

Parental Leave and Child Care Policies and Programs:
An In-Depth Look at the United States and Comparative Analysis of
Industrialized OECD Nations

by

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ABSTRACT

When my attention was brought to the overwhelming lack of family policy support in the United States, my curiosity led me to look into what other industrialized nations are doing to support growing families and find out what policies and programs have been put in place to better facilitate the work-home balance. I first provide a brief background context of family policy in the United States, leading up to the development and implementation of our nation's parental leave legislation, the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA). I present the crucial concerns of this provision, as well as the effects that policy has on children's well-being. The second major part of this analysis deals with child care programs and the myriad challenges so many families encounter in this realm. Specifically addressed are the topics of affordability, accessibility and quality of child care found in the U.S. After an in-depth look at U.S. policies, I transition to a comparative analysis of parental leave and child care provision in a range of other nations in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), specifically Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, France, Sweden and Norway. I carefully chose these countries to offer a broad spectrum of family policies to compare to our own. I then return to a discussion of limitations of U.S. family policy and the values and ideology it represents, as well as the importance of strengthening such policies.

DEDICATION

To all of the wonderful mothers, fathers, and caregivers who work so hard to raise their little ones while balancing careers with parenthood, and to all of the caring advocates, researchers, (some) policymakers, professors, students, and citizens who acknowledge your dedication and advocate for the programs and policies that will better help you achieve a life of protection and fulfillment.

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can always turn to him whenever I need an ear to listen, a shoulder to lean on, or someone to simply comfort me during stressful or emotional circumstances. Our first couple years together and current wedding planning haven't always been easy with both of us in graduate school, leaving limited personal time together. This only means we will cherish and appreciate our available time with one another upon graduation after pursuing our degrees, and I look forward to these future moments. Of course my own hard work and dedication has helped get me to where I am today; however, I'm not sure I could have done it without the love and support of all those I have mentioned, and I am sincerely obliged to have each and every one of you in my life.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION – CONTEXT FOR THE STUDY

A middle class mother in her late twenties walks into the local welfare office, ashamed and shocked that it has come to this. Being a married, educated woman with a Bachelor's degree and a solid career, she never pictured herself in this scenario. She is a first grade teacher, having been employed at the same suburban charter school for four years. What has brought her into this “shameful” place; one that many assume is filled with “welfare moms” trying to get a free ride? An unexpected cry for help.

The young woman I am describing in this scenario is my closest and longest friend, Ericka. She is not a single mother. She is not a high school dropout. She has an Elementary Education degree from a state university, and just recently completed her M.Ed. Ericka had to find out first-hand how difficult our country makes it for so many families to balance a career with parenthood. Although she works in what should be a highly respectable career, one that should value the beauty of new family formation, she instead learns that her employer only offers four weeks of maternity leave at a percentage of her salary with the remaining eight weeks unpaid, which is more than many women get. In order to avoid trying to survive several weeks without a paycheck, she opted to receive smaller checks over time to make up for her time off and lost wages. Like a vast majority of women needing maternity leave, she had to utilize her sick days as well as short-term disability leave; apparently becoming pregnant and bringing new life into this world constitutes as a “disability” in the employment world.

Now pregnant with her second child, Ericka is already facing complications with her school's family leave policies and dreading the upcoming income shortage. Because her baby is due in the first few weeks of school, her employer is making it even more difficult for her to receive the necessary time off and benefits she should be entitled to; their reason being that the year is just beginning, therefore, she hasn't yet "earned" time off. She is not the only one facing this dilemma in family planning, as it is a persistent problem across our nation. This overall lack of family support by our government and subsequently most employers, has been named by some as a national crisis that must be addressed. The time hasn't come to fix this problem; it has passed. The opportunity is still there for our nation to recognize this crucial problem, however, and work together to address this concern for working families.

It is situations such as this, as documented in the alarming narratives found in Valerie Polakow's book, *Who Cares for Our Children?* (2007), that led me to delve deeper into U.S. family policy, or lack thereof. In this thesis, I will examine family support policies in the United States in regards to maternity/family leave and care of young children, and compare them to those in other industrialized nations. My comparative analysis will look at specific social policies related to child care and family support in selected countries in order to bring attention to the existing variance in family policy and suggest alternatives to the current United States model. The research questions I seek to answer are as follows:

1. What types of parental leave programs and policies are implemented in the United States and how do these compare to those in other nations?
2. How do the availability, affordability, and quality of early child care programs in other industrialized nations in the OECD compare to those in the United States?
3. What are the reasons for the lack of public social welfare programs in the U.S. and why is our nation so hesitant to institute the kinds of family policies that are prominent across much of Europe?

In preparing for a previous graduate project, I encountered a preposterous fact that specifically steered me toward the research I have conducted and presented here, that the United States stands alone among all industrialized nations as the only one to not provide any amount of mandatory paid parental leave to our working mothers or fathers. I found this unbelievable and was eager to learn more about U.S. family support policies, and how these related to policies in other comparable parts of the world. I have also found it interesting that not many people seem to realize this startling fact until I inform them. As I discuss my current research, many friends and family members have been amazed that some of the family support policies we could only dream of, are standard in neighboring nations. When I have stated the fact that the US does not mandate paid maternity leave, a few have corrected me by stating, “Well we have FMLA (Family and Medical Leave Act).” This was but one small step closer to a “family friendly” working nation, but I will provide a closer look at this apparent “universal” benefit in the first section.

Closely related to family leave are the early child care resources available to a family after a child is born. As parents are being rushed back to work due to financial need and a lack of adequate leave time, they are now faced with the decision of who will care for their child when they return to the workforce. Few are lucky enough to have family care for their children during work hours, and another select few are privileged enough to employ private in-home nannies, while the rest of the population must seek other alternatives, typically group settings such as a child care facility or family child care home. The cost of child care services often creates a significant financial burden for many parents who must return to work, and other than minute tax breaks and a few specific programs for the poor, there are minimal public supports in place and a non-existent universal policy to aid families with this expense. This widespread challenge in child care affordability has said to be a result of our highly “individualistic and state-fearing American political culture” (Bergren 2008, p. 312), leaving child care related costs up to each person/family as a private responsibility as oppose to a public commitment. In contrast, many other nations offer universal programs to assist all families with the cost of child care, as this is seen as a shared responsibility between parents and state. This is particularly notable in Scandinavian countries, which will be further expanded on later in this thesis.

What is the significance of these family policies, or lack thereof, and why is the related discourse worth our time? First and foremost, the well-being of children. Valerie Polakow (2007) argues that “child care should and could be

seen as...[a] basic human right” (p. 27) which is not currently the case in our country. Hellburn and Bergmann (2002) point out that the very nature of child care is often seen as a commodity, where the wealthier get the more expensive care and education. When thinking of this concept through a children’s rights framework, this doesn’t seem fair. Children are the ones “consuming” this care, yet they have no choice in what environment they are placed in and unable to control their quality of care and education.

Another widely discussed reason for having these family policies in place centers around parental choice regarding the length of parental leave for the birth (or adoption) of a new child, and what type of facility to place their child in after returning to work. A majority of parents in the U.S. currently have limited options as to when they must return to work and whose care they will leave their children in. Our current lack of mandated paid parental leave, and limited unpaid leave, forces most parents back to work earlier than often desired. An issue brief by Columbia University (2002) argues that because of the demand in our society for both parents in the work force, yet a lack of “family friendly” policies to assist with this, it seems as though the U.S. is sending “mixed messages” about how to best raise a family in conjunction with employment.

My primary purpose here is to contribute to the ongoing effort to bring these crucial issues to the center of our nation’s social and political discourse. I want U.S. policymakers and citizens to recognize the importance of these major family policies that affect millions of our country’s children and shape the life circumstances these families will encounter. Although these topics have been

addressed by our politicians, and some small strides have been made, I argue that it hasn't been enough. At the present time, we are not sufficiently supporting all of our nation's families and children in order for them to thrive to their fullest potential. After learning that we are the only industrialized nation that has yet to mandate a paid parental leave, combined with the fact that a country as rich as ours has such a high percentage of children in poverty, I aimed to learn what other nations are doing to minimize these problems, and what policies have been implemented to alleviate the challenging demands and tensions between employment and child rearing.

Overview/Organization of Thesis

The second chapter provides a comprehensive overview of parental leave supports in the United States, including a historical backdrop of federal policy involving working families. This analysis will include information on national policy, namely the Family and Medical Leave Act, the role of government, effects on child well-being, and overall supports to the family. Chapter three transitions to the programs and policies in place that assist parents after a new child is welcomed into the family, specifically in the realm of child care options. My main focus here is on the affordability, accessibility, and quality of child care in the United States. I will discuss federal policies and government assistance involving early child care and share the typical views on public child care by the government and society. The fourth chapter will provide a comparative analysis of family policies offered in various industrialized nations, specifically Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, France, Sweden, and Norway. My intent here

was to choose comparable countries from various locations to demonstrate the range of family policies and programs that are offered around the world. Finally, in the last chapter, I will discuss the implications of these literature review-based findings and their importance. I will offer recommendations for how the United States might be able to better meet the needs of our families with young children and provide more choice, flexibility, and ease for parents to make the thoughtful and personal decisions regarding when they will return to work and ensure their children will be well cared for when they do. Whether a parent or not, I hope that the reader will find this information relevant and thought-provoking, and hopefully see that these family support policies should be a public concern, as children are “our” responsibility as a society, and they deserve to be protected and nurtured in a manner that will foster physical, emotional, and social growth and development.

CHAPTER TWO

FAMILY LEAVE POLICIES IN THE U.S.

In this chapter, I will provide an extensive description of parental leave policies in the United States that I will later compare to those offered in other nations. I begin by framing the historical context of our national policies in this area, leading up to our current federal policy involving parental leave for expecting and new parents. I will discuss the problems with this current policy, including the length of time parents are given during this time, the lack of compensation, and effects on child well-being. I will also look at the role of government in the development and implementation of family leave programs.

Historical Context

Decades ago, when the “traditional” family was the norm and a majority of women remained in the home, the topic of parental leave was not as pervasive. Around the time of World War II, blame was actually put on mothers for trying to enter the workforce instead of being at home caring for their children “where they belong” (Polakow, 2007, p. 6). Their absence through paid employment outside of the home was viewed as “inimical to the healthy development of infants and young children” (p. 7). During this time in history, there was intense and widespread hostility toward working mothers and many criticized them for participating in paid labor outside the home. Norms began to change, however, with the advancement of the war, which brought 17-18% of all families in the United States to be headed by women (Smith & Holguin, 1996). With many of their husbands on war duty and gone for such lengthy periods of time, women had

to take charge of their households and find jobs in order to provide financially for their families.

With more women in the workforce, this period brought the first major effort by the federal government to look at employment practices that affect pregnant women. The Women's Bureau aimed to provide nationwide guidelines and uniform standards for maternity policies for employed women in order to put first and foremost the health of herself and child, pre and post-natal. Even though these workplace guidelines were put into effect, the situations of pregnant women were unfortunately only found to improve marginally as a whole. Women continued to be discriminated against by employers, who often felt that expectant mothers did not belong in the workplace. It was also found that even with their job "protected," they were returning to lower status positions or loss of accrued benefits (Zigler & Frank, 1988).

As more and more women entered the work place, public policies were not keeping up with the changing trends and new "modern" families. Employment policies for pregnant women began to shift after passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibited discrimination in the work place based on gender. There remained questions and disagreements regarding what benefits should be granted to pregnant women in maintaining gender equality, until the guidelines were altered to include pregnancy related conditions as "temporary disabilities." A woman could now be granted the same benefits as any other employee, male or female, with a temporary disability (Conway et. al., 1999). Personally, I don't know how I feel about pregnancy being labeled as a

“disability” in the first place; this terminology creates a rather negative connotation of a “condition” that should arouse a feeling of joy and hopefulness. Some advocates of family policy are similarly disturbed by the defining of maternity leave as a disability and argue for public policy to “take the unique characteristics of childbirth into account” (Jacobs & Davies, 1994, p. 106). I would argue that it is in fact acceptable at times to “discriminate” among men and women in this instance and should be appropriate to have a specific pregnancy policy/benefit, given that men physically cannot have babies! Research associate Dana Friedman equated the disability leave to a woman being “cured of having a child” as though it was an illness from which she will recover (Jacobs & Davies, 1994, p. 106).

