

ARTICLE

SUPPORTING THE EMPLOYMENT OF MOTHERS: POLICY VARIATION ACROSS FOURTEEN WELFARE STATES

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Summary

This article compares 14 OECD countries, as of the middle-to-late 1980s, with respect to their provision of policies that support mothers' employment: parental leave, child care, and the scheduling of public education. Newly gathered data on 18 policy indicators are presented. The indicators are then standardized, weighted, and summed into indices. By differentiating policies that affect maternal employment from family policies more generally, these indices reveal dramatic cross-national differences in policy provisions.

The empirical results reveal loose clusters of countries that correspond only partially to prevailing welfare-state typologies. For mothers with preschool-aged children, only five of the 14 countries provided reasonably complete and continuous benefits that supported their options for combining paid work with family responsibilities. The pattern of cross-national policy variation changed notably when policies affecting mothers with older children were examined.

The indices provide an improved measure of public support for maternal employment. They are also useful for contrasting family benefits that are provided through direct cash transfers with those that take the form of support for mothers' employment. Finally, these policy findings contribute to the body of scholarship that seeks to integrate gender issues more explicitly into research on welfare-state regimes.

Résumé

L'AIDE À L'EMPLOI POUR LES MÈRES DE FAMILLE

Cet article compare les politiques de l'emploi des mères de famille de quatorze pays de l'OCDE depuis le milieu ou la fin des années quatre-vingt: congé parental, garde des enfants et organisation de l'enseignement public. Il présente des données collectées récemment sur dix-huit indicateurs concernant les politiques. Les indicateurs sont ensuite standardisés, pondérés et additionnés de manière à constituer des indices. Ces indices, qui font une distinction entre les politiques affectant l'emploi des mères de famille et les politiques familiales plus générales révèlent des différences marquées entre les politiques offertes par les divers pays.

Les résultats empiriques révèlent l'existence de groupes de pays qui ne correspondent qu'en partie aux typologies dominantes d'Etat-providence. Seuls cinq des quatorze pays procurent aux mères d'enfants en âge préscolaire des prestations raisonnablement complètes et ininterrompues qui leur laissent le choix de combiner l'emploi rémunéré avec les responsabilités familiales. L'examen des politiques affectant les mères ayant des enfants plus grands révèle des variations tout à fait différentes entre les politiques des divers pays.

Les indices permettent de mieux mesurer l'aide de l'Etat à l'emploi des mères de famille. Ils s'avèrent également utiles pour contraster les prestations familiales sous forme de transferts monétaires directs avec celles qui se font sous forme de soutien à l'emploi des mères de famille. Enfin, les résultats concernant les politiques apportent une contribution à la somme de savoir qui vise à intégrer plus explicitement les questions d'égalité des sexes dans la recherche sur les régimes d'Etat-providence.

Introduction

During the postwar period, rates of female employment, especially of maternal employment, have increased markedly throughout the industrialized countries. Changes in women's employment patterns have been influenced by a range of factors, including evolving gender roles, demographic shifts and economic restructuring. Despite their broadly similar political and economic systems, the rates and patterns of women's employment vary considerably across industrialized countries. This variation raises questions about the role that government policies play in influencing women's work decisions and, in turn, in shaping both gender equality and family economic well-being.

Existing cross-national variation in both government policy and in patterns of maternal employment provides a framework for assessing policy effects on employment outcomes. Both incomplete theoretical specifications and data limitations, however, have constrained comparative research on the role of policy in shaping maternal employment. Many analysts have failed to clearly disaggregate family policies into policies that affect maternal employment and those with largely unrelated effects.¹ Policies that influence mothers' employment have been especially difficult to study cross-nationally because of the shortage of comparable data on institutional features and expenditures.

This article addresses these gaps by comparing 14 industrialized countries with respect to a subset of public 'family policies' that facilitate the employment of mothers: parental leave, child care, and the scheduling of public education.² Data on 18 measures of public policy effort are presented for 14 countries. The data are then used to construct composite indices of policy 'packages' that support employment for mothers with children of different ages and to compare countries' performances cross-nationally. Finally, levels of support for maternal employment are con-

trasted with levels of income assistance for families with children. By aggregating a range of policies that affect mothers' employment, while differentiating them from family policies more generally, these comparisons reveal dramatic cross-national variation in both support for the employment choices of mothers and in the ways that countries combine employment support with income maintenance.

Background

Defining employment-supporting policies

The policies examined in this study are a subset of family policies. Family policy is typically defined broadly to include all government benefits that contribute to the health and well-being of families with children through direct cash transfers (such as child allowances and maternity benefits), tax expenditures (such as dependent tax credits), in-kind benefits (such as housing) and direct services (such as public education and child care). Family policies can be defined even more broadly to include other services, such as health care, that benefit all citizens including families with children.

The diversity of family policy packages reflects cross-national differences in historical origins, in contemporary policy goals, and in the use of alternative mechanisms aimed at achieving the same goals. Public policies that support maternal employment may be adopted with the explicit goal of increasing employment options; these policies may also be adopted in response to largely unrelated social or economic needs; for example, in response to depopulation and/or labor shortages. In different times and different places, for example, public child care has been developed to enhance children's health and development, to achieve other social service goals, to encourage child-bearing and to facilitate mothers' employment (Ergas 1990; Kamerman, 1991a, 1991b; Kamerman and

Kahn, 1991a, 1991b; OECD, 1990a, 1990b). Parental-leave policies have been adopted with the explicit goals of promoting infant health, securing employment opportunities for women, providing income security for families, and reducing gender divisions in the allocation of household work (Haas, 1991; Kamerman, 1980, 1991a; Stetson, 1991).

Although all family policies are presumed to benefit both parents and children, the effects of individual policies may affect family members differently. Children may benefit, for example, from fewer hours of more educationally-enriching child care. Mothers may benefit from more hours of less expensive custodial care. It is also important analytically to differentiate family policies that benefit children by enabling mothers to work at home as full-time care-givers (e.g. family allowances) from those that enhance family income by supporting mothers' involvement in paid work (e.g. paid maternity leaves).

The microeconomic theory of labor supply suggests one dimension along which family policies can usefully be characterized: the extent to which policies support the option of employment for women with dependent children. Policies may affect women's employment decisions by encouraging unbroken labor force attachments around the time of childbirth, by increasing the supply or reducing the cost of nonmaternal child care, or by providing de facto child care via public school schedules that are compatible with parental employment.

Labor supply theory and research

The selection of variables for this study reflects microeconomic theory and empirical research on the policy and non-policy factors that affect women's choices regarding the allocation of their time between paid work and all other activities. Extending the basic consumption model, labor supply is viewed as a consump-

tion choice between two commodities – market income and time spent outside of paid work (i.e. non-market time). According to labor-supply theory, a woman faces a budget constraint determined by her market wage rate (i.e. the slope of the budget constraint) and her other available income (i.e. her non-market or endowed income). Women will choose the combination of market income and non-market time determined by the point of tangency between the budget constraint and the highest possible indifference curve.³

The labor-supply model suggests that the *presence of children* in the home will have an impact on a woman's decision to work for pay and on her hours worked. Children are understood both to raise the value that a woman places on her time outside of paid work (i.e. to steepen her indifference curves) and to lower her effective market wages to the extent that substitute care involves expenditures. The greater a woman's child-rearing responsibilities, the less likely it is that she will choose to enter paid work. For women who are employed, greater child-rearing responsibilities would reduce their hours in paid work. A substantial body of empirical research supports these predictions with evidence of the negative effects of having young children on maternal labor supply in industrialized countries (Connelly, 1991; Gornick, 1994; Knudsen and Peters, 1994; Leibowitz et al., 1988; Mallier and Rosser, 1987; Phipps, 1993).

