of social rights, the dependence on the family is relatively modest as compared to the liberal or conservative regimes where individuals are more dependent on family care and support (Leira 2002). In Epsing-Andersen's (1999:45) terms, the Scandinavian Social Democratic welfare regime is the most "de-familialistic" among the three welfare state regimes because state policies aim to "lessen individuals' reliance on family; that maximizes individuals' command of economic resources independently of family or conjugal reciprocities"

The socio-political context

The Social Democratic Party has been a major architect of the Swedish welfare state, where it has been considered the state's duty to support children financially and with respect to their care. In addition, this duty has been seen as one that is to be undertaken in partnership with parents (Lewis and Astrom 1992). The welfare state contributes to the costs of raising children through family allowances and subsidises various forms of childcare (Leira 2002). Principles of egalitarianism and universalism provide the main legitimation for this welfare state regime (Epsing-Andersen 1990).

In Sweden, the state has for a century been powerful relative to family, church and market (Morgan 2006). From the late 19th century, the traditional responsibility of churches for family well-being was transferred to the state. Religious actors initially maintained their involvement in family matters as state officials but gradually lost their influence. By the start of the 20th century, the central state had assumed a direct role in child and family policy. Throughout the 20th century, there was widespread acceptance among political elites that the state bore responsibility for the well-being of all families. During the 1930s and 1940s, the state's responsibilities were further extended from education to maternal and child health, income support to families, housing, and other forms of assistance including some measures to help single mothers. In the 1960s and 1970s, the government even moved to promote full-day childcare over the part-time preschool system. Since then, the Swedish state has combined educational and care-taking functions in the public childcare system for all children below the mandatory school age.

The political power of the Social Democratic Party (SAP), which was the dominant party in coalition government from 1932 to 1976 and then was returned to power in the early 1980s, played a major role in shifting public policies in favour of working parents in the 1970s (Morgan 2006). In Sweden, a strong political coalition between the feminist movement, the union movement and the Social Democratic Party, coupled with a relatively weak religious party, has laid a solid political foundation for the dual-earner family model. As early as in the early 1960s, the desirability of the dual-role model (i.e. women taking both the mother role and the worker role) was controversial in Sweden. In 1968, a joint task force report by the trade union confederation

and the Social Democratic party on equal opportunity concluded that “there are thus strong reasons for making the two-breadwinner family the norm in planning long-term changes with the social insurance system” (Lewis and Astrom 1992:P. 67). Since the 1970s, women have had a strong presence in the Swedish parliament (Lewis and Astrom 1992; Morgan 2006). Even though the Social Democratic Party, the long-term architect of the Swedish welfare state, has been losing its grip on government offices since the 1990s, welfare policy reform in the 1990s was mostly in the form of retrenchment rather than a major restructuring (Palme et al. 2002).

The socio-demographic context

“The demographic challenge” has been common to most western countries over the past two decades (Lewis 2006). All western countries are ageing as birth rates fall. The worsening dependency ratios mean that pensions and care for older people are becoming a financial burden. However, this demographic challenge is somewhat less of a concern than the labour participation rate in Sweden. This is because the Swedish welfare system has been based on the assumption that men and women will be fully engaged in the labour market (thus creating a broad base of tax-paying citizens) so that sustaining full employment has always had a higher priority in Sweden. In fact, the Swedish fertility rate actually rose in the 1980s, only to fall dramatically during the severe recession in the 1990s (Bjorklund 2006).

During the 1950s and the early 1960s, Sweden was similar to most industrialised countries in that married women in the childbearing years tended to stop working; the labour force participation rate of women over the age of

fifteen remained constant at about 30 percent (Lewis and Astrom 1992). From the 1960s onwards, an increasing number of married women, including those with young children, joined the workforce as permanent employees. By 1985, nearly 80 percent of all Swedish women were working; those not working were almost exclusively older than 50 (Rosenthal 1994). The public sector created opportunities for the growth of female employment. Between 1965 and 1984, the number of public sectors jobs expanded from 700,000 to 1.4 million and 75 percent of these were filled by women (Lewis and Astrom 1992). As a result, accommodating these women's needs for reconciling work and childcare has been a major concern for the Swedish family policy in recent decades.

Policy Objective: A Pro-egalitarian Family Policy Regime Aiming for a Two-Earner Family Model

As far as family policy is concerned, a major objective is raising women's participation in the paid labour force to be fully on par with that of men (Leira 2002; Ozawa 2004). With female participation in the labour market as the primary societal goal, the Social Democrats have since the 1960s extended their egalitarian approach to gender relations and the family. The Social Democratic welfare regime typically provides a generous system of public care for children under school age alongside generous and flexible leave schemes for working parents. In addition, cash allowances for families with children and public employment in social services have been major mechanisms used to achieve this end.

Sweden is set apart from most other countries because of the establishment of

the two-earner family model as a social norm as early as the 1960s (Leira 2002; Lewis 2006; Lewis and Astrom 1992). It is widely acknowledged that Sweden, together with Denmark, Finland and Norway, has been the most active among OECD countries in enabling woman to participate in the labour market and in enabling men to share child-rearing responsibilities (Parry 2001). By the late 1980s, more than 85 percent of mothers were in the labour market (Bjornberg 2002). Indeed, Swedish family policy was more concerned about expanding opportunities for individuals to work than about enhancing family solidarity or promoting childbearing.

De-commodification and de-familisation of labour

Sweden is a typical social democratic welfare regime, where the state supports measures to liberate individuals from the constraints of both dependence on the labour market and the burdens of family responsibilities (Epsing-Andersen 1999). As far as the family policy is concerned, the objective is to support an egalitarian family. Egalitarianism between individuals regardless of sex is the highest goal, and the state actively enables individuals to achieve a balance between the right to work and the responsibility of caring and support for family members. Therefore, the Swedish welfare system seeks to challenge and change the traditional gender division of labour. In recent decades, policy initiatives such as state-sponsored day-care for children have expanded, while generous rights to maternity, paternity and parental leaves have been instituted with the aim of facilitating the dual-earner family and care-sharing parenthood (Leira 2002).

Swedish family policy has long been based on the principles of universality and

individual rights (The Swedish Ministry of Health and Social Affairs 2003). Legislation embodying new concepts of women and motherhood was instituted in the early 1970s (Leira 2002) including the legalising of abortion on demand, the passing of equal status legislation, and increased state support for childcare. Sweden's history of a gender-neutral parental leave policy dates back to its status as one of the first European nations to sign a commitment to equality at a UN convention in 1960. Together with Italy and Finland, Sweden provides among the most generous parental leave schemes in terms of duration, scope and income replacement. Still, it should be noted that Swedish family policy was stimulated more by the need for female labour force participation than by advocacy of gender equality (Parry 2001).