In any case, problems persisted with the Civil Rights Act and there continued to be discrepancies in the definition of the law, bringing trials to court over further claims of pregnancy discrimination. These considerations led to Congress passing the Pregnancy Discrimination Act in 1978, amending Title VII of the Civil Rights Act to prohibit sex discrimination specifically on the basis of pregnancy (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission). Although this amendment expanded and protected the general rights of pregnant women in the workplace, policies concerning maternity (and family) leave were generally still left up to the employer. There was yet to be a federal mandate in place to guarantee women any amount of specific maternity leave; only one that was supposed to prevent their employer from discriminating against them, and to

honor a temporary leave due to a “disability” if that is what they offer to all employees.

Family Leave Policy

Family and Medical Leave Act. The United States finally instituted its idea of a universal family leave policy under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) of 1993, making this the first piece of legislation signed into law under the Clinton administration. Heidi Berggren (2007) describes this legislation as regulatory and limited in substance and scope. As stated by the US Department of Labor, The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 “provides *certain* employees with up to 12 weeks of *unpaid*, job protected leave per year” (US Department of Labor, emphasis added). FMLA provides *eligible* employees to utilize this personal leave for the birth or adoption of a new child, to care for an immediate family member with a serious health condition, or to care for themselves in the event of a serious medical condition. The policy applies to public agencies, schools, and companies that employ over 50 people, and an employee may be eligible under the following criteria: they have worked for the employer for at least twelve months, have worked at least 1,250 hours in those twelve months, and the location employs a minimum of 50 people within a 75 mile radius. As you can see, these criteria eliminate a number of employed parents; not to mention, it is unpaid. FMLA was designed to “help employees balance their work and family responsibilities” (US Department of Labor) which I believe it does to a certain extent; however, how many families cannot afford to take several weeks off work without pay. This is especially challenging when

parents are dealing with the arrival of a new child and the medical expenses that come along with it, and even more difficult when the situation involves a single parent or low income family.

Thus, the benefits provided by FMLA are limited and not even available to everyone. I would describe it as a quasi-universal social policy; it was meant to benefit most working citizens and promote a greater sense of familism; however, specific restrictions prevent many employees from reaping the benefits. The most widely available benefit this policy provides is job protected leave; although it is argued, and I would agree, that job protection during pregnancy and child birth should not be a “benefit” but a minimum standard, or even a right (Conway, Ahern, & Steuernagel, 1999).

Problems with FMLA. Proponents of public family policy argue that there are a number of problems with current family policy in the U.S. in regards to parents in the workforce; specifically, it does not cover everyone, the leave is too brief, it is unpaid, and offers limited parental choice. Only companies who hold over fifty employees within a 75 mile radius are held accountable for offering the benefits associated with FMLA, and only to employees who have worked at least 1, 250 hours over the last twelve months (US Department of Labor). A study found that over forty percent of people in the private sector workforce are not covered under this law (Meyers & Gornick, 2005); therefore, the best a pregnant woman can hope for is the generosity of her employer. She would most likely be covered for a limited time under short-term disability,

combined with any available vacation and sick days, and then return to work shortly after the birth of her child.

Length of leave. Mandating only twelve weeks of maternity leave, our country lags far behind most industrialized nations, and is particularly low in comparison to all of the developed countries that make up the OECD¹. Suppose a woman works up through her eighth month of pregnancy, she is then left with a mere eight weeks of post-natal leave to rest and bond with her newborn. This scenario is given that the mother does not encounter any pregnancy related complications and have to leave work earlier than that. Even in the absence of medical problems, however, working during the last trimester of pregnancy can be quite uncomfortable and may even pose a risk to both the mother and fetus. Work is often known to cause stress, which is unhealthy for an expectant mother and her unborn child, and can also cause early labor, resulting in the premature birth of the baby. Working this far into a pregnancy can pose a particular challenge to women who perform physical labor or are on their feet all day. Women who must utilize all or most of this leave before the birth of the baby face an even larger dilemma when the child arrives and they must either rush back to work far too soon, or accept possible consequences from their employer. This stands in sharp contrast to numerous other countries where mothers (and some fathers) spend a much longer period of time in the home with their newborn; some

¹ The Organisation for Economic and Co-operative Development (OECD) was created "to promote policies that will improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world" and includes 34 member countries across the globe, many of which make up the most advanced nations in the world (OECD).

have laws that even prohibit new mothers from working until at least six weeks have lapsed (Berger, Hill, & Waldfogel, 2005).

Again assuming the above scenario of a mother working up until one month before delivery, this leaves only eight weeks after childbirth for the new mother to rest her body, nurture her newborn, and bond as a family. Although deemed to be one of the greatest joys one can imagine, welcoming a new baby to the family is overwhelming and exhausting, both physically and emotionally. After enduring several months of pregnancy, followed by intense labor and delivery, sometimes involving surgery, a woman deserves the right to a period of rest that does not involve the corporate world. This period is crucial for the mother and father to take the time to bond and form an attachment to their new child. Almost no mother wishes to rush back to work a meager few weeks after delivering a baby.

Effects of leave on child well-being. Longitudinal studies have researched the effects on maternal employment during the child's first months of life in search of any correlation between parental absence and the health and development of the child. Research has suggested a negative impact on various measures of child health in relation to mothers returning to work twelve weeks after childbirth. New mothers were found to breastfeed for a shorter length of time on average and take their children to less "well-baby" visits during their first year, resulting in the babies receiving a smaller number of immunizations. The correlation was found to be higher in mothers who returned to work full time rather than part time.

Another study was conducted to research the association between various family policies and child well-being; the focus specifically on parental leave, cash/tax benefits, and child care. Statistics were compared across twenty countries in the OECD to specifically examine the correlation between the level of these policies on each nation's percentage of child poverty, child mortality, and educational achievement (Engster & Stensota, 2011).

The researchers describe three main types of policy regimes², and place each nation in their study under its corresponding category depending on the level of family benefits they offer. They refer to the first, most desirable, category as the “dual-earner regime,” which is characterized by low to medium levels of cash and tax benefits, but high levels of public support for parenting leaves and childcare services. “General family support regimes” provide high levels of cash and tax benefits and low to medium levels of public support for family policies. The final category, “low family support regimes” offer overall low levels of support and encourage families to make their own private arrangements. The United States was grouped into the lower category, being classified as offering the lower end of family policies; although our nation does offer some tax benefits and a certain amount of means tested assistance, we tend to put most of the responsibility on families themselves to take care of their own needs with limited public assistance.

² A family policy regime is defined as “a distinctive set of policies for supporting families with children under eighteen years of age,” and more narrowly by family policy scholars in terms of policies that offer “direct financial assistance to families with children and services and benefits to working parents” (Engster & Stensota, 2011, p. 85).

The outcomes suggested that lower levels of family policies were correlated with higher child poverty and child mortality.

Researchers suggested that having stronger family leave policies in place benefit families in both direct and indirect ways. Offering adequate, job-protected, and especially paid parenting leaves provides families the financial assistance they need while preparing for their return back to work, as well as the necessary services afterward. It was found that paid maternity leave facilitates the employment of women with children, which contributes to reducing poverty. Christopher Ruhm (cited in Engster & Stensota, 2011) also found a strong, positive correlation between paid parenting leave and lower child mortality and attested that “rights to a year of job-protected paid leave are associated with roughly a 20% decline in post-natal deaths and a 15% decrease in fatalities occurring between the first and fifth birthdays” (p. 97). Tanaka (in Engster & Stensota, 2011) also confirmed this finding, further adding that no significant association was found in relation to unpaid leaves.

Thus, it was determined that dual-earner regimes offer the greatest chance for promoting children’s well-being, and were positively correlated with the highest levels of health and safety among children. This regime is most prevalent in the Nordic region, where levels of public support and child well-being were highest among all nations; therefore suggesting the United States could probably learn a thing or two from these parts of the world where the emphasis on families and children is so much higher than what we know here.

Unpaid leave. In conjunction with the short length of leave time the United States offers, the other most highly discussed arena of our national parental leave policy is the fact that it is unpaid. This stands in sharp contrast to other industrialized nations, all of which offer some amount of paid leave. There are several variations of leave available, ranging from several weeks to even a few years in some countries. These offer differing percentages of pay from partial to full amount of previous salary, for varying lengths of time on each pay scale. Some countries even offer paid leave to women who are not employed, which can be referred to as a form of early childhood benefit, a newer and uncommon form of government assistance in aiding families with young children (Waldfogel, 2001). Several weeks off work with no pay creates an obvious challenge to many families. Most people would have difficulty leading their normal lives without a paycheck over the course of several weeks or months; I know I would. This dramatic decrease in income becomes increasingly difficult when paired with the arrival of a new baby, given the significant financial burden this alone can pose.

Research estimates have suggested that one quarter of all poverty spells, or temporary financial hardships experienced by families, in the United States begin with the birth of a new child (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, in Waldfogel, 2001). This is not the most conducive environment in which to bring a new child into the world or expand your family. Jacob Hacker (2006) points out that there are over 160 nations that offer paid leave; further supporting the idea that we have much catching up to do if our society wishes to promote the same level of family support as the majority of the world. He also points out that in

today's economy with the rising cost of raising a family, a second income for most families is "not a luxury but a necessity" (p. 91). Hacker demonstrates how even two parent families with a middle class income often struggle with the financial drain of an unpaid maternity leave.

Consider the narrative of my close friend that I highlighted in the introduction. She and her husband are a two-income family who learned firsthand how arduous life would be in the midst of a new baby while their income simultaneously gets cut nearly in half. Ericka refused to leave her newborn too suddenly, as she recognizes and appreciates the importance of early bonding and nurturance between a mother and a new baby, and found ways around staying home with him through his first few months of life. As most mothers, she longed to lengthen the stay but had to return to her job. They continued to encounter monetary challenges during their son's first year of life, building credit card debt that pushed them into bankruptcy. Having gotten back on their feet, they are now expecting their second child and have taken measures to help alleviate the reduced and absent paychecks in the near future. Not wanting to endure the same previous hardships, she learned about a supplementary insurance she could pay into in order to receive assistance after the baby is born while she is on leave. I was happy to hear there was such a program available; however, not everyone is aware of this plan, and it has to be in place prior to pregnancy. They were lucky enough to have learned of this incentive while still planning to expand their family.

Considering that a number of the larger employers and corporations offer more extensive leave benefits, I was shocked to learn that another of my friends,

Amanda, who is an E.R. doctor at a large Phoenix hospital, receives zero paid maternity leave. Since her husband has chosen to remain a stay at home father, she was back to work just six weeks after the cesarean birth of her son, working twelve hour shifts in the fast paced emergency room. They too learned of the challenge this posed and decided to plan ahead and better prepare for the arrival of any future children. She has shared with me the physical and emotional difficulty of returning to work so soon and desired a longer bonding period with her next child. In knowing they wanted to expand their family, they began to budget their finances differently and specifically saved enough of their income to cover a three-month leave following the birth of their second son. This time around, they had a longer period to adjust to their changing household and bond as a growing family. She was also able to breastfeed her newborn during his first three months in the comfort of her own home, without worrying about trying to pump throughout a twelve hour shift in the midst of the hustle and bustle of a busy hospital. Although this family was able to plan ahead accordingly to prepare for this time at home, not everyone is fortunate enough to make the amount of money necessary to cover three months out of work.

There are a vast number of people who make just enough to cover their cost of living, with little to none left over to save. Katharine Karr Kaitin (cited in Jacobs and Davies, 2001) points out a fact often not recognized, and that is that women (or families in general) in higher paying jobs do not necessarily have more disposable income than those in lower socioeconomic groups; their income may be primarily supporting their households and family. This makes us

consider, if middle class families struggle, how do single parents and/or low-income families survive this toll?

Role of Government. The frequently asked question, “What should the role of government be in providing or mandating parental leave policies and public support programs for pre and post-natal care?” has been central to the discourse surrounding this issue for decades and continues to remain controversial. Many would argue that American political culture has long favored individual initiative and limited government involvement in our economy. Researchers have theorized that this individualistic nature of our society has proved a significant factor in our narrow, market-oriented public policies (Bergrenn, 2008). French political philosopher, Alexis de Tocqueville, coined the term “individualism” to describe Americans’ tendency to isolate themselves from their responsibilities to the larger society by focusing exclusively on themselves (Bogenschneider, 2006, p. 41).