Labor-supply theory also suggests ways that government policies may offset the downward pressure that children exert on women's labor supply. *Child care* and *parental leave* have received the greatest attention in empirical studies; recently, scholars have begun to examine the relationship between public school schedules and maternal employment.

Child care The conventional labor-supply model suggests at least two straightforward approaches to the effects of child care on women's employment. The first approach depicts child care as affecting women's prefer-

ences for non-market time versus time spent in paid work (Blau and Ferber, 1992). Theoretically, more satisfactory child care alternatives would decrease mothers' preferences for time spent at home versus time spent in market work, *all else equal*. In the second approach, features of child care affect women's budget constraints rather than their relative preferences for home time (Connelly, 1992; Michalopoulos et al., 1992; Ribar, 1992). The price of market child care may be viewed as a tax levied on mothers' hourly wages. Higher-priced care would have the same effect as lower net wages – a decrease in employment and a decrease in hours of paid work among women.

The two theoretical approaches suggest that improvements in women's child care options will be associated with increases in their labor supply. Single-country empirical studies suggest that the relationships among the demand for child care, the price and availability of care, and women's labor supply are complicated and multidirectional. On the whole, however, the literature supports the theoretically driven prediction that having more attractive child care options increases maternal employment (Blau and Robins, 1991; Connelly, 1990, 1991, 1992; Kimmel, 1995; Leibowitz et al., 1992; Meyers, 1993; Michalopoulos et al., 1992; Ribar, 1992; Stolzenberg and Waite, 1984; US General Accounting Office, 1994). In one of the few studies to address this question cross-nationally, Schmidt (1992) reported that child care growth, from 1960 to 1980, was positively associated with increases in female employment rates across 18 OECD countries.

Parental Leave The relationship between maternal employment and parental leave policies is understood differently from the relationship between maternal employment and child care. Generous maternity-leave provisions are generally believed to increase women's attachment to paid work in the short term. In addition to offering basic income support to new mothers, many maternity policies

are explicitly designed to prevent women from exiting employment following childbirth (Trzcinski, 1991).

The relationship between elements of maternity leave and mothers' longer-term attachment to paid work is more complicated. In contrast to child care, which enables mothers to spend more time at work, maternity leaves enable working mothers to spend more time at home – even though they usually remain officially 'employed'. Some scholars hypothesize that policies that enable long leave periods may limit certain career-enhancing opportunities that require a degree of continuity at work (e.g. opportunities for training and promotion). This constraint may have a negative long-term effect on mothers' earnings and, in turn, on their labor supply. However, to the extent that job guarantees and wage replacement lessen the probability that mothers will exit paid work or change jobs following each childbirth, maternity provisions would strengthen mothers' long-term labor-market attachment.

The empirical literature on the effects of leave provisions on mothers' employment is limited. O'Connell (1990) reports that the availability of employer-provided leave increases the likelihood of an early return to work after the birth of a first child. Joesch (1995) concludes that women's labor-force attachment increases with the provision of paid leave. Klerman and Leibowitz (1990) found only weak evidence of a relationship between US state maternity-leave statutes and employment. Waldfogel (1996), however, concludes that job protections did have a positive net employment effect after 1993. Using data from 17 countries, Ruhm and Teague (1995) conclude that the duration of paid parental leave is associated with increased female employment rates. Others have reported, based on cross-national research, that elements of child care and/or maternity-leave policy affect not only women's labor-force participation (and employment) rates but their hours worked as well (Dex and Shaw, 1986; Gornick, 1994; Gustafsson and Stafford, 1995; Rosenfeld and Birkelund, 1995).

Public school schedules School schedules can be a factor in mothers' employment decisions because public school provides de facto child care for mothers of school-aged children. Labor-supply theory suggests that improvements in women's child care options will be associated with increases in maternal labor supply. For mothers who rely on schools to provide child care for their older children, 'improvement' would include having children enrolled in public school for more hours per day, for more weeks per year, and on schedules that are more consistent with typical employment schedules.

The role of public schooling as child care has received increasing attention over the last decade (e.g. Commission of the European Communities, 1990; OECD, 1990b). Some observers (e.g. White, 1983) have argued that child care problems may actually worsen during the early school years. School vacations typically coincide with religious holidays and summer holidays, and only imperfectly correspond to parents' breaks from paid work. If parents relinquish more flexible child care arrangements when their children begin primary school, they may face even greater problems coordinating child-minding and paid work as their children age.

Although policy analysts are drawing attention to the role of school schedules in employment decisions, empirical research on the topic is all but non-existent. The Commission of the European Communities (1990) reports that women with children aged five to nine have higher activity rates in European countries that have continuous school-days, compared with those with school schedules characterized by attendance in shifts, short school-days, or days broken by a lunch break. In a study of four English-speaking countries, Gornick (1994) presents evidence of sharp increases in mothers' employment rates that correspond to the age at which compulsory education begins in each country.

Employment-supporting policies in comparative perspective

There have been several efforts in recent years to compile information on family policies, including child care and parental leave, in industrialized and developing countries. Comparative studies take several forms. First, there are several compendia of quantitative and qualitative data on program rules and/or expenditures.⁴ Compendia typically present information on large numbers of countries but with relatively little detail; none, unfortunately, contains data on child care expenditures or on important parental leave details such as coverage and take-up rates. Another important literature comprises volumes of country case-studies that describe child care and parental-leave policies in great detail (Baker, 1996; Cochran, 1993; Kahn and Kamerman, 1994; Kamerman and Kahn, 1978, 1994; Olmsted and Weikart, 1989; Woodhill et al., 1992). While these case-studies present rich historical, institutional, and programmatic detail, it is difficult to use them to paint a comparative portrait because policy features are not consistently measured. Finally, a number of scholars have compared the institutional detail of family policies across several countries, focusing on either single policies or policy configurations (Bradshaw et al., 1993; Ergas, 1990; Gauthier, 1991; Gormley and Peters, 1992; Gustafsson, 1994; Leira, 1993; Scheiwe, 1994; Wennemo, 1994; Wilensky, 1990). These studies provide important insights about variation in the architecture of family policies, and about associated outcomes, such as inequality and family poverty. Few have considered women's access to employment explicitly as a policy goal.

In the last decade, feminist scholars have turned their attention to incorporating questions of gender equality into welfare-state theory and research. Recent works have focused on the effects of family policies on a range of outcomes that are important to women, particularly women's integration into

the labor market and their economic independence vis-a-vis the family (Lewis and Ostner, 1991; O'Connor, 1993; Orloff, 1993; Sainsbury, 1994; Siaroff, 1994). This new generation of scholarship has highlighted important subtleties in the impact of welfare-state policies on women's status as citizens, workers, and family members. The classic framing of welfare-state development in terms of the interaction between the state and the market is currently giving way to more nuanced analyses that consider interdependencies among the state, market, and family.