Conceptually speaking, Sweden exemplifies the de-commodification of mother's labour and de-familisation of childcare. De-commodification of mother's labour means that the state enables mothers to retreat from the labour market and give birth to and care for children, whereas the de-familisation of childcare means that the responsibilities for childcare are being transferred from the family to the public. The Swedish family policy package is comprehensive, with public childcare, cash allowances and parental leaves each complementing one another. On the one hand, Sweden grants a prolonged parental leave period that enables parents to take care of babies and toddlers, thereby de-commodifying mother's labour. On the other hand, Sweden heavily subsidises childcare services for children between the ages of three to six, thereby de-familising childcare.

Policy Contents – Generous Government Spending in Cash support, Parental Leave and Public Childcare

Sweden is a big spender on family policy. The Swedish family policy expanded from the early 1960s to around 1980 but then experienced considerable cutbacks during the 1990s. Up to the 21st century, it is regarded as one of the few countries in the world with the most comprehensive and explicit family policy (Bjorklund 2006; Pepenoe 2006). Because the “typical” Swedish family has two income-earning adults, in the Swedish family policy “benefits that encourage work and make work possible thus tend to be more important than the level of child allowances” (Ministry of Health and Social Affairs 2003: P.1). As of 2005, social expenditure on cash allowances accounted for 1.6% of the GDP, and social expenditure on care services accounted for 1.5% of the GDP (Da Roit and Sabatinelli 2006: P. 71).

The Swedish family policy is organised around the principles of universality and individual rights. Unless otherwise specified, the following family policy measures refer to the 2007 data as given by the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs of the Swedish government (2007):

Cash Allowances comprise four kinds of allowance schemes:

1. **Child allowance** is paid for all children up to the age of 16, and for those over the age of 16 if they are attending compulsory schooling. The allowance is SEK 1,050 (Euro 1 = approximately SEK 9) per month. A supplementary allowance for additional children is paid to families with two or more children. The supplement is SEK 100 per month for the second child, SEK 354 per month for the 3rd child, SEK 860 for fourth child, and SEK 1050 per month for the fifth and subsequent child

each.

2. **Housing allowance** for households with children is means-tested. Housing allowances consist of two parts: a) allowance for children living at home, with the size of the allowance depending on the number of children in the family; and b) allowance for housing costs, which depends on the housing cost and on the number of children in the family. Nearly 30 percent of Swedish households with children received housing allowances in 2003 (Ministry of Health and Social Affairs 2003).
3. **Single-parent allowance** is paid to a child whose parents do not live together. The maximum amount is SEK 1,273 per child per month. The allowance is paid jointly by the other parent and by the state, depending on the parent's income level.
4. **Care allowance for sick and disabled children** is paid to parents whose children must have special supervision and care for at least six months, or who have a disability that entails extra expenses. The full rate of allowance is 2.5 "price base amount" per year (the "price base amount" for 2007 is SEK 40,300 per year).

Parental leaves (parental insurances) comprise four kinds of paid leave schemes:

1. **Pregnancy leave** is paid to women from the 60th day until the 11th day before the expected birth.
2. **Parental leave** is payable to both parents for a combined total of 480 days. 60 parental leave days are reserved exclusively for each parent, while the remainder is transferable between the two parents. For 390 days the benefit paid is equivalent to 80 percent of the parents' income.

Parents with low income or no income receive benefits for 390 days at a basic level of SEK 180 per day. Beyond these 390 days, a parent can remain at home with a child for a further 90 days at a minimum benefit of SEK 180 per day.

3. **Temporary family leave** is available for parents who look after sick children. Up to 120 days can be claimed each year.
4. **Daddy's days** are father's entitlement for 10 days of paid leave on the birth of each of his children.

Childcare service is designed on the principle of universal availability (Ministry of Health and Social Affairs 2003): pre-schools are for children from one up to six years of age. School children can attend after-school centres, which are open both before and after school and during school holidays. Parents pay a monthly charge, but the state provides heavy subsidises for childcare. As of 2003, the monthly fees for the pre-school service were charged at a maximum rate of three, two and one percent respectively of a household's income (before tax) for the first, second and third child in the family. The monthly fee must not exceed SEK 1,260 for the first child, SEK 840 for the second and SEK 420 for the third child. The monthly fees for school-age childcare were charged at a maximum rate of two, one and one percent respectively of the household's income, for the first, second and third child. The monthly fee must not exceed SEK 840 for the first child, and SEK 420 for the second and third child.

The following sections will review the evolution of Swedish family policy in the following order: 1) cash allowance; 2) parental leaves; and 3) childcare.

Cash allowance

Giving cash benefits to parents with young children has been common among OECD countries (Daly 1997), and Sweden is no exception. The Swedish welfare model is based on universalism, and the state provides universal, non-means tested financial support for families with children. Financial support to families is aimed to reduce disparities in living conditions between households with children and those without (Ministry of Health and Social Affairs 2003). While Sweden belongs to a group of countries with a generous family policy, the Scandinavian country still lags behind a few other OECD countries (e.g. Austria, Belgium and Germany) in the amount of cash support over the past two decades (Bradshaw 1992; 2006). Because the Swedish family policy aims to promote the dual-earner family model, parental leaves and public childcare are more important than cash support in the family policy system.

In Sweden, the combined strength of the working-class movement and the women's movement within the Left contributed to the adoption of family allowance policies right after the Second World War (Misra 2003). In 1948, mothers began to receive child allowances, which could be regarded as a form of compensation for women's unpaid work at home (Hirdman 1998). At the beginning of the 1960s, a political debate escalated around the issue of whether women should be subsidised through a cash allowance to look after their own children, or whether dual-earner families should be supported through extended public childcare facilities (Bergqvist and Jungar 2000). From then on cash allowances have become less and less important in Swedish family policy.

Still, child allowances have been a mainstay of Swedish family policy, with the aim of achieving equality between people with children and people without. Since its introduction, the child allowance has remained non-means tested, helping to increase the disposable income for families with children. Throughout the 1980s, they were adjusted yearly to equal about 5 percent of the average wage rate and are not taxed (Rosenthal 2000). During the recession in the 1990s, the child allowance was lowered from SEK 750 a month to SEK 640 a month between 1991 and 1995 (Bjornberg and Dahlgren 2003:p.11). In the early 2000s, the child allowance was SEK 950 a month, as it was expected to cover about a third of the direct costs of having a preschool child, and a fifth of the cost of a teenager (Bjornberg and Dahlgren 2003).