We are all familiar with the African proverb that “it takes a village to raise a child;” the notion of individualism stands in opposition to this, assuming that we are all responsible for our own lives, families, and life circumstances. There are many who still hold this belief of supporting one another and argue that we are ignoring our obligations to the rest of society. If so many other nations seem to be providing such a wealth of public support, what is holding our government back from implementing similar policies? Michelle Marks (1997) claims that the status of our national policy and specifically the shortcomings of FMLA are the direct result of partisan politics. Conservative Republicans outright oppose the

idea of universal policies being imposed on companies, and argue that “the government has no right to ‘mandate’ benefits in the private sector” (Marks, 1997, p. 56). These political views are what kept FMLA at a standstill and prolonged its passage for so many years. Whereas some of the more moderate Republicans accepted the proposal, as long as the leave was short and small businesses were exempt, strict conservatives opposed the bill completely. They only supported the idea of parental leave being entirely optional and left to the discretion of each individual employer. With a long string of Republican presidents, the proposed bill had a difficult time making its way through Congress; both the Reagan and Bush administrations had “vehemently disagreed with the notion of a government-mandated leave policy” (Marks, 1997, p. 63). President Bush vetoed the bill in 1990, and in a written statement supported his claim that the government “had no right to tell employers what benefits to offer” and asserted that such mandated leaves would “destroy the flexibility of existing benefit plans” (p. 63). With a new Democratic president in 1992, Bill Clinton enthusiastically promoted the support of FMLA in his campaign, and facilitated its passing the following year. He praised the bill and even expressed an interest in expansion, arguing, “by expanding family leave we can enable millions more of our fellow Americans to meet their responsibilities both at home and at work” (Wisensale, 2001, p. 185).

After FMLA had been implemented for some time, researchers set out to determine the bearing it had on the American workforce and whether or not it had produced either the positive results for employees or the possible negative effects

on employers that many had anticipated. It was found that the execution of this policy had little impact on larger companies, who already had parental leave programs in place prior to enactment. According to testimonies from employers themselves, it was determined that it had proved not a burden to most employers. However, not only did this “change” in policy provide little effect on companies, but to the discouragement of those who enthusiastically supported the bill, it also didn’t offer much change to the employers either. It was therefore argued that this policy had provided “minimal impact at minimal cost” (Wisensale, 2001, p. 161). Because of the reasons explained above, there have not been significant improvements for women in regards to sufficient maternity leave; this relates directly to why nineteen years after its passing, FMLA continues to be highly debated in Congress and among our nation’s concerned citizens.

CHAPTER THREE

U.S. CHILD CARE POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

Introduction

I have already discussed how quickly most parents in the U.S. are expected to return to work after the birth of a child, as they simply do not have the means to take several weeks off without pay. If both the mother and father are returning to the workplace so soon, who's caring for the children? Not only are the majority of parents in this country employed, but statistics show that the number of working hours is among the highest of the industrialized countries. When both parents are committed to such long hours at work, it is necessary to find alternative care arrangements for their children (Meyers & Gornick, 2005). According to recent U.S. Census data, 60% of mothers return to work within a year of having a child, and a high percentage of them go back after only a few months or even weeks (U.S. Census Bureau). Because of this, child care by someone other than a parent during the first couple years is the norm today, and parents must face the vital decision of who will care for their children while they are at work. Although some parents are able to work around their schedules and make arrangements to care for their own babies, statistics have shown that approximately 72% of infants are regularly cared for by someone other than a parent before their first birthday (Leach, 2009).

In fact, the rise in child care in America has been most prominent in regards to the care of babies under one year; more infants in this country are in non-parental care than anywhere else in the world, at an earlier age, and for

lengthier periods of time. Statistics suggested nearly one quarter of infants at three months old are being cared for by a non-family member, and nine month old babies in center-based care were found to spend an average of forty hours per week there (Leach, 2009). I can personally attest to the numbers of young infants in center based care and the long hours they spend there through my own work in child care centers. My experiences mainly dealt with the care of infants and toddlers, and many of our little ones were in the center for the duration of a full time work schedule. The age at which most centers begin enrolling children is six weeks, and it always broke my heart to see such a young, fragile infant dropped off in a room full of other babies for an entire day. As I will discuss further in this comparison, this scenario is not the norm in other nations, where children this young are much more likely to be cared for at home. Of course I understand that many parents do not have a choice but to enroll their children in non-parental care, which is where the extreme importance of affordability and quality care come into play; we must strive to offer children the most comfortable, homelike environment we can for young children during the times they must be away from their parents.

Affordability

Myriad researchers have cited child care as an ongoing “dilemma” or “paradox” in that parents must work to afford a proper standard of living; however, employment usually requires outsourced child care, which presents high costs that many families struggle to cover. Several mothers also experience a guilt dilemma when choosing between staying home with their child and

returning to work, especially when confronted with mixed messages from society as to what is the most appropriate option. Clarence Page (in Conway et al., 1999) argues that so many people support the idea that young children are better off with their mothers as opposed to being raised in a daycare setting; however, when they do stay home and then require public assistance to cover living costs, the public tells them to “get off their lazy backsides” and get to work (p.159). Although a small minority of the population can be found guilty of being “lazy” or taking advantage of “the system,” most women either choose to remain home in the best interest of their children and/or are unable to obtain a job that covers the cost and availability of proper child care. Research has shown that the cost of child care is rising at a faster rate than employers wages, making it even more difficult to keep up with the cost. Between 1990 and 2000, when the consumer price index rose by 29%, fees for child care centers rose 56% and continue to escalate (Hellburn & Bergmann, 2002).

The cost of full time child care is estimated to be around \$4,000-\$6,000 per year (per child), although these rates vary greatly depending upon age of the child, geographical location, and quality of care. These costs are approximated to comprise about 7% of a middle class income, and 20% of a low income; again these are rough estimates and can vary a great deal. Other research has suggested much higher amounts; according to a 2008 report from the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, the average price of full-time center-based care for an infant was over \$14,000/year, and over \$10,000 for a preschool age child (Moodie-Dyer, 2011). Studies have shown that the cost of an

adequate center was higher than tuition at most public universities, and the cost for two children was more than a minimum wage worker can earn in one year (Leach, 2009). It is not uncommon to hear the phrase, “working to cover the cost of daycare,” which many parents argue is senseless, and I would have to agree. This clearly presents a significant problem to many parents who need to return to work, yet may not have the adequate resources to cover the cost of care for their young children. This dilemma can result in two major consequences: a parent’s inability to return to work due to the lack of affordable care options, which often results in a cycle of welfare programs, or a parent feeling they have no other option other than to place their child in the hands of a provider they may not feel comfortable with; thus, possibly endangering the health and safety of their child. I have read numerous accounts of parents’ personal stories that involve them having no other alternative to leaving the care of their children up to someone of questionable qualification. I simply cannot imagine being put in this position, when as a mother, your number one priority is to ensure the protection and nurturance of your child. My focus here is one that Hellburn & Bergmann (2002) also stress, and that being that the actual cost of child care is not the only thing in question, but who should cover the cost and how.

As mentioned previously, the high cost of care can be a burden to even middle class families, especially since no public assistance is offered to parents who make “too much money,” other than nominal tax benefits that are found to be insignificant in helping to cover child care costs. Another of my closest friends, Kristan, and her husband, have been thinking about starting a family soon and she

has expressed her concern to me about the costs of child care, and whether it would be more beneficial and economical to leave her job to care for her own child at home. Her and her husband are both teachers with Master's degrees who make an adequate living; however, adding all the costs that come along with a child and non-parental care will prove to be somewhat of a financial burden to them, especially in the beginning. It upsets me tremendously that someone in this type of career will encounter such financial trouble when it comes to raising a family. As a former teacher, I can attest to the worry I experienced when thinking of a future family. My take home pay each week as a teacher was approximately \$450; it would probably cost at least half of that to cover full time care for one child in a high quality center. If a teacher earning an annual salary of \$35,000-\$40,000 struggles to cover the cost of child care, how do those working for minimum wage, earning under \$18,000 per year cope, when they would need to spend nearly one quarter of their income on child care (Durfee & Meyers, 2006)?

Researcher and passionate family and child advocate, Valerie Polakow, whose work initially piqued my interest in this subject matter, focuses her attention on precisely this issue. Through two of her published works, *Lives on the Edge: Single Mothers and their Children in the Other America* (1993), and *Who Cares for our Children? The Child Care Crisis in the Other America* (2007), Polakow presents portraits of the unstable and uncertain lives that low-income parents (particularly single mothers) and their children face, due to the continuous obstacles in obtaining the proper and adequate child care needed to survive their daily lives. She specifically and blatantly puts the blame on our

government's "distorted logic" of welfare "reform" (Polakow, 2007, p. 31). I will admit that before I encountered this information, I was one of the many who supported the idea that people shouldn't simply receive "free handouts" without at least attempting to work for them. The stereotypical image of the "welfare mom" is so prevalent, that most people tend to dismiss the substantial amount of struggling parents who truly want to improve the lives of themselves and their children. I will not deny the fact that there are some welfare recipients who are not making an adequate effort to transition toward independence; however, I now realize how many more who are actively trying to better themselves and their economic situation. The problem is the number of impediments they face along the way, which Polakow highlights through her use of thought-provoking statistics and powerful personal narratives of parents trying to climb the hurdles blocking their triumph. She vehemently describes the "domino effect of poverty" (2007, p. 59) that traps so many parents. We learn of the perplexing "welfare-to-work" program that was instated to entice the "needy," who require financial assistance to get into the workforce and "earn" their benefits.

One major barrier was that most of these programs require that the mother have a job in order to be eligible for child care subsidies, which makes sense at first thought; however, some mothers are unable to begin a job until they have a place for their child while they are at work. This paradox has made it nearly impossible for many women to obtain adequate and timely assistance when it comes to child care, and still face multiple quandaries once they do. Parents employed at low wage jobs are more likely to encounter job instability than those

in a higher paying salaried career; therefore, disruptions with work can interfere with subsidy benefits, placing a parent back at square one at the welfare office. Parents also run the “risk” of making “too much money” in welfare terms. If they surpass the amount of income that defines eligibility once they are receiving benefits, they can be cut off, even though this amount can hardly be considered a livable wage with enough left over to cover the high costs of child care. In one of her narratives, Polakow (2007) introduces us to a family of five who was told their annual income of \$35,000 was too much to receive any assistance. I could hardly live off this wage, let alone with a family to raise and the costs of child care to cover. Not only should the eligibility line be higher, but parents should also not have to fear that working extra hours or earning a raise while receiving assistance will negatively affect their child care arrangement. This conundrum, paired with the fact that some subsidies are only made available to those currently receiving public assistance, almost forces some people to remain on welfare and stay in low paying jobs in order to keep their child care benefits. Greenberg (2007) argues that it is “contrary to basic principles of equity to have a structure in which parents can only receive child care assistance by entering the welfare system” (p. 84) and I would have to agree.

Who gets the help and where does it come from? Myriad researchers have cited the “fragmented structure of child care assistance in the United States” (Durfee & Meyers, 2006, p. 733), referring to our lack of universal policy as a “patchwork” (Palley & Shdaimah, 2011, p. 1160) or “hodgepodge of programs” (Moodie-Dyer, 2011, p. 38). As opposed to one, comprehensive policy controlled

by a single federal department, we have various means by which to attain public assistance in regards to child care, all of which are ultimately targeted to a specific population, based on grants and available funds, and vary widely across the country. The program available to the broadest population is tax credits, which also provide the most modest benefits. The Federal Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit (CDCTC) is our most “universal” program; it is available to all employed parents with taxable income and work-related child care expenses. Because this is a progressive and non-refundable credit, however, meaning that a family’s credit cannot exceed the amount of its income tax liability, it is virtually useless to low-income families. In 2005, families with incomes under \$20,000 received approximately 0.6% of CDCTC benefits, whereas families earning over \$50,000 earned two thirds of the disbursed benefits (Greenberg, 2007). Even for the large number of families who do receive a portion of this tax benefit, it serves as a modest form of help in one lump sum payment that is unlikely to assist much in the regular, annual cost of child care. In 2001, the average credit received through this federal credit was about \$440 per claimant (Durfee & Meyers, 2006).