A focus on policies that disproportionately affect women is also evident in recent challenges to welfare-state regime theory. It is now commonplace for comparative scholars of the welfare state to speak of clusters of countries (i.e. groups of countries with similar characteristics, typically in relation to national-level public institutions). Esping-Andersen's (1990) empirically based model is the most well known. He posits the existence of three variants of the capitalist welfare-state – the social democratic (primarily the Nordic countries), the conservative-corporatist (dominated by the European continental countries) and the liberal (primarily the English-speaking countries). Each regime type is characterized by a relatively similar set of social policies and by corresponding socio-economic outcomes and employment patterns. Esping-Andersen argues, specifically, that each welfare-state model is associated with a distinct labor-market trajectory for women. Female employment levels would be expected to differ across regime types, with high levels of female employment in the *social democratic* countries (in which demand is driven by the large public sector and supply by extensive service provision); moderate levels in the *liberal* countries (largely market-driven); and lower levels in the *conservative-corporatist* countries (due to the historic marginalization of female workers and the existence of policies that encourage mothers to remain in the home).

A small body of empirical work has challenged the Esping-Andersen cluster model by

focusing on *intra*-cluster variation in policies and outcomes with disproportionate importance for women. Detailed comparisons of social policy across the Nordic countries, for example, reveal significant variation in government support for maternal employment. This policy variation corresponds to variation in female employment, with Norway diverging from the other social-democratic welfare states in having both lower levels of government support for the employment of mothers and lower levels of maternal employment as well (Borchorst, 1994; Leira, 1993; Sainsbury, 1996). Gornick (1994) finds similar variation across four English-speaking countries, with inter-country differences in maternal employment patterns corresponding closely to differences in the generosity of public child care and leave provisions. Bussemaker and van Kersbergen (1996) conclude that policy variation among the conservative regime countries leads to divergent women's employment patterns between Belgium and Germany, on the one hand, and Italy and the Netherlands, on the other.

Research issues

The relationship between public policies and employment outcomes demands further study; cross-national research designs are clearly promising because policy variations that cannot be observed within a single country can be seen across countries. Comparative scholarship on the effect of family policies on maternal employment has been limited by both the lack of comparable data and by the use of policy variables that have been, paradoxically, operationalized either too broadly (e.g. all spending on families) or too narrowly (e.g. child care variables alone).

A first important challenge for cross-national research is the *disaggregation* of family policy. Although maternity leave, child care, and school policies are often subsumed

under the umbrella of family policy, they represent a specialized subset of all benefits provided to families with children. To the extent that family policies, construed broadly, are directed toward goals other than supporting maternal employment – such as reducing family poverty or increasing fertility – this subset of policies may be weak even in countries with otherwise generous social provisions for families.

A second important challenge is the *aggregation* of specific policy indicators into measures of the larger packages of policies that affect maternal employment. Single policies are poor indicators of overall government efforts to achieve complex policy goals. Some policies may be near substitutes for one another; for example, direct spending on public child care and tax expenditures that reduce the cost of private care may represent alternative strategies for the achievement of a common goal. In other cases, the impact of policies is more nearly additive. The generosity of maternity-leave provisions, for example, depends both on the length of the leave and on the average wage replacement rate during that period. Policies can interact in an even more complex fashion. The overall generosity of maternity leave, for example, is mediated in some countries by eligibility restrictions that narrow the pool of potential claimants. In the case of family policies, interactions over time may also be important. For example, employed mothers may face disruptive breakdowns in child care as their children age because public preschools provide better coverage for young children than do intermittent school-days for older children.

This study addresses these challenges by identifying, compiling and aggregating multiple indicators of the subset of family policies that are expected to support maternal employment.

Methods

Selection of countries

The 14 countries in this study were selected to correspond to the core group of micro-datasets included in the Luxembourg Income Study. The Luxembourg Income Study (LIS) is a public access archive of micro-datasets gathered from a diverse set of industrialized countries and made comparable. The datasets are based primarily on household surveys or tax records; they contain demographic, employment, and detailed income data at the household and individual level.⁵ The decision to link policy measures to micro-data available through LIS dictated both the countries to be included in this study and the year of initial observation. This article presents baseline policy data that corresponds to the second wave of the LIS micro-data, the period 1984–7.⁶

Selection of policy indicators

Four criteria guided the final selection of the 18 policy indicators included in this study.

First, the indicator measured an aspect of policy reasonably assumed to be under government control. Maternal employment patterns are shaped by policy and non-policy factors, and by both public and private sector policies. Non-policy factors include demographic characteristics, wage and occupational structures, and prevailing norms about gender roles and the care of children. Employment patterns are also influenced by the policies of private employers, child care professionals, and other non-governmental entities. This study concentrates on indicators of *public policies*. Factors that influence labor-market patterns but are only indirectly under the control of governments, such as dominant beliefs about gender roles and characteristics of private child care arrangements, are excluded.

Second, the indicator captured a policy feature that labor-supply theory predicts will affect a mother's decisions to enter or to remain in paid work. Public family policies typically balance several competing goals. This analysis does not assume that support for maternal employment was a primary or even explicit goal of the policies measured by each indicator. Public child care may be provided, for example, for reasons related to child welfare or child development. Regardless of the explicit or implicit policy goal, a larger supply of free or low-cost public child care is expected to increase the probability that mothers will enter employment. Indicators included in this study are assumed to support mothers' decisions to enter or remain in paid labor by: (1) strengthening mothers' labor-force attachments at the time of childbirth; (2) increasing paternal involvement in child care-giving activities; (3) increasing the supply or reducing the cost of non-parental child care; and/or (4) extending the time children are cared for in public schools or by removing discontinuities in children's school schedules.

Third, the indicator was exogenous to individual employment decisions. Because decisions about employment and child care arrangements may be simultaneous, specifying policy measures that are exogenous to individual employment decisions is difficult. Measures included in this study are limited to indicators of government policies that are logically independent of or precede the employment decisions of individual women. For example, the assumption here is that enrollment in publicly funded child care is a better measure of supply (because supply is set by public policies and appropriations) than enrollment in all forms of non-parental care (which is a function of both public policy and private family and market arrangements). The distinction is not absolute. All family policies may reflect constituent demands for benefits that are consistent with prevailing employment preferences and behaviors. For individual decisionmakers, however, the availability of publicly subsidized child care likely repre-

sents a fixed characteristic influencing labor-supply preferences and choices.

Fourth, reliable and reasonably comparable data were available for all of the 14 countries. There are two exceptions to this general rule. First, data on child care expenditures were available in only six of the 14 countries and, second, data on enrollments in publicly funded after-school child care were available in only six countries. Although data on these two indicators were incomplete, they are included because they enhance cross-national comparisons significantly. Other indicators that would be helpful for differentiating national performance, such as the hours during which public child care is routinely available, were excluded because reliable data were available for too few countries.

It is important to clarify that other public policies that potentially affect the labor supply of women were excluded from this study. These policies, which extend beyond the traditional boundaries of *family* policy, include: (1) income transfer rules, especially those that determine benefit reductions associated with earnings; (2) public policies that encourage part-time work, for example, through the adoption of worker protections (e.g. wage equity for part-time workers and mandatory pro-rating of benefits) or through substantial demand for part-time workers in public employment; (3) marginal tax rates and the tax treatment of spouses; and (4) the public provision of health services and/or insurance for adults and their children.

