Responding to Families: A Focus on Public Policies for Vulnerable Families

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Changes in family structure and type

- birth rates are lower
- marriages occur at older ages
- rates of divorce have increased
- children have fewer siblings
- many children are raised in sole parent or blended families
- more grandparents and fewer children
- parents combine family and career

(Adema, 2012; OECD, 2012)
Policy objectives to advance family wellbeing

- responding to child and family poverty
- developing social protection systems
- enabling parents to have and raise children
- enabling women’s employment and work/family balance
- promoting gender equality in the workforce
- enhancing children’s outcomes early in the life course and beyond
- addressing family violence
United Nations Millennium Development Goals target policy agendas specific to family and child wellbeing

- eradicating poverty
- reducing child mortality
- improving maternal health
- promoting gender equality and empowering women
- universal education
- addressing family violence
Drivers of family policy

- challenge of poverty and the HIV/AIDS epidemic are significant influences on shaping policies in Africa (Akinsulure-Smith and Smith, 2014)

- family policies in South Africa in post apartheid eras target socioeconomic problems confronting contemporary families (Mokomane, 2014)

- policies in China influenced by political, socioeconomic, cultural and demographic factors (Xia et al. 2014)

- in Germany low fertility rates and ageing of the population have driven labour market and income support, child care, and parental leave policies

- commitment to gender equality and rights in Norway, Sweden and Denmark underpin generous parental leave policies and recognition of same sex partnerships (Wells and Bergnehr, 2014)

- Barriers: deeply rooted political and cultural resistance to change, conservative gendered assumptions and familism ideology create challenges to reform and implementation
Poverty and the wellbeing of children and families in rich and poor countries

- one child in five in 41 high income countries lives in poverty
- one in ten in Denmark, Iceland and Norway
- one in three in Israel and Romania
- Bulgaria, Mexico, Spain, Turkey and the United States also reflect child poverty rates higher than the rich world average

(UNICEF, 2017)
The variation in the multidimensional child poverty rate is vast: from 11 per cent in Switzerland to 85 per cent in Romania.

Ten countries have multidimensional child poverty rates of between 33 per cent and 50 per cent. These include Greece, Poland and the United Kingdom.

(UNICEF, 2017)
Child poverty in developing countries

- Tajikistan, Turkey and Estonia ranked highest in terms of multidimensional poverty
- Latin America and Caribbean: Haiti, Nicaragua and Bolivia are most deprived
- East Asia and the Pacific: Laos, Cambodia and Indonesia had highest MPI
- Arab states: Somalia, Yemen and Morocco identified as poorest
- South Asia: Nepal, India and Bangladesh closely followed by Pakistan
- Sub-Saharan African countries ranked 75 or higher (out of 104 countries) with Niger, Ethiopia, Mali, Burkina Faso and Burundi ranking the highest

Based on Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) (Alkire and Santos, 2010)
Factors influencing risk and poverty

• jobless families have the highest risk of poverty

• incidence of family poverty six times higher among workless families than those with someone in employment (OECD, 2008)

• maternal employment has become important in reducing family poverty

• the outcomes for children growing up in family jobless households include poor health and low educational attainment (Whiteford, 2009)

• sole parent and younger families with a single adult in employment are more likely to be poor than dual earner families

• single parent families, smaller households, older persons and immigrant families are vulnerable to higher risks of poverty

• growing number of single parent households contributes to increasing inequality and poverty (OECD, 2012)
Efforts to tackle poverty

- universal child and family benefits promote equity and reduce poverty gaps
- child allowances and tax benefit
- direct resources transfers to children and impoverished families in the form of housing, and food, clothing
- public support for child care correlate with lower poverty rates (Engster, 2012)
- paid parental leave alleviates financial and emotional stress for families
- family centred and community based interventions when combined with economic supports deliver gains for parents and children (Ma, 2015)
- exemplars of integrated service delivery initiatives can be seen in various countries:
  - Stronger Families and Communities Strategy in Australia
  - Sure Start in the UK involving the co location of related services
  - ‘Opening Doors’ in the US to address homelessness through social, health, employment and educational services
Targeted benefits to support families

Studies have established a strong correlation between social spending and child and family poverty reduction (Bradshaw, 2006; Corak, Lietz and Sutherland, 2005).