Another program that we tend to more commonly think of in the realm of child care assistance is that of means-tested subsidies, targeted to low-income families whose income lands in a specific place in relation to the proclaimed poverty line. Although this provides a more substantial amount of financial assistance, it is available to a much more restricted population, and is only granted to a percentage of those who qualify. The largest source of federal funding for child care assistance is the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), which

includes a “complex mix of federal and state funding” and can utilize funds from another public program used to assist low-income families, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) (Greenberg, 2007, p. 77). One major problem with this program is the fact that it is capped and rationed by state and federal grants and eligibility rules, leaving over three quarters of those deemed eligible without a share of the benefit (Durfee & Meyers, 2006). Thus, many more families who need this assistance are not receiving it than those who are. To even be considered eligible for assistance through CCDF, a family’s income must be below 85% of the state median income, and parents must be engaged in acceptable work activity (Moodie-Dyer, 2011).

One specific example of limited assistance was found in the recent Statewide Report of Arizona Demand for Child Care (Arizona Board of Regents Consortium, 2011). An increase in licensing fees paired with a decrease in public subsidies has raised the cost of child care for many families throughout the state. With the current economy and a 7% increase in the median cost of care over the last two years, numerous parents are struggling to find affordable, quality care for their young children. According to data from the Arizona Department of Economic Security, there has been nearly a 40% decrease in the number of families receiving DES subsidies since 2009 due to budget cuts and limited public funding. The Arizona Child Care Association estimates roughly 3-4,000 fewer children will receive funds in 2012, and also expect this number to continue to drop (Arizona Board of Regents Consortium, 2011).

Although Durfee and Meyers (2006) claim there are no real reliable estimates of average subsidy benefits, a study conducted by Meyers et. al (in Durfee & Meyers, 2006) estimated that *median* family benefits ranged between \$190 and \$363 per month. It was also estimated that the median length of time a family receives this assistance is between three and seven months, a time period in which I would argue many families income probably hasn't changed that drastically, especially given that they had to be employed in the first place to even receive the benefit. The inadequacy of statistics and range in data is largely attributed to the wide variations across states in regard to who is eligible for assistance, how much they should receive, how much is available, and what the process is. Although the CCDF is a federal grant, each state is granted authority as to how they choose to allocate their funds and control their budget, with certain limited guidelines. For example, the federal recommendation for reimbursement rates for child care vouchers is set at 75 percent of the local market, aiming to afford parents the opportunity to choose quality care comparable to that a higher income family has access to; however, states are granted flexibility in the structure and allocation of their funds, and in 2007, only nine states set their rates at the 75th percentile, which greatly limits parents' access to high quality providers (Herbst & Tekin, 2010). The eligibility in each state also varies, depending upon that state's particular median income, the established poverty line, and other criteria. In 2006, state eligibility ranged from 110 to 284 percent of the poverty line and from 34 to 89 percent of state median income to qualify for benefits. For example, in 2006, a family of three with an income over \$35,000

would still qualify for benefits in eight states; whereas in fifteen other states, a family of three with an income of \$25,000 was considered ineligible. In that same year, eighteen states reported waiting lists for families who did meet the criteria, but funds had been frozen or dried up (Greenberg, 2007). As you can see, there is an incredible amount of variation, and parents' fate lie in the hands of the state in which they live, who determine who gets in and who doesn't. I argue that all families in the same position require equal amounts of assistance, which will only occur through a more universal, federal based policy.

Accessibility

Another important issue we encounter in the state of child care is that of accessibility, which can mean a couple of different things. One problem some families face is the actual availability of a reliable child care provider due to their geographical location in relation to the number of providers in that area, or the distance of a facility from their home or work place. A statewide study in Arizona found a large percentage of parents in rural areas as well as border communities who did not have access to care centers, and were thus, more likely to find other alternatives such as arrangements with family, friends, and private child care homes (Arizona Board of Regents Consortium, 2011). Many families are also faced with the common dilemma of seeking care for their children during non-traditional work or school hours. Licensed centers rarely offer their services in the evenings or on weekends, leaving parents to seek other alternatives. One study found that late shifts and weekend employment correlated with lower incomes, when reliable care is most difficult to find; therefore placing low-income parents

who work odd hour shifts in an even more difficult position to find adequate and reliable care (Palley & Shdaimah, 2011).

Those that do not have a family care option usually choose home based care providers, many of which are either not licensed, not holding their standards up to code, or simply enforcing the bare minimum. This is not to say that all of these facilities are inadequate, but they are overall less regulated; therefore, leaving parents to use their best judgment. Sadly, some of these parents' best judgment is telling them that the environment they are leaving their children in is inadequate; yet it may be their only option at the time. Approximately four million children in the United States are cared for in these types of "family day care homes" which are often viewed skeptically as less professional and less adequate (Leach 2009, p. 148). Too many parents are being forced to leave their children in the hands of someone they don't trust and facilities of substandard quality. I argue that quality child care should be made available to all families, regardless of income, status, or the hours of care needed.

Research has suggested about seven million U.S. workers who work odd-hour shifts that fall outside the 9-5 norm have children and are, therefore, in need of care for these children while they are at work (Kiger, 2005). Taking this into account and realizing that standard child care only meets some workers needs, a few larger corporations have experimented with expanded forms of child care assistance; some have even constructed on-site facilities. Procter & Gamble implemented a center on-site that is open around the clock in order to meet the needs of their night shift employees. In researching the benefits of company

provided child care such as this, one study suggested that companies could reduce absenteeism by twenty percent by providing after hours child care for their employees; thus, benefiting both employer and employee creating a win-win situation for all. Another growing service that we seldom hear of is backup care, which a select few companies have begun implementing by providing last minute child care for employees when their regular provider falls through, or is off or closed during a holiday or vacation.

Abbott Laboratories is another large corporation that has taken significant strides in supporting the care of their employee's children. They have taken it a few steps further than most, by constructing a \$10 million "state-of-the-art" center at their national headquarters where over 400 preschool age "offspring of Abbott workers scamper through an outdoor shrubbery maze, take yoga lessons and stimulate their minds in an art and science studio" (Kiger, 2005, p. 25). They participate in a back-up care option and also offer field trips and on-site games for school age children while they are on school vacations. Employment at this company sounds like a parent's dream come true!

I am not suggesting that all companies institute something of this magnitude, as they clearly do not all have the finances to do so, but many more could offer some type of support in their employer's child care needs. The most obvious and significant argument against these programs is the cost; however, one company reported a high return on investment through the backup child care they provide to their employees; the amount of money they save in productivity by the employee not missing work was found to exceed the cost to cover the care (Kiger,

2005). Although we would like to hear that the main drive behind these institutions' child care assistance programs is the support for families, these larger corporations admitted it was partly due to competition in the workforce. Either way, they have proved that employers can do a lot to help meet the needs of working parents, and in the process increase their own productivity.

A somewhat different problem many families face, related to that of affordability, is limited accessibility due to the restricted number of slots available in subsidized care, for those that are utilizing public child care assistance. Multiple researchers have reported an overall gap in the number of children who qualify for a subsidy and the number that actually receive them; then many of those that do receive them find themselves in a position where they are unable to actually put them to use. Limited available slots and long waiting lists prevent an abundance of children from receiving adequate care in their local child care facility. A recent study conducted by the Government Accounting Office found that only one-third or less of those eligible for a child care subsidy actually received assistance, and attributes this to both a lack of state funding and the limited number of placements available (Palley & Shdaimah, 2011). Another study, conducted by the U.S. Department of Health, claimed that an even smaller number of those eligible actually receive a subsidy, around twelve to fifteen percent, further limiting the accessibility of child care to even more families (Herbst & Tekin, 2010).

Quality

Hellburn and Bergmann (2002) pose the question, “What care is “good?” (p. 57) which generates various responses but the main determinates include the following crucial areas: safety/protection, nurturance, emotional bonding, social interaction, and educational stimulation. These researchers seek to find how much care is “good” and stress that this is “not a minor issue” as it effects the lives of nearly 60% of our nation’s children (p. 88). Although it wouldn’t fix all of the inadequate facilities, solving the above problems of affordability and accessibility would help ensure more children with higher quality care, as well as relieve the daily stress and worry that many parents face in regards to what kind of environment their children are being left in. Too many parents are settling by placing their precious children in places they don’t feel comfortable with, but simply doing what they have to do to remain in stable employment and continue providing for their family. Polakow (2007) presents the disturbing phenomenon in the U.S. that there are no federal licensing requirements for child care facilities or regulated quality control, leaving great variance in policies and programs across the states. There has been debate over whether the government should play a part in nationwide regulations, or leave licensing requirements up to each state as it is now. Some norms have begun to develop in the realm of standards; however, not all states adhere to them, and there continues to be a lack of uniform and adequate quality control in this area.

Hellburn and Bergmann (2002) provide an in depth look at the requirements and qualification in each state for both child care centers and family

day care homes; the latter proving to mandate even less regulation and lower standards. I was shocked to learn of this data and see proof of the wide variance across the states and the overall lack of regulation. In having worked in child care, I was under the impression that the rules we followed were standard and adhered to by all centers. For example, the centers where I was employed in Michigan kept the infant to teacher ratio at four to one; there are eighteen states that do not abide by this policy. Only nineteen states require pre-service teacher training; nine do not require a criminal records check from their staff, and thirteen states do not require a child abuse registry check. Of all those that have these “mandates,” only in twenty-one states are all centers regulated.

The statistics for family child care homes were even more staggering, and are overall much less regulated. There are very few that mandate any pre-service training, with limited in-service training for employees, and half of the states do not enforce any square footage requirements for indoor space. Because of the nature of a private in-home child care, and the fact that almost anyone can seemingly open one without the general public knowing much about it, many of the requirements set by the state are often not followed anyway. Hellburn and Bergmann (2002) open one of their chapters with a portrait of a run down child care home in Washington D.C. that could bring tears to your eyes. Descriptions of one facility include, “swing set without swings,” “broken stairs,” “screenless open windows, and “overcrowding, infestations of roaches and rats, inadequate supervision, filthy cots and kitchens.” They state that this is but one of over half

off all the city facilities operating without a license; renewals have been held up due to “serious health and safety problems” (p. 123).

Polakow (2007) interviewed struggling mothers who have witnessed “children in high chairs who were not old enough to be by themselves,” “dirty diapers all over the counter,” and parents having “a really bad feeling” about leaving their child in these places, but not knowing what else to do (p. 33). The parents she spoke with testified to their children being in unsafe, non-stimulating environments where they were not receiving proper attention or adequate nurturance. The focus of her interviews and research is primarily low-income families, particularly single mothers, who can not afford higher quality care options and hence, are placed in an incomprehensible predicament that many of us couldn’t imagine facing. Although many families struggle with the cost and quality of child care, these extreme circumstances are only encountered by the lowest income families to whom more regulated, child care centers are inaccessible. Meyers and Gornick (2005) also point out the weak public regulations and highly variable and unequal cost, availability, and quality among child care across the different “classes” of citizens in our country. We see the elite often cared for by highly paid nannies or attending ivy league preschools, while so many more who can’t afford such “expensive treatment” are spending their days in small, run down centers or homes that are unregulated, operating without a license, and providing questionable care to innocent children.

Unfortunately, countless parents are forced to choose affordability over quality, which also unfortunately, tend to go hand in hand. Although there are

exceptions, public child care centers are more likely to hold higher standards and provide a higher quality service to families than private, home based care. Leach (2009) backs this up with her finding that family day care is usually less expensive, staffs poorly trained caregivers, holds lower standards with fewer guidelines, and are much more difficult to regulate and ensure quality care. This is often regarded as a “low status option” (p. 138), as these facilities are frequently run by “random” people, or non-teachers, looking for an easy way to stay home and make money at the same time. Public child care centers, on the other hand, are seen and accepted as more professional, and are more likely to be staffed with knowledgeable “teachers,” who often have had post-secondary educational training. This helps provide for a better understanding of the developmental and emotional needs of young children. Like myself, a vast majority of child care center workers have taken college courses in an educational field and plan to commit to a career enhancing the lives of children. Sadly, there tends to be a significant turnover of child care providers due to their low wages, which prevent many talented people who love children from entering or remaining in the field. One of the parents interviewed by Polakow (2007) argues “there’s something to be said about the fact that I leave the most important person in my life with the lowest paid person in the country” (p. 64). Research has been conducted on the low wages of child care workers, and it is suggested that these wages discourage providers from investing in advanced training and higher quality educational materials, while also providing little incentive for service quality (Hellburn & Bergmann, 2002). Studies have also been done on the

correlation between teacher salaries and quality of care, concluding that teacher education and salary was significantly correlated with the quality of care found in daycare classrooms (Antle, Frey, Barbee, & Frey, 2008).