These policies were excluded for a variety of reasons. First, income transfer rules, especially rules on the withdrawal of means-tested benefits, are mostly likely to affect the labor supply of lone mothers who are dependent on means-tested benefits. The labor-market behaviour of these mothers is very different from that of mothers whose primary income sources are family and employment-based; this study emphasizes policies affecting the latter group, which includes married mothers and lone mothers who do not substantially rely on income transfers. Second, policies that increase

part-time work clearly have mixed effects on women's employment outcomes, in that they encourage employment but at limited hours and in a limited range of occupations. This study is restricted to policies that facilitate both participation and hours and to those that potentially widen (or at least do not constrain) occupational opportunities. Third, marginal tax rates and the tax treatment of spouses are known to affect women's labor supply but the effects of tax rules are largely differentiated according to women's *marital* status, not their *parenting* status; the focus here is on policies that affect mothers' employment specifically. Finally, policies that shape the availability of health services and/or insurance were excluded largely due to data limitations; the labor-

supply effects of health benefits that are tightly linked to employment, as in the United States, clearly demand further attention.

Data sources and operationalization of indicators

The 18 indicators used in this study are described in Table 1. Data were collected from published comparative reports and from country-specific sources. In addition, policy experts in each country reviewed preliminary findings and corrected data as necessary.⁷

The first six indicators measure policies that

Table 1 Measures used in indices, by index

Measure	Maximum effort	Policies that support employment for mothers with		
		Children under three	Children aged three to school-age	School-aged children
Legislated job protection	Yes	X		
Paid maternity leave	52 weeks	X		
Wage replacement rate	100%	X		
Coverage	100%	X		
Extended leave	n/a			
Paternity benefits	Yes	X		
Child care expenditures	n/a			
Tax relief for child care	\$2600	X	X	X
Guarantee child care coverage (0-2)	Ages 0-2	X		
Guaranteed child care coverage (3-5)	Ages 3-5		X	
Percent children (0-2) in publicly funded child care	100	X		
Percent children (3-school-age) in publicly funded child care	100		X	
Percent children (age 5) in preprimary or school	100		X	
Percent children in publicly funded after-school care	100			X
Age of compulsory school	Age 5			X
School-day	40 hours/week			X
School-year	260 days			X
Continuous school-day	Yes			X

Note: Two of the 18 indicators in the database were not used in the indices. Extended leave was omitted because the degree to which it supports maternal employment in the long run has not been established. In addition, child care expenditures were excluded due to data limitations.

influence the generosity or availability of benefits for new parents. The next eight indicators measure public efforts in the area of child care. These eight include two measures of national child care expenditures (direct spending and tax expenditures), two indicators of age-specific child care entitlements (through national legislation or administrative policy) and four age-specific measures of public or publicly subsidized child care enrollments (as a proxy for the supply of low or no-cost public care). Four final measures capture public school policies that increase the supply of de facto child care through early school enrollments and through school schedules that more closely correspond to the standard full-time, full-year employment schedule.

Index construction

A set of indices were constructed from the 18 indicators in order to capture policy configurations that affect mothers with children of different ages. As necessary, country-specific data were converted into common metrics: for example, expenditures were converted to 1987 United States dollars. Disparate indicators were rendered comparable by standardizing them as percentages of *maximum levels of policy effort* (see Table 1). Supply of public child care, for example, is standardized as the percentage of children in a given age range in public or publicly subsidized child care; maternity benefit duration is standardized as a percentage of 52 weeks; school-hours are standardized as a percentage of a typical 40-hour work-week. In a few instances, it was necessary to designate an absolute maximum based on empirically derived values. For example, tax credits are standardized as a fraction of US \$2600, an estimate of the minimum annual cost for full-time private child care in the United States in 1987. In other cases, the presence of a policy (e.g. the availability of paternity benefits) was coded as one and its ab-

sence as zero. After individual indicators were converted into comparable units, they were weighted and summed into age-specific indices.

The first index, *Policies that Support Employment for Mothers with Children under Age Six*, comprises two component indices. One, *Policies that Support Employment for Mothers with Children from Birth to Age Three* (Infants), combines eight indicators measuring provisions that protect women's employment and wages at the time of childbirth and that provide alternatives to maternal care for infants and toddlers. Four indicators of the generosity and coverage of maternity leaves are included and weighted by one-half to reflect the limited period of time that they are available (typically the first 12 to 18 months after childbirth). The generosity of national child care provisions is measured through the inclusion of indicators for a national child care entitlement, the generosity of child care tax credits or deductions, and the supply of public child care for children under age three. A final indicator, whether any leave is available to fathers (coded as yes or no), is included as a measure of both the generosity of parental leave and the availability of non-maternal child care and is weighted by half to reflect its indirect relationship to mothers' employment decisions.

The other component of the first index, *Policies that Support Employment for Mothers with Children Aged Three to School-age* (Preschoolers), combines four indicators that reflect government efforts to increase the supply of public child care. Tax expenditures and the existence of a child care entitlement for children aged three to five are included, along with enrollments in public or publicly subsidized child care for this age group. To adjust for the impact of the age of school enrollment on parents' need for child care, a fourth variable is included to measure the percentage of five-year-old children enrolled in publicly supported child care, preprimary, or primary school. This measure was weighted by one-third to reflect the fact that five-year-old

children make up approximately one-third of the children in this age group.

The final index measures *Policies that Support Employment for Mothers with School-aged Children*. The importance of the correspondence of school schedules to regular employment hours dictated the inclusion of measures for the age of compulsory schooling and the length and continuity of public school schedules. The compulsory school-age variable is weighted by one-third because variation in school starting-age affects only a fraction of school-age children. Because employed parents also need child care during the hours when school is not in session, the index also includes measures for tax expenditures and enrollments in public after-school care. Due to severe limitations on data on after-school enrollments, it was possible to include only six of the original countries in this index.

Finally, numeric scores for each index were converted into aggregate measures of maximum effort ranging from 0 to 100, with 100 representing 100 percent of the maximum achievable score for this index. Table 1 presents the measures used in the indices; index formulas, values, and country rankings are reported in Table 5. Although the results for each index are presented in like units, index scores for individual countries cannot be compared *across indices*. Values for individual items and for the indices as a whole are very sensitive to the selection of items, coding, and standardization. Index scores can be meaningfully compared only within individual indices. Comparisons of performances across indices should be restricted to comparisons of countries' relative performances (i.e. their ranks).⁸

Analysis

The analyses in this article are primarily descriptive. Individual data elements measuring parental leave, child care, and school schedules are first compared across the 14 countries. Age-specific indices are then analyzed to ident-

ify clusters of high and low performing countries with respect to policy packages that support the decisions of mothers to enter or to remain in the labor market. Country rankings are compared, within and across indices, to identify discontinuities in policies supporting maternal employment for women with children of different ages.

The final step in the analysis considers the role of employment-supporting policies in the larger framework of national-level family policy. Countries' scores on the index of *Policies that Support Employment for Mothers with Children under Age Six* are compared to their performance on an aggregate measure of spending on family benefits: annual cash transfers per child under age 15. Expenditure data are adapted from Kamerman and Kahn (1991b) and include family and child allowances, public assistance benefits, and special family-related income and housing allowance benefits.⁹ Expenditures on child care and parental leave benefits are *not* included.