The housing allowance is available to families with children only as a mean-tested benefit. The number of households receiving the housing allowance grew during the recession in the early to mid 1990s, and dropped considerably after 1995. As of early 2000s, housing allowances were most commonly paid to lone parents in a rented apartment. The average housing allowance in year 2002 was SEK 1,694 for lone parent households and SEK 1,738 for two parent households (Bjornberg and Dahlgren 2003:p.13).

In sum, the cash allowance is relatively less important than the parental leave scheme and public childcare in Sweden because the Pro-egalitarian family policy regime aims to promote the two-earner family model.

Parental leaves

For the past three decades, Sweden has provided generous support for working

parents through paid, job-protected maternity, paternity, and parental leaves. Maternity leave is one of the early social rights instituted for women workers, dating back to the early labour protection legislation of the 1890s (EC Childcare Network 1996 in Leira 2002). Paternity and parental leave are more recent, as is the right to leave of absence to care for a sick child. Sweden was a pioneer in this regard when compared to the European Union which launched the Parental Leave Directive in 1996 (Leira 2002). In contrast with the state-sponsored childcare service that relieves mothers (or parents) of the responsibility of full-time care, the Swedish parental leave arrangements recognises the role of fathers as carers because working fathers are also entitled to a job break to care for a young child. In Sweden, parental leaves after birth are up to 18 months, and could be shared by mother and father. Statutory leave arrangements also include a father's quota or a leave period reserved for the father's use, generally as a non-transferable entitlement. Parents also have the rights to leave of absence from work with wage compensation to care for sick children. Parental leave may be used flexibly on a part-time basis until the child reaches the age of eight (Leira 2002).

Parental leave is instituted as an entitlement to enable the claiming of time-off from the job in order to care for a child. Since the mid-1950s, there was a paid maternity leave scheme that offered pay for three months at a flat rate; female workers were typically compensated at about 60% of foregone earnings (Bjorklund 2006). In 1960, Swedish women had the legal right to six months of unpaid leave after giving birth, and it was already illegal to dismiss a woman because of child bearing. In 1963, the paid maternity leave scheme was extended to six months, and the benefit became loosely tied to foregone

earnings, with a replacement rate of about 65% (Bjorklund 2006.)

Major extensions of the leave scheme occurred from 1974 onwards (Bjorklund 2006; Bjornberg and Dahlgren 2003; Leira 2002). The 1974 parental leave scheme replaced the former maternity leave scheme, granting fathers the right to share the leave period following the birth or adoption of a child (Leira 2002). Proposals for a father's quota were voiced in Sweden in the 1970s in connection with the introduction of parental leave legislation but were not legislated at the time. In the 1990s the scheme was reintroduced. As of 1999, there were 60 days of paid maternity leave, two weeks of paid paternity leave, and 450 days of paid parental leave. One month of the parental leave period was reserved for each parent, which could not be transferred to the other parent (Bjornberg and Dahlgren 2003). In 2002, this reserved period was further increased to two months per parent (European Foundation 2006).

Throughout the 1980s, the Swedish parental leave scheme provided 90 percent of the forgone income. Even with a cutback to 80 percent of the forgone income in the 1990s, the Swedish parental leave scheme is still generous by international standards (Bjornberg and Dahlgren 2003). By offering fathers the right to care for a child, even reserving a special period of the parental leave for their use, the Swedish system promotes new forms of fatherhood. The policy sets an example for state intervention not only in the general framework of employment but also in the internal arrangement of the family. However, its impact on gender equality should not be overestimated, as we will discuss in more detail in the next section. Indeed, this system will not be effective without the state being a primary employer for women, as several studies show t

private employers in Sweden are reluctant to encourage fathers to take parental leaves (European Foundation 2006; Leira 2002 quoting Haas 1992; Nasman 1998; Hass and Hwang 2000).

Public childcare

The parental leave arrangement is complementary to the public childcare provision in Sweden. Mothers' participation is needed for the Scandinavian policies promoting "full-employment" to succeed, and the Scandinavian welfare state provides an illuminating example of how childcare services could be socially redefined as a public responsibility (Leira 2002). State-sponsored childcare expanded with the aim of providing universal access for pre-school children. Gradually, the accommodation of children in publicly funded day-care has moved towards becoming an entitlement of parents (Bjourn and Dahlgren 2003; Leira 1992; Sainsbury 1994, 1996; Siim 1993).

Relatively early policy packages were formulated on the foundation that childcare is a joint interest of the state and parents. During the 1970s the high labour-market participation rate of mothers came to be seen as necessitating the expansion of publicly funded day-care for children. State-sponsored day-care for children was conceptualised not only as educationally advantageous for the children but also as a means of meeting the economy's demand for labour (Leira 1992). Public childcare has expanded considerably during the past three decades, with the largest expansion coming in the 1990s (Bjourn and Dahlgren 2003).

From the 1960s throughout 1980s, there was a strong division between the

Conservative and Centre parties on one hand, and the Liberals, Social Democrats and Communists on the other over the role of the state in relation to childcare support. The Conservative coalition favoured the use of childcare subsidies for mothers to retain the traditional male-breadwinner model, while the Social Democratic coalition promoted a universal coverage of public childcare with an aim to promote the two-earner family model (Bergqvist and Jungar 2000; Leira 2002). The Social Democrat's push for day-care centres gained stronger support nationwide from the mid-1970s (Leira 1992). Still, the real expansion of public childcare did not come until the 1980s: in 1966, public childcare was available for less than 10 percent of the children under seven, and in 1979, the figure was still less than 40 percent (Bergqvist and Jungar 2000: p.165). In 1985, the Swedish Parliament voted to support the proposal by the Social Democratic Government that by 1991 all children between one-and-a-half to six years old should have to right to a place in publicly financed childcare as long as their parents worked or studied (Gunnarsson 1993). In Sweden, the Ministry of Social Services is in charge of the public childcare policy, but the planning and actual provision of day care is primarily a financial responsibility of the municipalities.

Though universal coverage was early set as the aim, it came close to realisation only in the late 1990s (Leira 2002). As of 1987, places in publicly funded childcare services accounted for 31 percent of all children under three years old, and for 79 percent of all children from three to six. Parents in Sweden pay for about 11 percent of the running costs of day-care centres (Leira 1992). As of 1995, places in publicly funded childcare services accounted for 37 percent of all children under three years old and for 74 percent of all children from three to

six (Leira 2002: 61-62). In 1998, 95 percent of the municipalities reported that places are provided for all pre-school children within three to four months after application (Leira 2002). In 2002, a nationwide maximum-fee system was introduced, stating that no one pays more than three percent of the household's income for the first child, no more than two percent for the second, and no more than one percent for the third child in pre-school, with the fourth child free of charge (Bjourn and Dahlgren 2003).