Another area of research centered around this topic is the relationship between children receiving subsidies and the quality of care they receive. Herbst and Tekin (2010) assert that although subsidies are effective in helping parents maintain work while balancing parenthood, as well as shift children into more formal settings, little research has been done on whether these subsidies have implications for child development. They do point out, however, other factors that will play a part in the way policies affect child outcomes. First, mothers must be employed to receive a subsidy, and several researchers have suggested that early maternal employment in itself has negative consequences for young children. In fact, some believe that the only “good” care of a young child, particularly infants, is with a parent (Hellburn & Bergmann, 2002). A related factor prominent in the discourse, is that subsidies create an opportunity to purchase non-parental care, which presents mixed opinions and findings; some say they have seen a positive effect of formal daycare on children, while others argue that negative effects arise from young children being in the care of anyone other than their parents. The last factor Hellburn and Bergmann bring up is the fact that parents receiving a subsidy have at least a small amount of more disposable income that could go toward their child’s quality of life.

In regards to whether a child receiving a subsidy is likely to receive better or worse quality care, the results are somewhat mixed. There are so many other

factors to consider, and it depends on what we are comparing them to. Are subsidy recipients being compared to other families in a similar position who need a subsidy but have yet to receive one, or are they being compared to a wealthy family in a different neighborhood whose child attends the best preschool in town? One side of the argument is that a child receiving a subsidy will experience higher quality care and positive outcomes, due to the fact that this allows their parents to send them to a more regulated, public child care center that might otherwise be financially out of their reach. Hansen and Hawkes (in Moodie-Dyer, 2011) found that enrollment in a formal child care setting in a child's first nine months of life were associated with increased scores on school readiness in three year olds. Quality early child care settings have also been said to improve cognitive development and social skills; this is suggested to be even more significant for low-income children (Leach, 2009).

In contrast, other researchers have suggested that children using subsidies tend to receive lower quality care, especially those in "subsidy dense centers" (Antle et al., 2008). This particular study suggested that "subsidy density affects overall classroom quality as well as specific aspects of language and literacy instruction in comparable ways (p. 569), but only found a correlation in preschool age groups. Another group of researchers focusing on this age group sought to determine a correlation between preschool children on a subsidy and their subsequent development and progress the following year in Kindergarten (Herbst & Tekin, 2010). It was found that subsidy children performed worse than their counterparts in every domain; however, they caution us to keep in mind that these

results did not account for external differences between the two groups. Although some outcomes are said to disappear once these differences are accounted for, several were still influenced by subsidy use, even after removing systematic differences between the two control groups. One of the explanations for this include possible lapses in eligibility which could put children in multiple care arrangements, and even risky environments, leading to maladjustment and negative social effects. It is also suggested that subsidized children participate in non-parental care more intensively and their arrangements are more unstable; therefore, causing unsatisfactory outcomes.

In observing low-income preschools, such as Head Start programs, Polakow (1993), documented ways in which children in these institutions were treated differently than those in preschools primarily serving the middle class. She noted a more routine and rigid classroom structure, with much less freedom and play, which coincide with the common assumption that these children do not receive these skills at home. Polakow also noticed less patience and less compassion in her visits to some of these low-income classrooms, fostering a separate and unequal education where children of the poor are “destined to custodial care, and those of the privileged to educational enrichment” (p. 128). She suggests that our society is in fact constructing “at risk” students and perpetuating the achievement gap by stratifying the children right from the start. Those who are arguably in greater need of high quality enrichment have less access to it, while those from wealthier families are receiving not only higher

quality care, but also a higher quality integration of social skills and academic stimulation.

Hellburn and Bergmann (2002) raise an interesting question, “What standards should subsidized care meet?” I argue that this shouldn’t be in question; the quality of care to children should all be held to the same standards. I understand the authors’ argument that this can not be a realistic goal in the present time due to the limited amounts of quality care providers available; however, our country needs to take a strong stance on this and make it a reality. We should not be segregating what type of care is adequate for whom; they are all merely children in need of the same amount of quality care components: love, affection, socialization, nurturance, and education. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which the United States alone has yet to ratify, guarantees children the right to an adequate standard of living, and child care is a significant part of this for millions of children. The article also states that this should be provided by state assistance if parents are unable to afford this responsibility, which would include public assistance for high quality child care while children are in non-parental care (Walker, Brooks, & Wrightsman, 1999).

Effects of child care quality on children. All too often, child care is seen as mainly a support to parents so they can remain in the workplace. The same goes for our current subsidy policy; in general, the aim is to support employment among low-income families, while placing few restrictions on the quality of child care at stake (Gormley, in Herbst & Tekin, 2010). This ideal needs to shift toward a focus on the health and development of the child as the

first and foremost concern. Palley and Shdaimah (2011) support the notion that quality child care not only enables women to work, but can improve child outcomes and future potential. Engster and Stensota (2011) also assert that quality child care can play a role in children's early cognitive development as well as long term educational achievement, and are likely to have the greatest effects when children are young. Several studies have demonstrated that "global indicators of quality [child care] are valid predictors of children's social and academic outcomes" (Antle et al., 2008, p. 562). This is especially true for those children who are spending significant amounts of time in non-parental care. Not only does research suggest about half of children are cared for by someone other than a parent on a regular basis before their first birthday, but one study reported nine month old babies in center based care were found to spend an average of forty hours per week there (Leach, 2009). This puts these young children in the hands of someone other than their parents for the majority of the time they are awake during work days, which is often provided by various caregivers that come and go throughout their part-time shifts. Leach, among others, argues the importance of infants to receive constant care by a limited number of people, as it is imperative that they form close emotional attachments. She stresses that passionate personal attention is just as important as physical care for babies, and I would add that this is essential for children of all ages.

Although many still advocate that the best possible care for an infant is a parent, passionate and experienced child care teacher Enid Elliot (2007) supports the notion that daycare can be a positive option if it is of high quality and provides

children with the proper amount of stimulation and nurturance, and allows for physical and emotional bonding and attachment between child and caregiver. Neurobiology research has suggested that “spending one’s early years in an unstimulating, emotionally and physically unsupportive environment will affect brain development in adverse ways” (Hertzmann in Elliot, 2007, p. 25).

Distinguished pediatrician and child psychologist, T. B. Brazelton, M.D., and S. I. Greenspan, M.D., provide extensive facts and supporting research to portray *The Irreducible Needs of Children* (2000). These experts provide insight on the importance of nurturing relationships, physical protection, appropriate developmental experiences, and stable, supportive environments, just to name a few. They also cite the large majority of child care settings that have been deemed lesser than adequate quality; hence, not sufficiently fulfilling all of the above requirements for high quality care. Several factors have attributed to this overall lack of quality in child care facilities. Uneducated staff and a lack of proper training prevent some caregivers from possessing the knowledge necessary to appropriately meet the needs of children. Large ratios can limit caregivers’ ability to meet all of the individual needs of a group of children, particularly infants and toddlers, and can affect the development of strong, emotional attachments. Having multiple caregivers in a given day or week, along with a high turnover rate can also affect the stability of attachments between child and caregiver. Another crucial area cited by researchers, is a lack of integration between care and education (both academic and social) in child care programs, also affected by staff education and training.

Several studies have determined a positive correlation between high quality child care and long term effects that persist throughout later childhood. The Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes Study (Peisner-Fienberg et. al., 1999) was developed to examine the influence of typical center-based child care on subsequent child development. The executive summary presents their major findings in four broad, yet succinct statements: (a) high quality child care is an important element in children's school readiness, (b) high quality child care predicts positive future school performance, (C) child care experiences have a stronger effect on children traditionally classified as "at risk," and (d) the quality of child care classrooms was related to children's cognitive development, while social development was influenced by the teacher-child relationship (p.2). Additional research has corroborated that children who received quality care in their younger years demonstrate higher levels of social, emotional, and cognitive development in the years to follow. They also tend to form more positive relationships with teachers and peers, and demonstrate more appropriate behaviors in school.

Although all of these outcomes are desirable and important to address, we must not, however, ignore the significance of the care children are receiving for their current benefit. Of course we should care about and consider future outcomes, but it is just as important to advocate for positive experiences in their present state of childhood. As opposed to mere citizens of the future, children should be taken seriously as "participants in the present" and should be viewed and treated as "beings" rather than "becomings" (Mason & Fattore, 2005, p. 21).

It is imperative that we address this concern and understand the many needs of children in order to foster healthy growth and development among them all, regardless of whether or not their parents must work outside the home, or what level of income they bring in. Children shouldn't need to "buy" proper care; it should be their natural right.

Current Policy and Public Views on Child Care

Many questions arise in the child care discourse in regard to whose responsibility it is, who should receive public support, in what ways this support should be distributed, how policies and programs should be structured, and what the main goals or outcomes ought to be, as well as how these could best be attained. Lokteff and Piercy (2012) assert that the answers to these types of questions are "as diverse as the political, economical, and cultural values each country holds," and are linked explicitly with a nation's ideologies (p. 120). In other words, child care policies are often defined by the values that particular society holds, and thus, we encounter tensions between these values, national ideologies, and the realistic needs of families for various child care accommodations. Although it is a "complex mixture of factors and ideals that combine to form family policies," White (in Lokteff & Piercy) argues that it is mainly ideation, and not economics that create variation among national child care policies (p. 121).

In her discussion regarding the current state of child and family well-being in today's modern world, in which she feels the economy is not properly

supporting families, Francine Jacobs (in Jacobs & Davies, 1994) proposes the following policy dimensions as a way to view our nation's policy activity:

- Do these policies view children and families as private or public responsibilities?
- Are they targeted to a specific, means-tested group, or are they universal?
- Do the policies promote treatment or preventative strategies?

Each of these dimensions provide insight as to how our government and society as a whole views public policies in regards to family support, and can be used to compare to that of other nation's views on family support policies. I have also included a fourth dimension by which to frame our understanding of society's views on programs to support children, that of instrumental versus existential views. In other words, what is the motivation behind implementing certain policies to support children?

Public vs. private responsibility. A common question in the realm of child care responsibilities continues to persist, "What should the role of the state be in providing assistance to families?" Jacobs (1994) suggests that although the boundaries continue to shift, our country continues to yield a limited sense of public responsibility, especially compared to other nations. As identified by Tocqueville (in Bogenschneider, 2006) in his examination of American democracy, this tendency to rely on private responsibilities stems from a political culture that support values such as individual freedom, autonomy, self-sufficiency, and personal achievement. Wisensale (1997) points out that

historically, even when federal intervention has occurred, the focus was typically on individuals rather than families, supporting Bogenschneider's notion of an individualistic society rather than a widespread focus on familism. Wisensale asserts that this long-standing focus on private responsibility is partly due to the large number of conservative Republicans in office during the time when politicians began seriously discussing family policy. As mentioned in the family leave discussion, it took years to implement FMLA, which was finally signed by the first Democrat to be elected president after twelve years, Bill Clinton. Strongly advocating for family policy and public support, Clinton stated in a commencement address at a state university, "I believe it is imperative that your country give you the tools to succeed in the workplace but also at home. If you or any American has to choose between being a good parent and successful in your careers, you have paid a terrible price, and so has your country" (Wisensale, 2001, p. 186). Meyers and Gornick (2005) agree and argue that we are paying a price by our failure to ensure a healthy start for all children, for children are "public goods" that benefit society as a whole (p. 58).