Findings

Policy performance: parental leave, child care, school schedules

Parental leave As of the middle to late 1980s, all but three of the countries made near-universal provisions for job protection and wage replacement in the months following the birth of a child (see Table 2). The United States and Australia were the most prominent exceptions. The United States had no national law providing job protection at the time of childbirth; in Australia, federal law guaranteed up to 12 months of job protection but provided no wage replacement. The United Kingdom also fell short relative to other countries, primarily because eligibility restrictions (e.g. on minimum earnings and job tenure) were such that only approximately 60 percent of employed women had access to both job protection and wage replacement.

Table 3 Child care policies: public support and public supply

Country	Tax relief for child care	Guaranteed child care coverage (0-2)	Age - years	Guaranteed child care coverage (3-5)	Age - years	% Children (0-2) in publicly funded child care	% Children (3-school-age) in publicly funded child care	% Children (age 5) in preprimary or school care	% Children in publicly funded after-school care	Child care expenditures
	1987 US dollars									1987 US dollars
Australia	0	none	none	none	none	2	26	90	n/a	n/a
Belgium	1118	0-2	none	none	none	20	95	99	n/a	n/a
Canada	851	none	none	none	none	5	35	98	n/a	43
Denmark	0	0-2	3-5	3-5	3-5	48	85	80	29	n/a
Finland	198	0-2	3-5	3-5	3-5	32	59	59	n/a	1212
France	699	2	3-5	3-5	3-5	20	95	100	n/a	630
Germany	0	none	none	none	none	2	78	85	4	n/a
Italy	0	none	3-5	3-5	3-5	5	88	88	n/a	n/a
Luxembourg	599	none	none	none	none	2	58	99	2	n/a
Netherlands	384	none	none	none	none	2	53	99	n/a	n/a
Norway	342	none	none	none	none	12	40	50	n/a	508
Sweden	0	>18 mo.	3-5	3-5	3-5	32	79	79	34	1885
United Kingdom	0	none	none	none	none	2	38	100	<1	n/a
United States	685	none	none	none	none	1	14	87	<1	44

Table 2 Public parental leave policies

Country	Legislated job protection	Paid maternity leave (Weeks)	Wage replacement rate (% Wages)	Coverage (% Employed women)	Extended leave (Weeks)	Paternity benefits
Australia	yes	12	60	10	52	yes
Belgium	yes	14	77	100	0	no
Canada	yes	15	60	100	0	no
Denmark	yes	18	90	100	10	yes
Finland	yes	43	80	100	111	yes
France	yes	16	84	100	140	yes
Germany	yes	14	100	100	0	yes
Italy	yes	20	80	100	136	yes
Luxembourg	yes	16	100	100	0	no
Netherlands	yes	12	100	100	0	no
Norway	yes	18	100	100	26	yes
Sweden	yes	52	90	100	26	yes
United Kingdom	yes	18	46	60	22	no
United States	no	6	60	25	0	no

Note: For detailed notes on the data in Tables 2-4, see Gornick et al. (1996a).

In the other countries, all or nearly all employed women were covered by national job protection and wage replacement benefits. The length of protection and adequacy of wage replacement varied substantially. At the high end, generous, universal systems in three Nordic countries (Sweden, Finland and Norway) provided full or nearly full wage replacement for six months to one year. In Finland, generous paid leave was supplemented with over two years of extended, job-protected leave; in Sweden, parents had a right to unpaid leave until the child was 18 months old.

In about half of the countries, mothers' employment – and paternal involvement in early child care – was facilitated by the extension of some form of paid or unpaid leave to fathers. In general, countries with more extensive maternity benefits were more likely to provide benefits to fathers. Some exceptions are notable. Australia, with very limited benefits for women, did extend limited benefits to fathers as well. At the same time, a few countries with relatively generous policies for mothers had made no provisions for fathers – including Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands.

Child care All 14 countries made some public investments in child care. As with parental-leave policies, however, the form and intensity of support varied markedly (see Table 3). Reasonably comparable data on direct child care expenditures were available for only six countries. At the high end, Sweden spent \$1885 (in 1987 US dollars) per year per child under 15 and Finland spent \$1212. At the low end, the United States and Canada each invested less than \$50 per child. Data were available for all countries on indirect tax expenditures that are aimed at offsetting the cost of private household expenditures on child care. Tax relief was available in eight countries. The generosity of these provisions varied from a high of \$1118 in Belgium to a low of \$198 annually for one child in Finland (in 1987 US dollars).

For the six countries with complete expenditure data, there is some evidence of a policy trade-off between direct and indirect expenditures. Those countries with the smallest direct investments, the United States and Canada, were relatively generous in their provision of tax assistance. Tax credits were low or non-existent in Sweden and Finland, where direct

investments were high. The two middle-level countries, France and Norway, had moderate levels of spending through both direct and indirect mechanisms.

An important indicator of government commitment to the provision of child care is the adoption of national legislation that explicitly guarantees access to public or publicly subsidized care.¹⁰ By the late 1980s, only three of the 14 countries – Denmark, Finland, and Sweden – had adopted legislation that established child care as a right for all (or nearly all) children under the age of six. France guaranteed child care to all children aged two to five; Belgium had extended the promise of universal coverage to younger children (birth to age two) but not to older preschool children.¹¹

In the provision of child care for infants, Denmark was the clear leader with 48 percent of children under age three in publicly supported care. Four additional countries (Belgium, Finland, France and Sweden) also had relatively high rates of public provision, with 20 to 32 percent of children under age three in care. Provision for children under age three fell substantially in the remaining countries, with twelve percent of children in Norway and fewer than 5 percent of children in the remaining countries enrolled in public or publicly funded care.

Public child care provisions were more highly developed for preschool children. In four countries (Belgium, Denmark, France and Italy), over 85 percent of children were in public day-care or preschools. At the other end of the spectrum, four countries (Australia, Canada, Norway and the United Kingdom) enrolled only 25 to 40 percent of preschool children in publicly supported care. The United States again stands out as the exceptional case. Although use of all forms of non-parental care is relatively high in the United States, the heavy reliance on private arrangements and narrowly targeted means-testing for public benefits was evident in the enrollment of fewer than 15 percent of preschoolers in publicly supported care.

Levels of public child care arrangements for

children begin to converge as children age and school enrollment is considered. When child care and school enrollments are combined for five-year-old children, virtually all countries made public provisions for 80 to 100 percent of children. Here, only Norway (50 percent) and Finland (59 percent) stand out.

Data on the supply of after-school child care for school-age children were available for only six countries. In this group, Denmark and Sweden were once again the most generous, with 29 to 34 percent of children covered. After-school enrollments were much lower in the other four countries for which data were available; estimates ranged from 5 percent to less than 1 percent in Germany, Luxembourg, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Public school schedules The start of formal schooling marks an important transition for families and an important shift in the structure of policies supporting mothers' entry into paid labor. All of the industrialized countries provided universal access to government-sponsored schools. Table 4 shows that the details of school scheduling varied.

Entry to school ranged from early enrollment at age five (in Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom) to later enrollment by age six in most other countries. Finland, Denmark and Sweden did not begin compulsory school until age seven. The number of school-days per year varied cross-nationally from 175 to 220; this represents a range of 45 additional days or nine additional weeks of school.