- unemployment benefits
- parenting payments for low income and sole parents
- disability support
- conditionality linking support payments to changes in parental behaviours e.g. immunisation programs, improved school attendance, workforce participation, job search (Adema, 2012)
Women’s employment and parental leave

- workforce participation of women has increased (Adema, 2012)
- proportion of families who have mothers working part time and full time vary
- family decisions are impacted by the extent to which national policies support mothers to sustain their employment
- many countries have enacted parental leave policies to ensure work family balance

Comparison of parental leave – selected countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Time of work</th>
<th>Cash benefit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>68 weeks (8 taken by father)</td>
<td>80% of monthly wage reduced after 56 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>96 weeks</td>
<td>43 weeks at full wages + 53 weeks at 80% wage replacement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>8 – 156 weeks (mothers or fathers can take the time off or reduce hours)</td>
<td>65% of salary cash benefit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>21 weeks and 2 hours rest per day for 1st year 16 weeks following adoption of child</td>
<td>80% salary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>52 weeks</td>
<td>90% monthly wage reduced after 6 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>26 weeks + 16 weeks</td>
<td>Paid + unpaid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>18 weeks + 52 weeks</td>
<td>National minimum wage + Unpaid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>13 weeks + 2 weeks for each multiple birth + 2 weeks for PND</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>13 weeks (3-5 days paternity leave)</td>
<td>Wage replacement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>None (sick leave only)</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Women’s employment and child care

Economic and social trends have altered the working patterns of families - two incomes are becoming the norm

- high mortgages, statistical probability of divorce, threat of forced early retirement
- notion that children are a private responsibility of the family alone has shifted
- investing in families in early childhood - child care constitutes an important family-related policy
- formal child care has come to the force by changes in traditional family care of children. non-maternal child care is an integral part of modern societies
- women friendly policies are significant to family wellbeing
- government supported child care for the early years
- access to part time employment and tax systems that do not disincentivise women as second earners
Formal child care across countries

On average three quarters of 5 year olds participate in pre school education, a third of children benefit from child care arrangements (Leach, 2009)

- Finland: child care is freely available to all parents who choose it
- Germany: legal claim to child care for all children aged one or over – 11.6% in full time care / 23% in part time care
- Sweden: free subsidised child care for children 1-6 years
- Ireland: early child care supplement as add-on child benefit to be used for cost of preschool care, or support stay at home parent
- UK: every three and four year old is eligible to half time pre school education
- Italy: child care available to children 3 months – 3 years – publicly funded and income related fees. Preschool availability for children 3-6 (90% enrolment in preschool, highest in European Union).
- Korea: child care for 0-2 years, all expenses subsidised regardless of income level

Participation in child care: Nordic countries is approximately 35 hours per week; participation is part time in countries such as Australia, Netherlands and the UK

(OECD, 2012; Ploug, 2012)
Vulnerabilities of migrant families

• migration from poor countries into developed countries has accelerated
• substantial income differences between developed and developing countries
• shrinking workforces in the western world
• political events and environmental disasters
• migrant families experience higher levels of poverty and social exclusion than families who are native born (Smeeding, Robson and Wing, 2009)
• poor housing, lower levels of education and linguistic isolation increase their marginalisation (Hernandez and Charney, 1998)
• educational outcomes of children of migrants and labour market performance are poorer than the native population (Algan et al, 2010)
• rural/urban migration: in China there is increasing mobility of individuals and families between rural and urban areas
• inequalities in services between urban and rural areas - children in villages experience compromised education and health care (Xia et al. 2014)
Families at risk: child maltreatment

- limited international comparisons of trends in child maltreatment given the limits of definitional differences (OECD, 2011)
- child protection systems vary in their policies, degree of regulation, thresholds for intervention and their orientations to the assessment of need and risk
- policies relate to early intervention and prevention, protection and rehabilitation
- policy interventions are directed at multiple systems
- interventive responses include investigation, case management, and varying levels of preventive and ameliorative interventions including parent education, family support for children and other family based services
- protective care in institutions, foster homes and adoption and some application of policies of permanency planning
Income and its relationship to some forms of child maltreatment