Even though the public childcare system went through a series of reforms during the 21st century, the most prevalent form of childcare in Sweden is public childcare. By 2003, the public childcare covered 80 percent of children aged between two and three years old, and 90 percent of children between four and five years old (De Roit and Sabatinelli 2007; The Clearing House 2005). A typical Swedish family is therefore arranged like this: the mother takes parental leave to care for the child for 18 months to 24 months after birth, and then goes back to work and sends the child to public childcare. In the following section, we will discuss how the family policy configuration is associated with some major socio-demographic changes in Sweden.

Family Policy and Demographic Changes

While it is difficult to pin down the impacts of policies, Sweden's egalitarian family policy has arguably contributed to some major socio-demographic changes. We will organise the discussion around three major aspects: 1) gender equality; 2) fertility rate; and 3) family solidarity.

Relatively high gender equality

The Swedish family policy configuration in effect fosters the development of a dual earner model, or the “one and three-quarter earner model” (Lewis 2006). The child allowance system treats different family forms in a largely neutral manner, thereby equating dual earner families with other family forms in terms of their tax treatment. The parental leave scheme and the public childcare system combine to help women to reconcile responsibility for child care and the need for continuous attachment to the labour force.

Still, we should not simply assume the relatively high gender equality to be the consequence of the family policy because motherhood change preceded policy reform (Leira 2002). From the 1950s and 1960s Nordic mothers of young children increasingly rejected the conventional bread-winner model, opting for both paid work and children. Policy initiatives aiming to increase women’s labour-market participation were in full swing only from the 1970s and early 1980s onwards. The state effectively reinforced the trend and dismantled the male-breadwinner model by further redefining the gender division of labour in work and care (Morgan 2006).

Scandinavian mothers were among the first, as compared to their counterparts in the Western Europe, to enter the labour market in large numbers, and participation rates have remained high. In 2000, the full-time equivalent employment rate for males was 70 percent, and for females was 60 percent, though a significant portion of Swedish mothers of children under the age of seven were working part-time (Leira 2002). As of 2005, the female employment rate is 81.1 percent for women aged 25-54 and 70.4 percent for

women aged 15-64 (of which 39.6 percent are part time), ranking Sweden at the top among EU members (Da Roit and Ortigosa 2007). As compared to other EU members in 2000, the full-time equivalent employment rate for women aged between 15 to 64 years was 60 in Sweden, while the figure was 45 in the EU-15 (Boje and Strandh 2005).

Despite relatively equal opportunity in terms of labour market participation, both horizontal and vertical sex segregation of labour is still evident in Sweden (Leira 2002). When Nordic women entered the labour market, they often joined the public sector and worked in areas that were related to family care and services. Women make up the majority of employees in the personal and social services, education, health, welfare and caring services. In the upper segments of public and private organisations, the representation of women is not significant (Leira 2002).

In terms of the sharing of the caring responsibility, the “familisation” of fathers, that is, fathers’ participation in care of children and unpaid domestic work, is making slow progress. Since its introduction in the 1970s, the right of fathers to share parental leave on a voluntary basis has been slowly and steadily accepted in Sweden. This is in contrast to the ten-day statutory paternity leave, which rapidly became popular after its introduction in the 1990s. Still, fathers in Sweden have been more likely to take parental leaves than elsewhere in Europe (Leira 2002). In 1987 one in four of eligible fathers took up some of the leave, and by the end of 1992, almost half of the fathers of children born in 1991 had used the right to parental leave (OECD 1995). Compared to fathers elsewhere, this is remarkable (European Foundation 2006).

Still, parental leave is primarily a leave scheme for mothers, and its impact on gender equality should not be overestimated. On average, in 1996, men accounted for 9 per cent of the estimated use of parental leave in Sweden (Bruning and Platenga 1999: p.200). The OCED (1995) pointed out that Nordic fathers who made use of voluntary parental leaves were often well-educated, with permanent jobs and high income. The user group is usually comprised of both the mothers and fathers who have a high level of education and income, thus strengthening the mother's bargaining power in the family (Brandth and Dvande 1993). In short, the Swedish family policy configuration may have helped promote female participation in labour market but did not single-handedly change the gender division of labour in the society as a whole.

Relatively low family solidarity

The Swedish family configuration is built on egalitarianism. A major outcome is de-familisation, that is, individuals are becoming more and more independent from family. As family benefits are provided on an individual basis, the Swedish family policy provides little incentive for people to get married. In other words, marriage and family are both weakening as social institutions. This trend can be illustrated by looking at the marriage rate, divorce rate and extramarital births.

In Sweden, people are increasingly less likely to get married. The Swedish marriage rate by the late 1990s was one of the lowest in the world. As of 2002, the number of marriages per 1,000 unmarried women was 17.5, as compared to 43.4 in the US (Popenoe 2006: 68). If this trend continues, only about 60

percent of Swedish women will ever marry, as compared to over 85 percent in the US. This is a sharp decline, as compared to the generation marrying in the 1950s: the figure for Sweden was 91 percent and for the US 95 percent (Popenoe 2006:68).

While people are less likely to get married, they are more likely to cohabit outside of marriage. Virtually all Swedish couples live together before marriage, and many of the couples do not marry even when they have children (Popenoe 2006). In the 1950s and 1960s, extramarital births were highly stigmatised for unwed mothers. But it has become commonplace in Sweden, to the point where the parents of about half of all children born in the late 1990s were unmarried (Leira 2002). In 1990, cohabiting with no child accounted for 30 percent of the total number of households, and cohabiting with child, 22 percent (Boje and Strandth 2003). By the early 2000s, about 55 percent of births occur outside of marriage, and about one-third of Swedish children are likely to experience a parental divorce or separation (The Clearing House 2005). These all point to the weakening of marriage and family as a social institution.

Fertility rates fluctuating with the labour market

The ratio of births to death in Sweden have fluctuated significantly over the past four decades, with the highest replacement rates in the mid-1960s and in the early 1990s. Only in the late 1990s was the replacement fertility below 1 (Boje and Strandth 2003). With the death rates fairly stable over the years, the fluctuation is caused mostly by the changes in birth ratios. In fact, the total fertility rate reached a peak at 2.14 in 1990, and declined sharply to 1.50 in 1999, then recovered to 1.65 in 2002 (Bjorklund 2006). Its total fertility rate

in 2001 was 1.6, slightly above the EU average (The Clearing House 2005). This is consistent with the general conclusion that the pro-egalitarian family policy regime tends to have above average fertility rates in OECD countries (Engelhardt and Prskawetz 2004).