Variation was also substantial in the average number of hours per week that children attend school. Most countries appeared to trade-off school attendance and the length of the school year. Countries with the longest weekly hours – Australia, Belgium, Canada, France, the United Kingdom and the United States all kept children in school from 32 to 35 hours each week – had short to moderate school years.

Low weekly school-hours were particularly incompatible with employment schedules

Table 4 School policies

Country	Age of compulsory school (Age-years)	School-hours (Hours per week)	School-year (Days per year)	Continuous school-day
Australia	6	35	198	yes
Belgium	6	35	185	yes
Canada	6	35	180	yes
Denmark	7	21	200	sometimes
Finland	7	25	190	yes
France	6	35	175	no
Germany	6	25	213	no
Italy	6	27	220	sometimes
Luxembourg	5	30	220	no
Netherlands	5	29	220	sometimes
Norway	6	30	190	yes
Sweden	7	30	190	yes
United Kingdom	5	33	190	yes
United States	6	33	185	yes

when school schedules were also discontinuous. Children in two countries, Germany and Luxembourg, were routinely sent home for lunch in the middle of the day. The typical school week in Luxembourg was also disrupted by the scheduling of two half-days during the week (supplemented by a half-day Saturday session). In-school supervision for children during the lunch period was inconsistent in Denmark, Italy and the Netherlands. France had one of the longest school weeks (35 hours), but the schedule corresponded poorly to typical adult employment hours because schools were routinely closed on Wednesdays.

The indices: packaging policies that support maternal employment

Individual policy indicators paint a complex portrait. It is difficult, however, to reach general conclusions about the intensity of government support for maternal employment. Given the extent to which different policies may substitute and interact, and the importance to employed mothers of continuity in public supports, conclusions about policy-achievement based on any single indicator may be mis-

leading. Composite indices provide more parsimonious measures of relative country performance. By considering policies according to the ages of children affected, these indices also provide a more complete and nuanced portrait of policy achievement.

Policies aimed at children under age six Figure 1(a) uses the first index to compare the intensity of government support for employment among mothers with children under the age of six; index values are reported in Table 5. Three loose clusters are revealed. The six countries with policies most supportive of maternal employment are France and three Nordic countries (Finland, Denmark and Sweden), followed by Belgium and Italy. A middle tier of countries includes a heterogeneous group of five countries – Luxembourg, Germany, Canada, the Netherlands and Norway. Three English-speaking countries – Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States – were the least supportive of maternal employment.¹²

Figures 1(b) and 1(c) compare the intensity of government support for mothers with infants to public support for mothers with preschoolers. Several conclusions about continuity in employment-supporting policies are suggested.

Table 5 Policies that support employment for mothers: index values and ranks

Country	Policies for mothers with children under six		Policies for mothers with children under three		Policies for mothers with children aged three to school-age		Policies for mothers with school-aged children	
	Index value	Rank	Index value	Rank	Index value	Rank	Index value	Rank
Australia	19.2	13	21.6	13	16.8	14		
Belgium	55.6	5	60.0	4	51.3	6		
Canada	32.4	9	34.7	10	30.1	9		
Denmark	63.7	2	63.9	2	63.5	3	41.9	4
Finland	60.8	4	65.8	1	55.9	5		
France	64.9	1	53.2	5	76.6	1		
Germany	34.1	8	36.2	8	31.9	8	32.6	6
Italy	50.6	6	36.0	9	65.2	2		
Luxembourg	35.2	7	36.3	7	34.1	7	41.4	5
Netherlands	32.0	10	34.0	11	30.1	10		
Norway	31.2	11	41.4	6	20.9	12		
Sweden	61.9	3	62.3	3	61.6	4	55.5	2
United Kingdom	21.6	12	22.0	12	21.3	11	54.6	3
United States	17.1	14	13.6	14	20.7	13	57.0	1

Note: Index scores were calculated using weighted combinations of the relevant indicators as follows:

Policies for mothers with children under six

0.50 (Policies for mothers with children under three + Policies for mothers with children aged three to school-age)

Policies for mothers with children under three

0.50 [Legislated job protection + (Coverage)*(Paid maternity leave) + Wage replacement rate + Coverage + 0.50 (Paternity benefits)] + Tax relief for child care + Guaranteed child care coverage (0-2) + Percent children (0-2) in publicly funded child care

Policies for mothers with children aged three to school-age

Tax relief for child care + Guaranteed child care coverage (3-5) + Percent children (3-school-age) in publicly funded child care + 0.33 (Percent children (age 5) in preprimary or school)

Policies for mothers with school-aged children

Tax relief for child care + Percent children in publicly funded after-school care + 0.33 (Age of compulsory school) + School-day + School-year + Continuous school-day.

First, government support for maternal employment was fairly consistent for most (but not all) countries across these age groups. The five countries that were the most generous in provisions aimed at families with infants also provided generous benefits aimed at preschoolers. The same is true at the other extreme: the three English-speaking countries with the weakest provisions for infants remain clustered at the bottom in provisions for preschoolers. Women in these three countries had less complete employment protections at childbirth, were less likely to have wage protections during the following months, and had much more constrained access to public child care.

Second, country ranks move *within* the loose clusters described above, suggesting subtle differences in national policy emphases. France, for example, is among the high performers on both indices, but is *more* supportive of employment for mothers of preschoolers. This shift reflects the strong French commitment to nearly universal enrollment of children in *écoles maternelles* beginning at age three, but somewhat limited parental leaves, and relatively modest rates of public child care provisions for infants. Finland represents nearly the opposite case, shifting from the most generous in support of mothers with infants to a position of poorer

performance (relative to other countries) in provisions for preschoolers. This reflects Finnish family policy, as of the middle to late 1980s, that emphasized benefits for families with infants – through both home-care allowances and a child care entitlement. Although there was a larger supply of public child care for preschoolers than for infants, greater demand for care as children aged produced a larger gap between need and supply. Limited spaces in public child care for preschoolers were allocated on the basis of age and family income.

Finally, more dramatic change in relative performance for two countries – Norway and Italy – exemplifies serious discontinuities in policies. Norway declines markedly from providing moderately generous benefits for infants to falling near the bottom in provisions for preschoolers. During the late 1980s, Norway provided extensive and generous maternity leaves for employed women, but those leave benefits were coupled with low levels of public child care provisions for the under-threes, relatively modest investments in child care for preschoolers, and a late start on compulsory education. Although mothers had generous support in the months after childbirth, public support was limited once maternity leaves were exhausted. Italy's family policies represented yet another combination: moderate support for mothers with infants and generous provisions for those with preschool children. Italy provided generous maternity policies and widespread preschool coverage for children over age three, with a significant gap in public child care for infants and toddlers. During the period between the end of maternity benefits and the beginning of public preschool at age three, Italian mothers faced significant barriers to employment.

From the preschool to the school years: policies for families with children aged six to twelve Figure 1(d) depicts relative country performance on policies for mothers with school-age children in the six countries for which complete data were obtained. Most

salient here is the dramatic shift in the composition of the more highly performing group: the three countries with the most employment-supportive policies on this index are the United States, Sweden and the United Kingdom. The United States and the United Kingdom score highly due to long weekly school-hours and continuous and regular school schedules; the United Kingdom also began compulsory school at a young age (age five) and kept students in school for a relatively long portion of the year. Sweden delayed compulsory schooling until age seven and had somewhat shorter school hours, but the potential disadvantage of these policies for employed mothers was offset by extensive public after-school care.