Hellburn and Bergmann (2002) argue that child care, and all aspects surrounding it, should be a public concern, as the long term effects will determine what kind of future citizen these children will be. Leach (2009) also thinks "it is a pity" that not all nations recognize that issues revolving around children should be a social responsibility in which we all participate in as a nation (p. 8). She points out that our nation relies on "demand-side funding" where parents are ultimately responsible for the funding of their own desired care; as opposed to "supply-side

funding” used in many European countries, often paid for through taxation and support from the government (p. 267). These countries see early child care as a universal right and a social essential, similar to primary education and health care. In contrast, the societal contribution to child rearing in the United States is small compared to other industrialized nations, as our society continues to assume that other people’s children are not “our” responsibility (Walker et al., 1999). The Nordic region is especially known for family support being recognized as a civic responsibility, with a common feature being that child care is necessary to prepare children for their futures and provide essential social experiences. In other words, not only is it seen as a tool to help parents balance employment with child rearing, but as a value to the child in and of itself for social and emotional development (Waldfogel, 2001). The separation of the public from the private world in our country; however, has “strengthened the notion that families should stand or fall on their own,” and in turn, a “rather impoverished set of child and family policies have emerged” (Jacobs & Davies, 1994). In regards to the lack of government participation in child care programs and quality, I particularly enjoyed a sarcastic quote by feminist social reformer, Florence Kelley, that should serve as a no-brainer, “If the government can have a department to take such an interest in the cotton crop, why can’t it have a bureau to look after the nation’s child crop?” (in Bogenschneider, 2006, p. 147).

Targeted vs. universal support. Most public policies in regard to families and children in our country are generally targeted, or means-tested, rather than universally available to all. One must usually be considered “needy” in order

to receive public benefits, and even these are often provided for a limited amount of time, being withdrawn once a family's financial situation only somewhat improves. There are still a vast number of families that fall under our government's definition of "needy" that are put on waiting lists to receive benefits that are not available to them due to short supply. Services such as child care are purchased by families who can afford them, and those that can't simply hope for assistance, or are forced to stay home from work collecting welfare or place their children in the care of a provider they do not trust. That aside, myriad family advocates suggest that even if there were enough benefits to go around for all of those labeled "needy," public programs such as child care and family leave policies should be universal and available to everyone by their mere status as a citizen and member of our national community. Leach 2009) addresses the concern that it would be economically challenging to offer services to all children, but still stresses the "temptation to spend only on disadvantaged families...has to be resisted" (p. 174).

As mentioned previously, it is not only the families who fall below the suggested poverty line that struggle with the cost of child care; many middle class families are challenged with these high costs of quality care that often don't fit well into their budget. Universal policies would promote standard, quality care for all families, as opposed to merely helping *some* of the low-income families, and leaving the rest of the low and middle class world to fend for themselves. Proponents of universal policies argue that targeting individuals to receive benefits leads to fractured and disconnected policies, and also claim that this type

of focus has undercut political support due to voter's apprehension that any programs for children are merely disguised forms of welfare programs. Those that favor universalism also feel it will help avert cultural conformity and lessen race and class divides and assert that these types of policies have "proved more effective than means-tested programs in maintaining widespread, ongoing political support" (Bogenschneider, 2006, p. 129). Data has shown that countries that provide more public, universal assistance to families have lower rates of child poverty (Walker et al., 1999). This makes sense when you consider how many more families would be receiving the support necessary to keep their children enrolled in a child care facility while they continue to bring home a paycheck from their place of employment, in order to keep food on the table and a roof over their head.

With the exception of public elementary and secondary education, few benefits accrue to children "by virtue of their universal status as minors" (Jacobs & Davies, 1994, p. 23). If our nation believes in providing universal public education to all school-age children, why are we so hesitant to provide these same services to infants-preschoolers? With the funding provided through Head Start, a much higher percentage of preschool age children receive services at no cost to their families; however, these are still generally reserved for lower income families, and there are not enough slots to go around for everyone. Because our country primarily focuses on school age children the amount of assistance toward early child care is extremely low; one study reported that 56% of children age three to six were supported in some way (including tax benefits, subsidies, and

Head Start), while only 5% of children under three received public support for child care services (Waldfogel, 2001). Although most countries spend more on middle and later childhood than early childhood, the U.S. still spends significantly less than other nations on our youngest citizens. Thevenon (2011) explains the reasoning behind our higher public expenditure for children reaching school age being due to our nation's focus on educational services and cognitive development; however, I argue that we need to start realizing the fact that cognitive development begins in infancy, not on a child's fourth birthday or when they walk through the doors of a preschool.

Treatment vs. prevention. Jacobs (in Jacobs & Davies, 1994) suggests that United States child and family policies are “overwhelmingly treatment-oriented,” with few broadly available preventative programs (p. 24). She also suggests that one of the reasons for this is the common expectation that “normal families can get along without any outside help,” and that middle and upper-class families can purchase supports they need, such as private childcare, or simply work less to accommodate their family needs (p. 24). I have already demonstrated how this is not the case, and that all families can utilize the same types of services. In not implementing prevention strategies early on, such as adequate parental leave and proper child care programs, many families then struggle and our nation makes attempts to “treat” the problem. Advocates for prevention strategies, such as Wisensale (2001) argue that there is a “cost for inaction” and presents studies that have demonstrated companies' economic losses in the long run by not having proper family policies in place (p. 210). In other words, the

employers would have benefited economically by having established policies that assist parents with balancing their responsibilities at work and in the home.

Jacobs also supports the notion that intervening early is far more affective than trying to “fix” the problem later. I would add that not only is it important to see the economic advantage of prevention, but it is imperative to note the social and emotional damage that can be done when policies aren’t put in place and families then have to try and solve or undo their predicament.

Instrumental vs. existential views. This last comparison of differing views deals with the *reasons* behind implementation of specific child and family policies. Why bother and who cares? Not to say that our society or government doesn’t actually care about the well-being of our nation’s children, but the reasoning behind many child related policies is often based on a cost-benefit analysis, or our country’s economic pay-off in the long run. So much research highlights the importance of high quality early childhood care and education in terms of their later academic achievement and behavioral development, and an overall higher chance of becoming a *future* productive citizen in society. For example, the programs put in place for the poor children, such as Head Start, have acted as programs to “inoculate the lives of poor children against the effects of poverty” and have been described as “crime prevention” for later economic payoff (Polakow, 1993). The overall investment in early childhood has been matched with a cost-benefit rationale, as opposed to a child and family’s right to an adequate and fulfilling life. Yes, these are all preventative strategies that I just advocated for, and yes these things are incredibly important to consider, as we of

course want all children to be well-rounded, productive citizens in our communities; however, the problem is they aren't *future* citizens, they *are* citizens. Children aren't going to *turn into* people; they *are* people. This goes back to my previous discussion of children as "beings" rather than "becomings." The future certainly matters; however, the present matters just as much. They have current needs, wants, and emotions. We must care about and include children's present state of well-being in the now when framing our discourse on family policy and the importance of quality child care.

The second part of this includes the government's other reasoning behind family policy: keeping parents in the work place and contributing to our economy. Leach (2009) asserts that we do not offer substantial tax breaks and subsidies for child care because our government prefers mothers to take paid employment and earn money, so they can *spend* it. She suggests they prefer active consumers who will benefit our economy. One way to accomplish this, among all other consumer goods we purchase, is by having to pay others to care for their children, and of course by paying income tax. A history of child care policy suggests that the goal of child care for poor families has always been to keep the parents in the workplace, rather than to provide a safe and nurturing environment for the children (Moodie-Dyer, 2011; Zigler & Frank, 1988). The main focus of child care subsidies is to help transition parents from welfare to employment (Herbst & Tekin, 2010). Lokteff and Piercy (2012) frame these ideals, defined by a society's values, as policies that allow "time to care" versus "time to work" (p. 121). In recognizing our country's lack of family friendly policies, Gilbert and

Van Voorhis (2003) also maintain that our policies seem to elevate the importance of paid work over family time, child rearing, and “the activities of domestic life” (p. 54).

CHAPTER FOUR
INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS OF FAMILY LEAVE & CHILD
CARE POLICIES

Introduction

I have provided an in-depth analysis of the family leave policies and child care programs available here in the U.S. and will now transition to a more brief look at those offered in other industrialized nations, focusing only on countries that comprise the OECD. Most, if not all, researchers agree that the U.S. offers the least generous social welfare benefits in terms of family-friendly policies and cite myriad ways our nation could improve in this critical area. Recognizing our society's lack of public social policy in comparison to others has enticed me to learn what comparable nations are doing to better support their parents and young children in the specific areas of family leave and child care provisions. This chapter will provide insight as to what types of family policies, income support, and child care programs are available in other societies across the world. I have focused mainly on policies and programs offered in the following countries: Canada, Australia, the UK, France, Sweden and Norway. I carefully selected these regions as comparisons to demonstrate a range of economically similar nations who all provide more extensive family policies and support than the U.S. By no means do I want to portray them as perfect; they have undergone many challenges and changes that some might argue have weakened their support. However, when it comes to valuing and placing emphasis on families and children, so many countries supersede ours. I begin with Canada, our closest

neighbor geographically, which shares a similar political economy, size and diverse citizenry, and end with the Scandinavian region, which is often presented as portraying exemplar examples of family support that the rest of the industrialized world could learn from.

Variance among nations' family policies can be due to many factors, including their political, economic, and cultural influences, which are exemplified by welfare regimes, labor market policies, and gender and parenting values (Moss & Deven, 2006). For organizational purposes, I will group my following discussion of international policies by welfare regimes, a concept coined by Esping-Andersen to categorize international political activities based on their quality of social rights, social stratification, and the relationship between state, market, and family (Valeyeva, Christen, & Smorchkov, 2011). Although the countries categorized in a particular regime do not necessarily share all of the same characteristics or policies, this classification is a simple and efficient way to demonstrate the overarching political themes present in each society.

Esping-Anderson defined three broad types of welfare states: liberal, corporatist, and social democratic (as cited in Valeyeva et al., 2011). Waldfogel (2001) also uses these regimes to describe the variance in family policy across OECD countries and uses the terms Anglo-American, Continental European, and Nordic, respectively, to classify the levels of social public assistance to families as low, medium or high. Valeyeva et al. (2011) defines a liberal state as one with modest universal transfers and insurance plans as well as traditional work-ethic norms. Also present is an order of stratification and market encouragement by the

state, resulting in minimum subsidized private welfare schemes. A corporate state supports social rights, but contingent upon class, resulting in a hierarchical society. This regime aims to preserve traditional family-hood, with the state intervening when necessary. Social democratic states rest on principles of universalism and highly promote equality. States in this regime strive to assist all families by socializing costs for individual independence.

Parental Leave

Introduction. As mentioned, the U.S. is the only advanced country in the OECD that does not mandate a paid parental leave. Our government's notion of a universal leave entitlement is not only unpaid, but is short in duration and comes with many restrictions and drawbacks. My aim here is to provide a look into the more generous leave policies that are offered across other industrialized nations. I hope the reader will see how far the U.S. lags behind and recognize other alternatives for family policy we could adopt to foster a better balance between family's public and private lives.

Liberal Welfare/Anglo-American Welfare States. For the purposes of this analysis, those nations defined as liberal welfare states are the United States, Canada and Australia. As I have already went into great detail on U.S. policies, I would like to provide a brief glimpse of the family policies in these other two Anglo-American countries. As mentioned previously, these welfare states are grouped according to common characteristics, though still vary in types of policy development and the level of public social assistance they offer.

Canada. Although similar in many respects, the Canadian welfare state has developed more steadily than the U.S. and has introduced a number of social programs that we have yet to see here. In terms of their publicly funded universal health care, Olsen (1994) classifies this realm as social democratic; however, their family policy is still fairly liberal in comparison to most of Europe, albeit more generous than in the United States. Wage replacement benefits for pregnancy and childbirth were first introduced through an amendment of the Unemployment Insurance (UI) Act in 1971 (Baker, 1995). This program was originally established to protect employees who had to experience temporary loss of income between jobs, and excluded many workers in the first few decades of its implementation. Adoptive parents were entitled to this benefit by 1984, and another amendment in 1990 gave fathers who qualify the right to take leave under UI.

Both employees and employers contribute to the trust funds. Premiums for UI are collected through payroll deductions; about three percent of employee's earnings are deducted and invested in the UI fund, and employers contribute approximately 1.4 times the amount their workers pay in. As in the U.S., some employers provide more than the statutory amount, increasing their workers' incentives and benefits (Baker, 1995). Employees pay their premiums up to a set amount (approximately \$26,000) through deductions that are roughly \$2.55 per \$100 of salary until the maximum amount has been reached, and then payments are no longer made (Wisensale, 2001). To qualify for these benefits, a parent must have been employed continuously for one year, and also contributed to the

UI fund for at least twenty weeks in the last year (Baker, 1995). As in many other countries, specifically in the liberal welfare states, this requirement leaves many parents ineligible to collect benefits.