With a relatively consistent family policy configuration over the years, we still cannot conclude that the Swedish family policy causes changes in the fertility rate. Rather, the fertility rates seem to be very sensitive to fluctuations in the labour market (Bjorklund 2006; Rahmqvist 2006). This may be because the Swedish parental leave scheme provides a strong incentive for women to first get established in the labour market before having children. The incentive for women to work before having children is also associated with the postponement of child birth. The average age of women giving birth to their first child has increased in Sweden, from 25 years of age in 1980 to about 28 years of age in 2000 (Rahmqvist 2006: 1265).

Concluding Remarks

In analysing the policy choice in Sweden, it should be noted that the principles of gender equality and universalism are firmly established in its cultural and political system whereas family is less treasured as a social institution. Sweden has long been the international exemplar for work-life balance policies, with a policy configuration that helps generate a high employment rate of both sexes so that the government can raise enough tax income to support generous public spending. Even during the period of “hard times” in the mid-1990s, the policy reform was mostly a temporary retrenchment rather than a major

restructuring (Palme et al. 2002). In terms of female employment, the Swedish scheme is regarded widely among scholars as the most effective policy package because of a combination of maternity/paternity leaves for the period immediately after births, and part-time jobs and childcare facilities in the following years (Da Roit and Sabatinelli 2007). The coverage of children under three years of age differentiates Sweden from the rest of Europe. This provision, mainly subsidised and controlled by the state, not only allows women to reconcile paid work and family responsibilities but also creates a huge labour market demand for women. As the public sector is now an important provider of childcare, the traditional unpaid home care is being commodified into paid employment. Thus, it induces a virtuous cycle between the defamilisation of care and female employment. To conclude, this policy configuration is not feasible without a strong and active state.

A Cross-Country Comparison of Family Policy

Chapter 7: Summary of Findings and Policy Discussion -- Analysing the Convergence and Divergence of Family Policy in Developed Countries

Introduction

In this concluding chapter, we will first discuss and explain the extent to which the five countries are converging towards the same family policy orientation, followed by our evaluation of the effectiveness of various family policy models. Finally, we will outline our policy recommendations based on our findings in this comparative study.

Evolution of Family Policies in the 20th Century

In the early 20th century, France and Sweden were among the few countries that had launched explicit family policies. Supporting family and childrearing by cash allowances was then the primary policy instrument. By the 1930s, cash allowances for families with children began to be viewed increasing as a pro-natalist strategy for providing parents with an incentive to have more children. The 1950s were the “golden age” of cash allowances (Kamerman and Kahn 1997), with the side effect of reinforcing the traditional male breadwinner, female homemaker family model. The increasing female labour participation rate since the 1960s and 1970s had two major implications for family policy: first, the traditional family model has been losing its

coherence; and second, the resolution of the work-family conflict became a more pressing problem in most developed countries. As a result, parental leave schemes and public subsidies for childcare have been growing in importance as family policy instruments. But it would be a mistake to see two earner families as replacing the breadwinner model as the common pattern in developed countries. Rather, families are becoming more diverse, with a rise in cohabitation, delayed marriages, singlehood rates, divorce rates and lone parent families. As a result, the traditional assumption that the state can support women and children through supporting families is becoming outdated. An emerging trend in family policy is the shift from family-based consideration towards a more individualised form of support. A children-centred policy orientation is one such new convergence in developed countries. Public subsidy for childcare is therefore becoming more common among developed countries, and children's saving accounts (as in the case of Singapore and the UK) are gaining in popularity. Indeed, all countries covered in our report have come to reform their family policy towards accommodating three major trends, namely work-life balance, diversity in family forms, and children-centred support. Nevertheless, the pace and the scale of family policy reform vary. In the following sections, we will discuss in more detail the convergence and divergence of policy reform and policy effectiveness in these countries.

Understanding the Convergence of Family Policy Reform

Some common demographic changes (such as the breakdown of the traditional family model, the rising female labour participation rate, the falling fertility rates) have prompted many developed countries to re-orient their family

policies in a common direction. It is obvious that these countries show a certain degree of convergence in their family policy, as discussed in the following.

From preserving the traditional family model towards recognising diverse family forms

Developed countries have become less explicit in their desire to preserve the traditional breadwinner family model. Obviously, there is a major difficulty in sustaining the traditional family model in general and the patriarchal gender division of labour in particular. This is because women are becoming more educated, getting more involved in work and are less constrained by the traditional gender division of labour. A related socio-demographic change is the declining solidarity of marriage and family. It is becoming more “normal” to delay marriage, to cohabit, or even not to marry at all.

Instead, it is common for family policy reforms to take into consideration diverse family forms. Not surprisingly, the Pro-traditional Family Policy Regime and the Pro-natalist Family Policy Regime (the two Family Policy Regimes within the Conservative Welfare Regime) underwent the most significant change in this area in recent years. For example, Germany has recognised the need to shift from home-based childcare towards public childcare services, and France has offered both married and unmarried couples the same legal status. By contrast, Sweden could be considered an exemplar because its family policy has long provided equal rights and benefits for diverse family forms.

From directly financing the family towards children-centred support

With the dissolution of traditional family model because of increasing numbers of divorce and illegitimate births, supporting the family is becoming more difficult. No longer valid is the assumption that children will be taken care of as long as their families are supported. A major problem of “family-centred” family policy is that the policy tends to focus on promoting and protecting two-parent families while neglecting other family types. Actually, two-parent families are more likely to be able to take good care of their children regardless of whether there are two earners or one earner and one carer. Nevertheless, lone-parent families are often faced with the difficult decision of whether to be an earner or a carer. The increasing number of lone-parent families thus poses a major challenge to the “family-centred” family policy. As a result, helping and supporting children directly is becoming a common theme in policy reform, replacing the old conception of supporting children through financing their parents.

Britain’s family policy reform has been mostly influenced by the increasing number of lone-parent families and child poverty. Cash allowances for families are giving way to subsidising childcare support; new services and programmes are designed specifically for children of various age groups. To a lesser extent, the promotion of public childcare in both Germany and France is targeted at children’s needs instead of parents’. Another way to look at the shift away from family support to child support is that it would be relatively easy to mobilise political support for policy reforms aimed at supporting children’s needs for better care and education. Not surprisingly, more developed countries have followed the lead of Sweden to recognise children’s

entitlement to public support for infant and child care services.