The three lower scoring countries for this age group – Denmark, Germany and Luxembourg – had diverse policy packages. Average total weekly school-hours in Denmark were among the lowest in these 14 countries and the age of compulsory schooling was seven. The resultant downward pressures on maternal employment options were partially offset by relatively high levels of after-school care. Luxembourg and Germany exemplify particularly difficult policy combinations with respect to maternal employment. In these countries, the combination of irregular school-hours with low levels of public after-school care resulted in hours of coverage that were substantially at odds with parental employment schedules, especially full-time schedules.

Employment support as a component of the family policy package

The 14 countries in this study varied dramatically in the generosity and continuity of public support for maternal employment. These policies capture an important dimension of family policy, but they represent only one component of the full package of benefits targeted on families with children. Another crucial form of government support is cash transfers provided directly to parents.

Figure 2 analyzes the relationship between family policy benefits provided through support for maternal employment (the index of policies relevant to mothers with children under age six) and through direct cash assistance (spending on child allowances and means-tested assistance). Twelve countries for which complete data were available are compared.

About half of these countries made comparable commitments on both dimensions of family policy. Denmark, France and Sweden represent generous welfare states with policies that provided extensive support for the employment of mothers and a generous system of direct transfers to families. Germany and Norway represent the middle level on both dimensions: moderate and inconsistent support for maternal employment and medium levels of support through direct family transfers. The United States was consistent in its *lack* of support for families; direct income transfers were low and government support for mothers' employment was extremely weak by international standards.

Another six countries represent mixed models of family support. Two extremes are notable. The United Kingdom represents a 'low employment-support/high cash transfers' combination in which child care and parental-leave policies were limited, but a combination of universal and means-tested transfers provided relatively generous cash assistance to families. Finland and Italy represent the contrasting 'low cash transfers/high employment-support' package of family benefits: a strong commitment to child care and maternity leaves but relatively low levels of direct income assistance.

Conclusions

These indices reveal cross-national variation in public policies that support maternal employment, both when considered alone and as part of a larger package of family support. This

Family transfers per child under age 15

High (>\$800)	United Kingdom	Netherlands	Denmark France Sweden
Medium (\$500-\$799)	Australia	Germany Norway	
Low (\$200-\$499)	United States	Canada	Finland Italy
	Low	Medium	High

Policies that support employment for mothers with children under age six

Figure 2 Policies that support employment for mothers by family transfers per child under age 15, 1984 (in 1980 US dollars, converted with OECD PPP series)

Source: Kamerman and Kahn, 1991b

Note: Comparable expenditure data for Belgium and Luxembourg not available.

policy variation is of substantive interest, because the adequacy of these policies affects both the strength of women's labor-force attachments and the economic well-being of families. The patterns of cross-national variation are also of interest theoretically because they challenge prevailing models of welfare regime types.

Labor-market research indicates that women's employment rates and their patterns of employment vary considerably across these same industrialized countries. OECD (1994) reports, for example, widespread variation, with respect to women's ages, in labor-force participation rates in the late 1980s. In Finland, France and Sweden, women's participation patterns resembled men's: their participation rates rose and fell smoothly with age, i.e. in an inverted U-shape. In Germany and the Netherlands, in contrast, women's participation rates were highest among women in their mid-twenties and they fell steadily from that point; this 'left-peak' pattern diverged markedly from the male pattern in these countries. In Australia and the United Kingdom, women's rates rose, then fell (among women in their late-twenties), and then rose again, in an 'M-shaped' pattern that was once again unlike that of their male counterparts.

These data suggest that women's labor-market behavior varies across countries in response to the addition of children into their lives. Other researchers, using multivariate designs, also report that the magnitude of the negative effect of having young children on mothers' labor supply varies across the industrialized countries (Gornick, 1994; Knudsen and Peters, 1994; Phipps, 1993). The role that public policies play in shaping these labor-supply responses remains largely unmeasured. The policy indices presented in this article provide an improved measure of the policy variations that may underlie cross-national variation in mothers' employment patterns.¹³

For women with children below school-age, the most developed policy package combined job protection and wage replacement at the time of childbirth, provisions for the care of

infants through extended leave and/or publicly subsidized child care, and support for the care of children over age three in the form of public child care and/or early enrollment in public school. In the middle-to-late 1980s, only 5 of the 14 countries in this study had reasonably complete and continuous provisions for this age group. In these countries – Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France and Sweden – mothers would be able to enter and remain in full-time paid work with minimal career disruptions and earnings losses due to child care responsibilities. Labor-supply theory and prior research would lead to a prediction of higher levels, and more continuous patterns, of maternal employment in these countries; the OECD data suggest an employment picture along these lines.

In the remaining countries, government provisions were far more limited and/or discontinuous. In some countries, such as Germany and the Netherlands, moderately generous maternity-leave policies allowed women to leave the workplace at the time of childbirth without severing their employment, but the lack of child care left them with few options for care after leaves were exhausted. In these countries, women with children might be expected to accommodate their family responsibilities by reducing their hours of employment or by exiting employment altogether during the years between the end of maternity leaves and the beginning of reliable child care through public centers or public schools. The 'left-peak' pattern of women's participation rates, reported by OECD, is consistent with a story of inadequate supports for women who might otherwise choose to combine paid work and child-rearing.

In a final group of countries, the English-speaking countries in this study, government benefits were altogether limited. Without job protections and access to leaves, many women workers faced stiff penalties for work absences due to childbirth; without publicly subsidized child care, many had few viable alternatives to full-time maternal care of children. It is in these countries that we would expect to ob-

serve the greatest disruptions in employment among mothers with young children; that is, where we expect to see employment patterns that are highly differentiated by children's ages. The 'M-shaped' pattern seen in some of these countries – indicating a pattern of exit and re-entry – suggests that women in these countries were responding to inadequate supports by temporarily exiting the labor force.

The cross-national picture was very different with respect to policies for mothers with school-aged children. There is evidence that countries with very strong commitments to policies supporting maternal employment when children are young – such as Sweden – continue this support through a combination of continuous school-days and after-school child care. Much more notable is the change in relative performance of the United States and the United Kingdom, which emerge as strong performers with respect to school-aged children. Early school enrollments, long school-days and years are consistent with the historical commitment to free public education in these countries. Provision of many hours of de facto child care may be an important byproduct of these policies, and might enable mothers of older children to enter the labor market and/or to extend their hours of paid work.

Policies that increase employment options directly enhance mothers' labor-market opportunities. These policies also have important and frequently overlooked implications for the economic well-being of families. All of the industrialized countries in this study have social insurance and social assistance programs designed to reduce the risk that families will fall into poverty. In many, these programs have aimed to protect, augment, or replace the earnings of a male breadwinner – e.g. through unemployment insurance, child benefits, or lone parent allowances. With the growing importance of *women's* earnings to household income – in both dual and single-earner families – policies affecting mothers' employment are an increasingly important component of anti-poverty policy. Dramatic cross-national

diversity in the economic well-being of both families and children has been well documented, and the role that income transfers play in reducing poverty rates is well understood (Rainwater and Smeeding, 1995). Much less appreciated is the effect of policies that support mothers' employment on reducing poverty among families. The indices presented in this article permit more complete analyses of family benefit packages that combine both types of policies.