- micro level correlative factors are identified
- constraints poor families face in meeting children’s needs
- adverse association of poverty with parental stress
- fewer disciplinary options available to low income parents
- pressures on families experiencing persistent low income and precipitous declines in family income (Cancian, Slack and Yang, 2010; OECD, 2011)
- income and maltreatment associations present critical issues for family policy design
- need to re-evaluate the role and function of child protection processes within the broader context of policies to enhance the wellbeing of children through supporting families
Families at risk: domestic and family violence

- violence against women and girls is a global issue that kills and maims women physically, psychologically and sexually denying women and girls human rights and equality

- violence against women is gender based and deeply embedded in relationships of inequality between men and women

- in some cultures intrafamily violence is still viewed as an accepted way of dealing with conflict and condoned

- alarming rates of family violence are recorded in different countries:
  - 35% of women worldwide have experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence
  - 30% of women worldwide who have been in a relationship have experienced physical or sexual violence by their intimate partner
  - 7% have been sexually assaulted by someone other than a partner
  - 38% of murders of women globally are committed by intimate partners
Lifetime prevalence of physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence among ever-partnered women by WHO region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHO region</th>
<th>Prevalence, %</th>
<th>95% CI, %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low- and middle-income regions:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>36.6</td>
<td>32.7 to 40.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Americas</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>25.8 to 33.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Mediterranean</td>
<td>37.0</td>
<td>30.9 to 43.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>20.9 to 30.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South-East Asia</td>
<td>37.7</td>
<td>32.8 to 42.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Pacific</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>20.1 to 29.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High income</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>20.2 to 26.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CI = confidence interval.

(WHO, 2013)
Lifetime prevalence of non-partner sexual violence by WHO region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHO region</th>
<th>Prevalence, %(^a)</th>
<th>95% CI, %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low- and middle-income regions:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>8.5 to 15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Americas</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>7.0 to 14.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Mediterranean(^b)</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>0.8 to 9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South-East Asia</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>0.9 to 8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Pacific</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>1.6 to 12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High income</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>8.9 to 16.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CI = confidence interval.

\(^a\) Results adjusted for interviewer training, whether the study was national and whether response options were broad enough to allow for different categories of perpetrators or were limited to a single category of perpetrator.

\(^b\) No data were found for countries in this region, therefore a prevalence estimate is not provided.

(WHO, 2013)
National policies in particular countries

- **Sweden**: violence against women legislation – new offence labelled ‘gross violation of women’s integrity’ (1 in 4 women are victims)
- **Germany**: Second National Action Plan – 130 measures – legislation, prevention, support for survivors, intervention with perpetrators, training, public education, research and National Helpline
- **Spain**: established judicial institutions such as courts of violence against women, public prosecutors of violence against women and cash benefits to support women leaving violent situations
- **Portugal**: is into its Fourth National Plan against domestic violence
- **Australia**: two national frameworks to address child abuse and neglect and domestic violence (National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children 2009-2020 and National Plan to Reduce Violence versus Women and their Children 2010-2022)
- **India**: Domestic Violence Act – protects women in relationships and other women in household – sisters, mother, etc. Applies across all religions and supersedes personal laws of specific groups.
- **Taiwan**: is the first country to enact a Family Life Education Act designed to promote healthy family functioning and communication and effective parenting (Hwang, 2014)
Policies and strategies

- direct service provision to victim/survivors and intervention with perpetrators
- direct intervention to help victim/survivors rebuild their lives
- legal reform
- early identification of ‘at risk’ families, communities, groups, and individuals
- training
- education for building a culture of nonviolence
- advocacy and awareness raising
- networking and community mobilization
- data collection and analysis
- resource development

(UNICEF 2000)
Challenges for the future

• Lack of an explicit family policy – policies focus on specific families/individuals – not on family as a unit.

• Potential for fragmentation of policy and services arising from policy development and service delivery by various tiers of government and NGO agencies.

• Closing the gap between policy and implementation.

• Governments not to rely on family as a substitute for public assistance and services.

• Invest in research to build an evidence base on critical issues that are relevant to public policies for families – studies that integrate quantitative and qualitative data.

• Priorities:
  • Address the social stress and social exclusions related rising levels of poverty and inequality.
  • Increase support for families and children experiencing violence.
  • Family friendly and culture appropriate policies and supports for migrant, refugee and asylum seeking populations to address their economic, social and psychological needs.


References


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