Towards helping individual citizens to achieve work-life balance

With a high female labour market participation rate associated with a decline in the fertility rate, helping individual citizens (and women in particular) to balance the need to work and that for childcare is another major theme in family policy reform. Work-life balance usually becomes a significant issue when a country has undergone a transformation from an industrial economy to a service economy because there will be greater demand for female labour and married women have traditionally borne most of the burden of household chores. Not surprisingly, the introduction of schemes to provide for longer and gender-neutral parental leave is thus becoming a more common policy measure in Europe. The EU Directive on Parental Leave was adopted in 1996, and the majority of the EU member states have instituted similar policies (EU Foundation 2006). Still, parental leave has not attained recognition worldwide, with only a minority of ILO member states offering such leaves (Leira 2002). Another major common policy is for the public to share the childcare responsibilities with the family either through public subsidies or public provision for centre-based childcare services.

To recapitulate, European countries are converging towards accommodating diverse family forms by orienting family policy towards more gender-neutral, children-centred family measures. Sweden has been an exemplar in this policy area, while France and Britain have both undergone major policy reform towards this model. By contrast, Germany and Singapore have only belatedly started to move in this direction.

Understanding the Differences in the Family Policies

There are still major differences among the five countries even though they are converging towards a gender-neutral, children-centred family policy model. Divergence in family policies is obviously related to the socio-political contexts. We will discuss the differences in family policy reform orientation by referring to 1) the societal division of labour between the market, state and family; and 2) the strength of feminist political forces vis-à-vis the traditional family values. Then, we will discuss the choice of policy measures in family policy reform by referring to state capacity.

The societal division of labour between state, family and market

A country's family policy objective depends, to a large extent, on the institutional division of labour between the state, the family and the market. It is not surprising that the classification of the Non-interventionist, Egalitarian Pro-natalist and Pro-traditional Family Policy Regimes coincide with the classification of the Liberal, Social Democratic and Conservative Welfare State Regimes. Even though there is some convergence among these different policy models during recent policy reforms, significant differences remain because of their different orientations originally.

The Non-interventionist Family Policy Regime is closely associated with the Liberal Welfare State Regime, because the market is often favoured over the state and the family. British family policy reform in the past decade has actually been reinforcing the role of market; for example, the solution for child poverty in lone-parent families rests on encouraging lone parents to go to work by subsidising the use of private childcare centres. By contrast, France (a

Pro-natalist Family Policy Regime) and Germany (a Pro-traditional Family Policy Regime) are still emphasising the role of family by providing prolonged parental leaves, though they are becoming more active in subsidising centre-based childcare services. In Sweden, the state has taken over the childcare responsibilities by regarding childcare centre enrolment as an individual entitlement. In Singapore, family policy is subordinated under the national development strategy. Even when the Singaporean state launched new initiatives to promote childrearing in recent years, the family policy packages are still favouring highly educated, high-income women while leaving less educated, low income women with little option but to conform to the traditional homemaker role.

The political struggle between the feminist movement and traditional values

The political struggle between traditional values and the feminist movement is also a major factor in explaining the extent to which the family policy favours gender neutrality. Where feminism gains an upper hand, family policy works in favour of gender neutrality and work-life balance for women, as in the case of Sweden, and to a lesser extent, France. Swedish family policy has been pillared on a gender-neutral parental leave scheme and the universal provision of centre-based childcare services. By contrast, where the traditional values are strongly upheld by major political parties, as in Germany and Singapore, the preservation of the traditional family is preferred over the promotion of gender equality. Women's role as homemakers is often reinforced as maternity leave schemes are pro-longed and financial incentives are given to the family for taking up childcare responsibilities.

State capacity and the choice of policy instruments

The choice of policy instruments is best understood by referring to the state's capacity because this is directly related to how much resources the state can allocate to this policy area. We can further analyse different types of policy instruments as follows:

a) Explicit vs. implicit family policy

Strong and active states are more likely to find it feasible to use comprehensive policy packages with explicit goals. Sweden and Singapore represent two such cases, as both are able to launch major policy restructuring when they see fit. This is only possible when the state is powerful and autonomous vis-à-vis the market and the civil society. For example, Sweden was able to transform childcare service from a private to a public responsibility, and Singapore was able to launch a whole new family policy package within a couple of years after it had made pro-natalism an explicit objective in 2000. By contrast, Britain has not always been able to launch a comprehensive family policy with an explicit goal. Rather, British family policy only intervenes when there is a strong social consensus favouring a policy solution for some severe social problems. For example, child poverty was widely regarded as a major social problem in the UK, and the Labour government responded by reforming its family policy towards a children-centred orientation.

b) Legislation vs. financial incentives

A strong and active state is more likely to use both legislation and financial incentives as policy instruments whereas a relatively weak state is usually

more likely to use financial incentives only than resorting to legislation. The UK represents a typical example, as it had long refused to adopt the EU parental leave directive but instead relied for a long time mostly on promotion campaigns encouraging voluntary participation by employers. By contrast, both Singapore and Sweden are able to complement legislation with financial incentives to achieve their family policy objective, as shown by their relatively quick reform of statutory parental leave schemes. Between the two Conservative Welfare Regimes, France has resorted more often than Germany to using legislation as a family policy instrument. This is associated with the differences in their political arrangements in that France has a more centralised form of government whereas Germany has a more decentralised form.

c) Selective coverage vs. universal coverage

A distinctive feature of the Liberal Welfare State Regime is its emphasis on means-test benefits; Non-interventionist Family Policy Regimes such as Britain's thus tend to avoid universal coverage. When the British government intended to enlarge the coverage of family benefits, it was inclined to skew measures towards the principle of so-called "selective universalism". Simply put, new benefits provide universal coverage only for a selected age group, that is, children. All children, instead of all families (in other words, adults are not directly benefited), would benefit from the enlarged coverage of childcare reform and the launch of the Child Trust Fund. Such rhetoric as "investing in the future of children" and "tackling child poverty" helped to generate relatively strong support from the general public, who remain sceptical over universal benefits.

On the contrary, the Egalitarian Family Policy Regime has always provided universal coverage as in Sweden. Between these two extremes are Family Policy Regimes in the Conservative Welfare State Regimes. For example, both France and Singapore in effect divided women according to their income levels. In Singapore, the use of tax relief alongside limited subsidies actually provides high-income women incentives to work while channelling low-income women to homemaking and child caring. The same effect is also evident in France's limited provision of public childcare services.

d) Service provider vs. resource provider

In the Non-interventionist Family Policy Regime, as in Britain, family policy is less inclined to intervene into private decisions concerning family affairs. Therefore, the government declines to be a service provider, and instead, prefers to stimulate the demand for private childcare service through subsidising public-private partnerships. By contrast, both the Swedish and French government have taken on the role as a service provider, though Sweden has a much higher public childcare centre enrolment rate than in France.