As shown in Figure 2, a few of the countries included in this study packaged generous cash transfers to families with extensive supports for mothers' employment. Evidence of the effectiveness of this package as a *poverty-reduction* strategy can be found in the low levels of post-transfer child poverty, reported by Rainwater and Smeeding (1995) for the mid-to-late 1980s, in Denmark (3 percent), France (7 percent) and Sweden (3 percent). The opposite extreme – meager cash transfers combined with few supports for continuous maternal employment – likely contributed to exceptionally high levels of poverty among children in the United States (22 percent) during this period. More complex policy interactions may be observed in those countries that had 'mixed' packages of family supports. Several of these countries had child poverty rates in the middle of the range seen in the industrialized countries – including Australia (14 percent), Canada (14 percent), Italy (10 percent) and the United Kingdom (10 percent) (Rainwater and Smeeding 1995) – suggesting that the two policy strategies may work in tandem to reduce family poverty.

This study also suggests a third direction for future empirical work – the integration of policies related to women's employment into research on welfare-state regimes. As noted earlier, Esping-Andersen's (1990) tripartite welfare-state typology has dominated comparative analyses of the welfare state in recent years. His work catalyzed a wave of feminist critiques of mainstream welfare-state research and it has provided a focal point for scholars seeking to integrate gender into research on

the determinants and effects of social policies. One of the most intriguing, yet least developed, components of Esping-Andersen's work is the proposition that each welfare-state model is associated with a distinct labor-market trajectory for women. While a few country cases have been analyzed, neither Esping-Andersen nor his critics have used cross-national data from a large sample of industrialized countries to systematically assess the extent to which each welfare-state model supports the employment of mothers.

The findings from this article provide the outline of a new cross-national policy portrait. The results reported here suggest that Esping-Anderson's clusters fail to cohere with respect to policies that affect women's employment. As seen in Figure 1, the *social democratic* regime type disaggregates as Norway diverges from the other social democratic countries (Denmark, Finland and Sweden). The *conservative* countries reveal little commonality – France and Germany provide an especially sharp contrast – and Canada pulls away from the other *liberal* countries (Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States).¹⁴ These findings should motivate further empirical research aimed at reassessing the dominant welfare-state typology by considering the interplay between policy and women's employment patterns. Ideally, new research will focus on both cross-cluster and intra-cluster variation in policy packages and in women's employment outcomes.

In conclusion, this article finds significant cross-national variation in government policies that are understood to influence women's employment decisions by increasing viable alternatives to full-time maternal child-minding and thus reducing barriers to employment. The extent to which women with children have institutional supports that enable them to choose the option of employment, in turn, shapes both gender equality and the economic well-being of families with children. Despite their importance, these policies – and the economic, political and social outcomes associated with them – remain poorly understood.

Existing cross-national variation in the architecture and intensity of policies that support maternal employment provides a rich opportunity and an important challenge for comparative scholarship and policy analysis.

Notes

- 1 The term 'family policy' has traditionally been broadly inclusive. As Kamerman and Kahn (1978) explain: 'Family policy may be defined as a field in which certain objectives regarding the family are established (e.g. large families, healthier children, less financial burden attached to raising children, more equality for women, well-cared for children, and so forth), and various policies and measures are developed to achieve these goals' (p. 5). Many scholars continue to cast a wide net when comparing family policies; for example, Baker (1996), Gauthier (1991) and Kamerman and Kahn (1978) include in their research on family policy: income transfers, protective laws, and a range of services, including but not limited to policies that support maternal employment.
- 2 This article does not consider policies that potentially affect the employment of fathers, for two reasons. First, a large body of empirical research indicates that while women's participation rates, their hours worked, and their wages, decrease with the presence of children, men's employment patterns and their wages are largely insensitive to their status as parents. Throughout the industrialized countries, employment, specifically full-time employment, remains the norm for working-age men, whether or not they have children. Second, women continue to contribute the majority of household labor and, in general, to maintain primary responsibility for child-rearing in all of the industrialized countries; gender-differentiated employment patterns indicate that trade-offs between paid work and family work remain substantially greater for mothers than for fathers.
- 3 For a presentation of the microeconomic model of female labor supply and its underlying assumptions, see Berndt (1991); Blau and Ferber (1992); Heckman (1993); Killingsworth (1983); or Killingsworth and Heckman (1986).
- 4 Most of these are produced by major international organizations, including the Council of Europe, the European Commission (EC), the International Labor Office (ILO) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).
- 5 For more information on the Luxembourg Income Study (LIS) micro-data, see de Tombeur (1995).

- 6 The family policy data that were gathered for this paper are available via FTP as part of the larger Luxembourg Income Study (LIS) Institutional Database. The Institutional Database, which serves as a companion to the LIS micro-databases, includes descriptive information on the primary tax and transfer programs in the LIS countries. For more information, see LIS Working Papers Nos 7 (de Tombeur, 1995) and 139 (Gornick et al., 1996a).
- 7 For more detailed information about data sources used for this study see LIS Working Paper No. 139 (Gornick et al., 1996a).
- 8 For a detailed discussion of the index construction method used here, see LIS Working Paper No. 139 (Gornick et al., 1996a).
- 9 Expenditures data are adapted from Table 5 in Kamerman and Kahn (1991b). These expenditure data were converted by OECD analysis into 1980 US dollars using purchasing power parities. For this article, expenditure figures were recoded into categories of low (\$200–\$499 per child per year), medium (\$500–\$799) and high (over \$800) spending.
- 10 The adoption of child care guarantees has several possible effects, including: (1) communicating to mothers that the state is committed to assisting them in balancing employment and childrearing; (2) increasing the total supply of child care; and (3) signalling to employers that mothers of young children will be reliable employees, thereby reducing employers' reluctance to offer women opportunities for training and advancement.
- 11 Two other countries had developed policy in this area, but with such weak provisions that no entitlement to employment-supporting child care can be inferred. Italy had extended its guarantee of child care down to children under three, but with a service target so low (5 percent) and so poorly funded as to be meaningless. Germany had an entitlement for preschool children, but the programs to which it applied – part-day, part-week preschool – were poorly attuned to the working schedules of employed parents.
- 12 An earlier study, by Wilensky (1990), included the construction of two indices – for parental leave and child care benefits – for a sample of OECD countries during the period 1976–82. Overall, Wilensky's index values on leave and child care are consistent with parallel indicators contained in this study. Notably, this study scores Canada more highly (relatively) on child care provision and Norway much lower; these discrepancies can be attributed to the inclusion here of tax relief as well as to policy changes over time. In both cases, the use here of continuous scoring and the inclusion of a larger number of variables resulted in more variation across countries. For further information about the relationship between these two sets of indices, please contact the first author. Harold Wilensky graciously provided information about his index construction methods and results.
- 13 See LIS Working Paper No. 140 (Gornick et al., 1996b) for an analysis that links these indices with mothers' labor-market outcomes, specifically with employment patterns that are differentiated by the age of the youngest child.
- 14 Gustafsson (1994) reaches the opposite conclusion – that child care policy patterns can be predicted from Esping-Andersen's typology, but her analysis, based on three countries, is clearly preliminary.

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