Canada offers both a maternity and a parental leave provision. Maternity leave is set at 17 weeks, followed by 35 weeks of parental leave than can be taken by either parent or shared within the first year. Fifteen of these weeks are paid at 55% of the leave taker's salary prior to pregnancy (Columbia University). On average, leave takers receive a maximum of approximately \$275 per week (Wisensale, 2001). Although this is more generous than the unpaid leave mandated here in the U.S., many women, particularly low-income and single women, still struggle with their income being cut in half over the duration of their maternity leave. Hanratty and Trzcinski (2009) point out that parents receive lower amounts of Social Assistance benefits during this time, which get cut while they are receiving leave benefits; therefore, the impact of these payments is said to be minimal for low-income parents. The authors suggest that countries interested in prolonging their paid leaves may want to consider different ways of ensuring consistent support to low-income families, in order for this to have a more positive impact and help families in the way it was intended.

Australia. Until just last year, Australia was the United States' only partner among OECD countries that did not have a national family leave policy in regards to the birth or adoption of a new child. As in the United States, several employers offered a paid leave benefit on their own accord; however, there was no universal policy that mandated any such benefit. Also similar to the U.S., the

nation was divided among those who supported the policy and those who opposed it, some arguing that they shouldn't have to help pay for other people's kids. Those against the paid leave scheme perceive it as a form of welfare where the government is simply paying people to have children. Tory Shepherd argues against this notion that paid leave is a bribe to have children, or a form of welfare to help only the needy, and believes "it's an investment (too little and too late, some say) in the future" (2011, January 4). She mentions the positive side effects of children getting to spend more time with their primary caregivers, as well as aiding in ameliorating the effects of the aging population. Obviously aware that there will always be some women who will not return to the workforce after bearing children, she still believes that by making leave a normal part of employment policy and providing parents with these kinds of family-friendly benefits, will increase the chances women will enter and remain in paid labor. Shepherd briefly points out how so many other countries that offer far more generous leaves continue to maintain high employment rates among women, as well as steady rates of fertility (Shepherd, 2011, January 4).

According to the Australian Government, the nation has decided to implement a universal paid leave in order to "provide greater financial support to families, increase workforce participation and promote early childhood development" that is meant to reflect the nation's "child-centred approach to family policy, which is fundamentally about what is in the best interests of the child" (Australian Government, 2009). Eligible parents will receive payments at the federal minimum wage level, which is approximately \$545.00 per week. This

leave benefit lasts for a duration of eighteen weeks and usually comes from the employer, while some receive the benefit through the Family Assistance Office. The Government has aimed to impose minimal costs to employers, who receive Government funds, and are responsible for making payments to employees who have completed twelve months of continuous service.

Eligibility requires the primary caregiver (usually the mother) to have been engaged in paid work continuously for at least ten of the last thirteen months prior to expected birth (or adoption), and have worked at least 330 hours in that ten-month period. At only an average of about one full day of paid work per week, this is fairly generous eligibility, especially in comparison to the U.S. where one must work full time for a year to receive an unpaid leave of only twelve weeks. Although this benefit is considered universal, it is only available to those earning less than \$150,000 per year; however, this still covers a wide range of families, and most who would experience a financial hardship without it. This covers all employees, including those who are self-employed. The benefit may be transferred to another caregiver (usually the father) if they meet the eligibility criteria. Mothers who do not qualify for the leave benefit will still be granted other forms of assistance, including the “Baby Bonus.” All families used to receive the Baby Bonus; however, qualified parents must now choose between either the bonus or the paid leave; they may not receive both (Australian Government, 2009).

Qualifications for the Baby Bonus are much less strict, allowing nearly all families access to it. A parent must meet residency requirements, be the primary

caregiver, and have adjusted taxable income of less than \$75,000 for the six month period following birth or adoption of the child. As of July 1, 2011, the bonus consists of a higher first installment of \$879.77, followed by twelve bi-weekly payments of \$379.77. Under the instance of multiple births, a woman could receive payments for each child. She could also decide to take the Baby Bonus for one child, and utilize the paid leave for another, as these cannot be used simultaneously for the same child. All forms of these child related benefits may be claimed up to three months prior to the birth or adoption of a child (Australian Government, Family Assistance Office). The universal benefits mandated by the federal government may be used in conjunction with any available company provided maternity leave. The national paid parental leave must be taken after birth or adoption, and used within twelve months. Parents eligible for a company provided leave benefit may, for example, utilize this leave prior to the arrival of a child, followed by the benefits mandated by the government.

A new addition to Australia's family-friendly policies will begin in just a few months on July 1, 2012, with the implementation of a specific paid paternity leave, also referred to as "Dad and Partner Pay" (Australian Labor). The eligibility requirements are the same as those for the paid parental leave; however, now fathers and other partners will be eligible for pay regardless of the mother's eligibility, and in addition to their current parental leave benefits. This is meant to provide financial support to fathers and other partners who normally have to take an unpaid leave to be home with their new child and support their partners. Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, and the Labor Department recognize this need for

financial assistance as well as the importance of father involvement in children's lives and bonding time as a growing family (Australian Labor). As you can see, although Australia is categorized in the same welfare regime as the U.S. for the liberal states' being known for minimal support, Australia has finally taken large steps toward a more family-friendly working world for parents, and recognizes the need for financial support to growing families during this time.

Corporatist/Continental European Welfare States. Although there is great variance in family policies across Continental Europe, they have been grouped together in the same regime as nations that provide moderate leave policies and provide a certain amount of public assistance to help families with the financial burden of childbearing, as well as to support the balance between employment and parenthood. As opposed to liberal welfare states, maternity leave in many European nations is based on the idea that "childbirth is a physical ordeal for women that requires preparation and recuperation," and therefore, serves as a special legislation that is "gender specific" (Baker, 1995). The amount of government support ranges across the countries in regards to the level of assistance provided, but I will provide a brief look at a handful of nations' views on social welfare support, and the types of policies that have been implemented in this area.

The European Union (EU) introduced the Pregnant Workers Directive in 1992, which aimed to "implement measures to encourage improvements in the health and safety at work of pregnant workers and workers who have recently given birth or who are breastfeeding" (Lewis, 2003, p. 135). This directive

recognizes the importance of protecting expectant and new mothers and requires EU Member States³ to implement legislation that protects childbearing women (unlike the United States, where there is an absence of a federal policy specifically aimed at pregnancy). Under this provision, all female employees are entitled to 14 weeks maternity leave, two of which are compulsory. This entitlement is regardless of length of employment service, number of hours worked, or current salary. Member States must ensure that employed pregnant women and new mothers are guaranteed income during the minimum 14 week leave, which must be equivalent to not less than the state's statutory sick pay (British Employment Law Guide). This can vary across states depending on the sick leave pay in each, but is currently 60 Euros per week in the UK (under 80 U.S. dollars per week), which isn't a lot, and not enough to cover most families' expenses; however, most European nations are more generous than the mandated minimum pay (Lewis, 2003). Overall, most continental European countries provide relatively high levels of universal cash support through benefits and tax breaks, with a less obvious target on low-income families (Thevenon, 2011). In addition, a relatively high proportion of employers in the EU provide benefits beyond the statutory leave, as research has suggested that employers who provide

³ The European Union (EU) is a political partnership among the following 27 Member States: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom; Candidate countries not yet Members are as follows: Croatia, Former Yugoslavia Republic of Macedonia, Iceland, Montenegro, Serbia, and Turkey (European Union).

policies that promote a work-family balance see improvements in business performance. These policies have also sought to contribute to long-term economic success and promote social justice by fostering a greater participation in the labor force (Hardy & Adnett, 2002).

United Kingdom. The right to maternity leave in the UK was introduced in the 1975 Employment Protection Act which allowed women to cease work 11 weeks prior to expected delivery and return 29 weeks after childbirth (Baker, 1995). Under the EU Parental Leave Directive, the UK implemented the Employment Regulations Act and Parental Leave Regulations in 1999, expanding upon leave benefits for parents. The current Statutory Maternity Leave (SML) is 52 weeks long; this is a combination of 26 weeks Ordinary Maternity Leave (OML) and 26 weeks Additional Maternity Leave (AML). Two weeks of this are considered Compulsory Leave, which women must take after the baby is born. In order to qualify for Statutory Maternity Pay, a woman must have been employed by the same employer continuously for at least 26 weeks into the “qualifying week” which is the 15th week before the baby is due, and earn enough income to be paying into National Insurance contributions, which is approximately 102 Euros per week (Directgov). Benefits are provided through contributions into the social insurance program by employees, employers, and the government (Baker, 1995). The first six weeks are paid at 90% of an employee’s average gross weekly wages, while the remaining weeks are either continued at the 90% compensation or at a standard flat rate of 128 Euros per week, whichever is lower (Directgov).

If a woman does not qualify for Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP), she may be eligible for a Maternity Allowance if she is employed but does not qualify for SMP, is self-employed, or has very recently been employed and has paid into the National Insurance funds. The rates of pay for this allowance can vary and depend on a woman's gross average weekly earnings, but is generally the same as SMP at either 90% of average earnings or the flat rate, whichever is lower (Department for Work and Pensions).

Qualifications for a father to receive Statutory Paternity Pay are basically the same as those for SMP, and it is paid for a period of one or two consecutive weeks at the lesser amount of either 90% of average weekly earnings or flat rate of 128 Euros. As of April 2011, fathers or partners may qualify for additional paternity leave and pay for a maximum of 26 weeks. To qualify for leave, a father must be taking time off to care for the child, while the child's mother has been entitled to Statutory Maternity Leave or Maternity Allowance, and has started working again. Additional Statutory Paternity Pay is available during the partner's 39-week Maternity Allowance or Pay period (Directgov).

The organization of work hours in the UK are different than many other EU countries; men typically work long hours, while women often work shorter, part-time hours, supporting the traditional family structure. The rates of part-time work are proportionately high among all women, as they also are in Germany and the Netherlands; in 2004, about 40 percent of women in the UK with children worked part-time, and about a quarter of those without. Atypical work schedules and shift parenting are also common among families (Lewis & Campbell, 2007).

Anyone can ask for flexible work arrangements; however the law provides certain employees who meet eligible criteria the right to request a flexible schedule from their employer. Although the employer must seriously consider this request, there is no law that they must fulfill it. They have the right to deny such a request if “there are good business reasons for doing so” (Directgov). Some examples of “flexible working” arrangements that parents may request include the following: flexi time, annualized hours, compressed hours, staggered hours, job sharing, homeworking, and part time. The UK government website, Directgov, offers specific guidelines on who has a right to request these arrangements, as well as detailed information on all other aspects of family policy I have discussed thus far. This serves as a convenient, accessible place where parents can go to learn about all of their options in regards to maternity and parental rights, employment policies, and programs that assist with child care and education. I did not find such a convenient place with this level of comprehensive information in other nations; of course the language may have had something to do with this.

France. Referred to as an example of the “pro-natalist model” by Anne Gauthier’s typology⁴, the main objective in French family policy is to increase

⁴ After presenting a historical review of family policy across the OECD, Anne Gauthier clustered countries into four groups, based upon their overall objectives for family policy: 1) Pro-natalist: the main concern is to increase fertility and encourage families to have children, by implementing policies that help parents reconcile family and work; 2) Pro-traditional: main concern is preservation of the family, with minimal to moderate state support; 3) Pro-egalitarian: main objective is to seek gender equality through dual parent and career roles; 4) Pro-family/Non-interventionist: main concern is families in need, with limited public assistance, as families are viewed as self-sufficient units who meet their own needs privately (Gauthier, 1996).

fertility rates as well as attract more women into the workforce, with support for working mothers “an integral component of French family policy” (Wisensale, 2001, p. 229). France was one of the first nations to develop an explicit family policy in response to decreased fertility rates, through The Family Code in 1923. The institution of the family became an independent component of public policy, and family allowances and benefits were increased through this code. French family policy developed three main goals: a) to increase fertility rates, b) to help families with the financial cost of raising children, and c) to provide financial assistance to poor families to help offset social inequalities (Public Policy Research Center, 2008). Due to the emphasis on both parents contributing to the financial and emotional care of children, family policy in France has said to be the most consistent with the dual-earner/dual-carer model prominent in Scandinavia. This model encourages time for parents to care for their own children during the critical first year of their life, and assumes the government will provide measures to facilitate this (Meyers & Gornick, 2005).