To recapitulate, the choice of policy instruments is conditioned by the division of labour between the state, market and society. Only a relatively strong state is able to take up all three roles of regulator, provider and financier, whereas a relatively weak state may focus on financing both the market and the family to achieve a desirable family outcome.

Analysing Policy Outcomes: The Hard Choice Among Family Solidarity, the Fertility Rate and Gender Equality

When we analyse the policy outcome of the five countries, we should note that common trends among them include weakening family solidarity, increasing gender equality and a declining fertility rate. Therefore, when we evaluate the effectiveness of their family policies, we are only discussing these three dimensions in relative terms. A major observation is that none of these countries can achieve significant improvements in all three dimensions at the same time. In other words, there lies a hard choice for a family policy in deciding which objective to prioritise.

Both Germany and Singapore have shown relatively strong family solidarity, but they also have the lowest fertility rate. Gender equality also shows relatively slow improvement. By contrast, Sweden, and to a lesser extent, France have show relatively weak family solidarity, but they have a relatively higher fertility rate and relatively high level of gender equality. In terms of family policy outcome, Britain is in the middle, with a relatively weak family solidarity, a modest fertility rate and modest gender equality. From the five countries we studied, we conclude that it is very unlikely that the three objectives can be achieved at the same time.

This argument could be pushed further. The more the policy aims to retain the traditional family model that assumes women take care of the children, the lower the likelihood that women will give births in an industrialised setting. Certainly, the fertility rate may be less influenced by policy than by other social and cultural factors. In many countries, it is found that new migrants

and groups of ethnic minorities tend to have more children. However, the preservation of the traditional family model seems to require putting too much responsibility on women, especially in terms of the resolution of work-life conflicts. Therefore, while the divorce rate may be lower, the marriage rate is not high and the fertility rate is very low.

Gender equality is associated with a rising female labour market participation rate. Though this is arguably more related to economic development than government policy, government policy is related to the likelihood of higher female employment rate. For example, Sweden provides public subsidises for childcare that liberate women from family responsibilities, thus achieving a very high female labour market participation rate. By contrast, in other family policy regimes, women are divided into two major groups according to their education and income level. Highly educated, high-income women have more options for work-life balance whereas less-educated, low-income women are more likely to conform to the traditional gender division of labour and quit their jobs (or work part-time) after having children.

To conclude, this comparative study has three major findings concerning family policy effectiveness. First, family policy can often achieve the stated explicit objective as long as the policy instrument is strong and comprehensive. Second, family policy is more likely to influence people's decision to work than to influence their decision to have children and their likelihood of embracing marriage and family. Third, family solidarity is often compromised by the decline in fertility rates and a lower level of gender equality whereas there seems to be no conflict between high gender equality

and high fertility rate. These findings will serve as reference for our policy recommendations in the following sections.

Sketching the Hong Kong Socio-political Context

The Hong Kong policy context is closer to the liberal welfare regime. Market and family remain two major social institutions, and the state is expected to play a relatively smaller role. Accordingly, Hong Kong is also closer to the Non-interventionist Family Policy Regime, as those values such as self-reliance and voluntarism also apply to Hong Kong. Nevertheless, we cannot ignore that Hong Kong is also influenced by the traditional Chinese ethics such as Confucianism. The inclination towards preservation of the traditional family is still strong, although gender equality is gaining more support. In this aspect, Hong Kong is closer to Singapore. Still, Hong Kong remain different from Singapore because of its relatively weak capacity vis-à-vis the market and the society. In this way, Hong Kong may be classified as a Non-interventionist Family Policy Regime skewed towards the Pro-traditional Regime.

Hong Kong is also under the challenge of family changes facing most developed countries. While gender equality is improving, marriage and family are both weakening as social institutions, and the fertility rate is very low. Among socio-demographic changes the decline of fertility rate is the most obvious (Census and Statistics Department 2007a:3-6): the annual number of live births in Hong Kong dropped steadily from 86,751 in 1981 to 68,281 in 1991, and hit the lowest in 2003 at 46,965. There has been a

moderate increase in recent years, recording 65,626 live births in 2006. Still, the total fertility rate is very low, dropping from 1.933 in 1981 to 0.901 in 2003 and then rebounding slightly to 0.984 in 2006.

Another major demographic trend is delayed marriage (Census and Statistics Department 2007b: p.12): the median age of women marrying for the first time was 28.2 in 2006, an increase of about 4 years from 23.9 in 1981. Men have traditionally married at older ages than women; the median age at first marriage for men in 2006 was 31.2, an increase of about 4 years from 27.0 from 1981. However, a more significant trend is the increasing prevalence of spinsterhood among women: the percentage of never married women in the age group 40-44 reached 16 percent in 2006, a sharp increase from 3 percent in 1981 (Census and Statistics Department 2007a: p.9). In sum, Hong Kong is experiencing similar socio-demographic challenges as those experienced in other developed countries. Therefore, policy reforms in those countries would be relevant for Hong Kong.

Based on our findings in this comparative study, we propose the following ideas that hopefully would contribute to further deliberations on family policies in Hong Kong. It is important to note that our recommendations do not suggest that Hong Kong government is ignorant or deficient in these aspects. In fact, even without a rigorous analysis of the Hong Kong family policy, we could believe that the Hong Kong government is moving towards these directions. Indeed, in the 2006-07 Policy Address the Chief Executive put a strong emphasis on “cherishing the family” (p.13). The recent establishment of the Family Council further demonstrated that Hong Kong will

strive towards a well-coordinated family policy.

Ideas for Moving Family Policy Ahead in Hong Kong

We will propose the following six recommendations for the further development of family policies in Hong Kong:

1. Prioritises Different Objectives in Family Policy

While the government may have multiple objectives in the family policy, it is important that it sets a priority for these objectives, which may sometimes contradict one another. In our comparative study, family policy is often more effective when there is a clearly stated family outcome, be it stronger family solidarity, increasing fertility rate or higher gender equality. There should be a clear priority because we find that strengthening family solidarity may even further reduce the fertility rate, if no corresponding measure is provided to enhancing gender equality, such as easing the work-life conflicts on the part on women. A serious consideration of the various trade-offs in the formulation of family policies should be on top of our policy agenda.

Work-life balance deserves particular attention in Hong Kong. A recent research commissioned by the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Women's Commission reveals that both the awareness and the adoption of family-friendly employment practices are not prevalent in Hong Kong (Siu and Phillips 2006). Without a family-friendly environment, both family solidarity and fertility rate are often adversely affected. This problem is evident in Singapore, and to a lesser extent, Germany and France. These countries aim towards the preservation of the traditional family, and at the same time,

increasing the fertility rate. An unintended consequence is that there emerges a division between high-education, high-income women and low-education, low-income women. High-income women are less influenced by the family policy, thus less likely to conform to the traditional family form and give birth to children. Low-income women are more influenced by the family policy, thus more likely to conform to the traditional family form and give birth to children.

2. Recognise the diversity of family forms

In order to enhance the policy effectiveness, the government should recognise that the increasing diversity in family forms because of an increasing diversity of individual choice concerning intimate relationships. The traditional family policy often presupposes a typical “family form”, that is, two-parent family established through marriage. However, with a larger number of families not organised according to the two-parent family model, the new family policy should recognise and accommodate their different needs.

For examples, cohabitation and lone-parent families are become more common in recent years. Though official statistics for cohabitation is not available in Hong Kong, the number of single parents increased from 34,538 in 1991 to 58,460 in 2001, an annual growth rate of 5.4 percent over the period (Census and Statistics Department 2004: 3). It is worth nothing that the overall labour force participation rate of the single parents dropped steadily from 74.5 percent to 63.7 percent in 2001. In contrast, the figure for ever married persons living with child(ren) aged under 18 increased slightly from 71.0 percent to 72.3 percent. In short, alternative family forms will be vulnerable than

two-parent families.

Though the government may be inclined to encourage the traditional family model, it can hardly afford to ignore the needs of other family forms. For examples, in both Sweden and France, the legal status is equal for married couples and cohabitated couples, and also for legitimate and illegitimate children. That permits people to decouple the decision to get married and that to have children, thus helping to stabilise fertility rate. In the UK, the government takes special care of the needs of lone-parent family and expands the public childcare services, thus encouraging lone mothers to get back to work and increasing the female labour market participation rate. By contrast, both Germany and Singapore provide strong incentives for people to conform to the traditional family form. They do have a higher percentage of two-parent family, but are harder hit by the very low fertility rate and the relatively low female labour participation rate.

3. Cater for the changing gender division of labour

Because of macro-sociological forces at work in developed societies, the gender division of labour is bound to be shifting away from the male breadwinner family model. Any family policy that aims to reverse this trend is likely to be ineffective. A more feasible approach is to accommodate this social change by taking into consideration of the needs of different “individual members in families” rather the needs of the family as a whole. Therefore, instead of supporting the family through various cash support schemes, family policy package may include several policy measures that cater for the changing gender division of labour.

It has been estimated in 2001 that there were some 734,500 homemakers in Hong Kong, or 13 percent of all persons aged 15 over above (Census and Statistics Department 2001). However, there are still a significant number of women with dual roles, among them 214,300 without domestic helpers and 113,000 with domestic helpers (Census and Statistics Department 2001). Therefore, family policy packages should provide citizens with flexible options. For examples, gender-neutral parental leave accommodates dual earner families, public childcare is targeted at lone parent families, and a short paternity leave may help male breadwinner families. This approach could help the smoothing functioning of different family forms because it accommodates individuals in different social situations.

4. Orient towards a children-centred approach

Hong Kong may follow an increasing number of countries that have shifted their family policy towards a more children-centred approach with strong reasons. Because of the diversity of family forms, we can no longer assume that children will be taken care of if their families are supported. While Hong Kong already has the Elderly Commission, the Women's Commission and the Commission on Youth, new family policy initiatives should put more emphasis on the special needs of children. Not only does supporting children usually encounter less political resistance, but children-centred policy initiatives also ensure that children actually get the desired mode of support as well as more equal opportunities for personal development. For examples, almost all countries are strengthening childcare services, and the UK and Singapore also initiated public-private co-financed funds especially for children. In sum, this

approach fits with the overall trend of taking into consideration of the needs of “individual members in families” rather the needs of the family as a whole.

5. Helping Citizens to Achieve Work-Life Balance

Hong Kong should accommodate citizen’s needs of achieving work-life balance. With an increasing number of two-earner families and an increasing number of lone-parent families, there is an increasing pressure on women to resolve the conflicts between the needs to work and the childcare responsibilities. With a higher female labour force participation rate, the lack of work-life balance policy is directly related to the declining fertility rates. In this aspect, Hong Kong shows a similar pattern as in Singapore that high-educated women are less likely to marry than low-educated women. In Hong Kong, while the percentage of never married women in the age group 35-39 with only primary education or below decreased from 1.2 percent in 1981 to 0.8 percent in 2006, those with secondary and post-secondary education grew significantly from 2.4 percent and 1.0 percent to 12.5 percent and 9 percent respectively. Though helping women to resolve the work-family conflicts may not reverse the trend, it probably will make marriage and childrearing less burdensome for women. Therefore, Hong Kong should transform from treating childcare as being solely a private responsibility towards a public-private childcare partnership. Prolonging the parental leaves and providing childcare subsidies are both policy options suitable for Hong Kong.

6. Mustering a Resource Pool for Family Policy

To launch new family policy initiatives often require new financial resources.

It is not feasible that Hong Kong government can learn from Sweden to always allocate tax revenue for new policy measures. Even though we have a sizable fiscal surplus at the moment, current revenues of the government should not be the sole source of funding for new policy initiatives. A more realistic approach will be to examine how to more efficiently make use of existing financial resources. In this regard, the Hong Kong government should examine what public and private resources are available for better utilisation.

To tap into a wider pool of resources, the government may put stronger effect in promoting private enterprise in the adoption of family-friendly employment practices. Another form of private-public partnership is to make use of community resources to support families, for examples, by promoting social enterprises that provide family and childcare services. An example of possible source of public resource for family policy would be the revenues generated from the Foreign Domestic Helper Levy, currently collected to a sum of some HK\$1,000 million each year. In January 2008, the Employees Retraining Board has issued a consultative document on the future directions of the board by broadening its scope of activities. Yet, one possible direction that merit further consideration is to put a stronger emphasis on the training for family and childcare services. Another possibility that the government could consider is to go beyond retraining and broaden the use of the levy revenues on initiatives that integrate training with the provision of family-related services. Since the levy was collected from typically middle-class families hiring foreign domestic helpers and these families could rarely benefit from the retraining programmes funded by the levy, it makes sense that the levy could be directed to uses that would enable them to lessen their dependence on

foreign domestic helpers. Now the ERB already funds programmes that train and despatch part-time local domestic helpers, so it would not be entirely impossible if the Board extends this to include the provision of institutional childcare or elderly care services. Politically there has always been complains from employers of foreign domestic helpers on the levy and from time to time the public has questioned the channelling of the levy to the ERB. Deployment of the levy revenue to develop new family-related services could kill two birds in one stone -- locating new resources for family policy and alleviating public resentments to the levy.

The End

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