Family policies, including parental leave and allowances are part of the French social security system and under the supervision of the Ministry of Social Affairs. Funding for leave benefits are covered in a variety of ways: employees contribute about 7% through the social insurance program, employers pay in approximately 12.6%, and another small percentage comes from automobile insurance premiums and taxes on drug, alcohol, and tobacco advertising (Wisensale, 2001). Eligibility for paid leave requires a parent to have been employed over the last year. Mothers are entitled to 16 weeks of maternity leave

for a first and second child, 26 weeks for a third and any subsequent children, 34 total weeks for twins, and 46 weeks for triplets. The compensation is paid at their full wages, but not to exceed the social security ceiling. Fathers are entitled to 11 days of paternity leave at 100% compensation following the birth of a child; they may take up to 18 days for multiple births. Additional parental leave may be obtained at the end of the standard leave, which either parent may take up until the child is three years old. There is no mandated leave pay during this period; however, parents may be eligible for additional allowances from the government to assist in the costs of raising a child (Public Policy Research Center, 2008). During this period, parents are guaranteed their employment benefits, insurance, retirement and job protection (Wisensale, 2001).

In an interesting and heart-warming New York Times article titled, “My big fat French parental leave,” father David Jolly (2007, October 26) describes the joy in taking time off work to raise his 20-month old son due to the generous opportunities afforded to him by French family policy. He says he is “living a dream I never imagined living: parental leave in Paris,” where “good Americans are said to go when they die” (Jolly, 2007, October 26). Jolly describes the immense delight in watching his son grow, witnessing his first steps, and hearing him speak his first sentence; an opportunity he would not have had without the federal leave policies put in place by the government of France. Although he only received 11 days of paid paternity leave when his son was born, Jolly still “jumped at the chance” to utilize a second unpaid leave when his wife went back to work after 15 months. He describes the French labor law’s mandate to allow

one parent to stop working or reduce their work schedule to care for a child until their third birthday, with the guarantee to resume their job when they return (same position, or in a similar capacity). Even though this portion of their leave is unpaid, the family receives a government stipend to help with the costs of raising a child, at about \$700 U.S. dollars per month, which Jolly describes as “more than enough for the essentials for the two of us,” such as baby food and diapers (2007, October 26). What is especially interesting is how effortless he says the request for leave was; signing up was “remarkably straightforward.” He simply sent a letter to his company’s personnel department informing them of his intention to take a six-month leave, without any further paperwork or negotiations. Jolly contrasts this with the system here in the United States, where many people don’t even have a right to parental leave, let alone for this duration or with pay and allowances. Not only does our country offer such limited leave, but parents and researchers alike have cited the lack of knowledge about federal and company policies in the U.S., along with a difficult to navigate policy system, complicated rules and paperwork, and lengthy processes in obtaining information and benefits.

Additional leave policies across Continental Europe. Since I have only provided detailed information on a select few countries, I would like to share some brief statistics regarding parental leave policies in additional countries across Europe to highlight an overall similarity across this group of welfare states. My objective is to prove how far the U.S. lags behind the rest of the industrialized world in this area; therefore, I intend to shed some light on the basic policies that are offered across the seas.

Most Central and Eastern European countries offer some combination of paid and unpaid leave until a child is two or three years old. Some countries allow additional time off after the standard leave is up. For example, a parent in Portugal may take two to three years of unpaid leave to continue caring for their children after the statutory parental leave of six months has expired, six weeks of which are mandatory for the mother post-birth. In Hungary, parents with three or more children can take leave on a flat rate benefit until the youngest is eight years old. In Portugal and Spain, mothers may transfer or share part of their maternity leave with fathers, and Portuguese mothers may also choose between a shorter leave paid at 100% or a longer one at 80% of their salary. Other nations that offer parents the flexibility to use all or part of their leave until a child reaches a certain age include Austria, Germany, Belgium and Portugal. Parents in France, Germany, and Portugal may also take their leave on a full or part time basis. In regards to part-time work, Hungary, Italy, Portugal, and Spain allow women to reduce their working hours during the first 9-12 months after birth (Moss & Deven, 2006). Parents in Austria, Spain, and the UK have the right to reduced work hours while their children are young (Ray, Gornick & Schmitt, 2008).

Mothers in Germany are entitled to 14 weeks of maternity leave at 100% wage replacement, typically six weeks prior to birth, and eight weeks after. Maternity benefits are available to all employees who are active contributors to a health insurance fund. Wage replacements come from a percentage paid per month by the health insurance fund, and the rest by the leave taker's employer (Angloinfo). There is not a specific, statutory paternity leave for fathers, but

parents may choose to share up to an additional three years of parental leave, twelve months of which are paid at 67% of that parent's salary (British Employment Law). Parents in Poland are offered 16 weeks maternity leave at 100% pay for the first child, 18 weeks for subsequent births, and 24 weeks for multiple births. Parents are entitled to an additional 24-month leave at a flat rate, with an additional 12 months for single parents. Italian mothers are granted five months maternity leave at 80% of their income, with an additional 10 months (20 months for multiple births) of parental leave that can be taken by either parent, with 30% pay. Any unused leave may be taken until the child is nine years old. Parents are also entitled to five paid family sick days per year to care for children 3-8 years old. Parents in Portugal are allowed to take up to 30 days of family leave off work per year for children, and may also request a special leave of up to four years to care for a sick child (Columbia University). In Austria, the duration of maternity leave is 16 weeks paid at 100% of earnings, with an additional four weeks for premature or multiple births. Parental leave is paid at a flat daily rate for up to 24 months, with low-income and single parents receiving a higher rate. Mothers in Spain receive 16 weeks leave at 100% up to a maximum level, while fathers are entitled to two days at 100% and each parent may take an unpaid full-time leave for up to one year. Greece offers 14 weeks maternity leave paid at 100% and three months unpaid parental leave per parent that can be used until the child is three and a half years old (Wisensale, 2001).

Many working women in Europe who are breastfeeding are offered shorter working hours and/or breastfeeding breaks. Women in Austria are allowed one

45-minute break if they work between 4-8 hours per day, and two breaks if they work more than an eight-hour day. In France, a woman breastfeeding a baby under twelve months old is allowed to take two breaks per day, each a half hour long. A full time mother in Italy has the right to take two one-hour breaks during her shift; she can even choose to take them together at the end of the day to shorten the working day by two hours. Portuguese mothers are also entitled to two one-hour breaks, and mothers of infants under nine months old in Spain are allowed to take a one-hour break or two half-hour breaks everyday (Mothersbliss).

The extended family plays a much more important role in several European countries than we see here in the U.S. In Hungary, child care home allowances can be granted to parents or grandparents caring for children under age two. Parental leave can also be taken by a grandparent in Bulgaria until a child is two years of age. Grandparents and other extended family also play important roles in the care of children in Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece (Robila, 2012).

As you can see, universal paid parental leave, especially maternity, is standard across European countries, and almost all mothers and most fathers are compensated during this time. Although the policies across Continental Europe vary, they provide families with overall high levels of support through paid leave benefits to lessen the stress that parents face when they must be out of work due to childbirth. A 2000 European Commission Report emphasized the promotion of a family-friendly work environment and active labor market policies, while EU

Member States agree that employment and social policies need to be modernized to keep up with changing trends in families and the economy (Hardy & Adnett, 2002).

Social Democratic/Nordic Welfare States. If you were to conduct a search on comparative family policy, a high percentage of your results would include the Nordic region, where you will find the most generous social policies across the world in the realm of families and children. Family policies in this region aim to meet the explicit goals of promoting adequate family bonding time and child well-being, while strongly supporting gender equality. Countries in these welfare states tend to follow the “dual-earner/dual-carer” model described earlier, which engage both the mother and father, as well as the state, in providing for the care of children. Meyers and Gornick (2005) describe this model as one that values both paid labor and caregiving work, while aiming to distribute them equally among men and women. Arrangements provided by the state allow for reduced work hours when time to care for young children is needed, and balances support for parents’ employment and family well-being. Although each individual nation in this region varies in the types of programs and benefits they provide, they are the most similar to one another than the other welfare regimes, and all offer a very comprehensive set of programs and policies that support families throughout pregnancy and into the childhood years.

Sweden. Swedish society and democratic socialism is highly known for its emphasis on gender equality, and believes that parenthood is to be a shared responsibility between mother and father, with substantial help from the

government to facilitate this. Sweden is known for its extreme generosity in the realm of parental leave policies and financial benefits to families with young children. Explicit policies have been put in place for several years in an attempt to alleviate pressures on the family by a highly industrialized society. Ozawa (2004) describes two main issues Sweden sought to address in the formation of their social welfare policies: a) how can the government help facilitate a balance between work and parenting, and help women participate in the labor force, regardless of their family structure? and b) how can the government provide a national minimum for all children, irrespective of their parents' status or background? In their view, addressing these issues benefits the entire society, and also aims for horizontal equity, as opposed to the vertical equity present in the United States (Ozawa, 2004).

Unlike the “fragmented and meager support” in the U.S., Sweden offers “cradle-to-the-grave” coverage through a “coherent package of compatible programs and policies” universally to nearly all of its citizens (Olsen, 1994, p. 4). All families are entitled to parental benefits; earnings related benefits apply to those employed during the eight months prior, while those without a job receive a low, flat rate of approximately 24 U.S. dollars per day. Each parent is entitled to leave benefits based on their own earnings, regardless of the employment or income status of their partner (Duvander, Lappegard, & Andersson, 2010).

Being the pro-egalitarian state that they are, Sweden does not exactly have a separate maternity and paternity leave policy, rather one “parental” leave that can be shared between the mother and father; however, 60 days are reserved for

each parent and cannot be transferred to the other, so essentially they use it or lose it. This two-month period reserved for the father is commonly referred to as a “daddy quota” and was implemented to encourage more fathers to share in the responsibility of caring for their children, and to balance out the gender norms in society (Pylkkanen & Smith, 2004). Fathers are also entitled to an additional ten days of paid leave, to be used immediately after the child is born, in order to be home with the mother and infant (Duvander et al., 2010). The total duration of leave mandated in Sweden is 480 days; 390 of these days are covered at the same rate as the general sickness benefit at 80 percent of the parent’s income, with a cap at SEK 874 in 2009 (equivalent to \$128 U.S.). The remaining 90 days are paid at a flat rate of SEK 180 per day (\$26 U.S. dollars), and an additional three months of unpaid leave is also available. Interestingly, if a parent happens to be sick during their leave, they are still entitled to their usual paid sick leave, which is handled separately and not counted toward parental leave (Swedish Institute). Parents are entitled to 60 days per year to care for a sick child or take them to doctor appointments, paid at the same 80% rate as their parental leave and own sickness benefit (Columbia University).

Not only does Sweden offer such generous policies, but they offer a great deal of choice and flexibility, allowing parents to use their allotted time off in a way that will most accommodate their individual needs as a family. For example, leave benefits may be used full or part-time and may be saved and used any time until a child is eight years old (Ronsen & Sundstrom, 2002). Full-time employed parents have had the right to reduced hours since 1979; parents are able to work

six hour days until their child turns eight (Meyers & Gornick, 2005). For this reason, part-time work is high among Swedish mothers, particularly during the pre-school years; however, it is not very common among women without children (Ronsen & Sundstrom, 2002). This flexibility affords parents the opportunity to plan their leave times according to their own schedules and what will work best for them, spanning it over several years if necessary, although it seems that most parents take at least the majority of the leave during the first year of their child's life. Based only on my research, it seems that many mothers take the first part of the leave up to so many months, while the father takes his leave after the mother returns to work. Although the duration of leave ranges from the shortest to the longest length of time allowed, statistics show the highest frequency of leave time for women is around 9-10 months (Pylkkanen & Smith, 2004).

The number of fathers taking leave and their duration of leave has drastically increased over the last several years, due to encouragement of shared parenting responsibilities and incentives put in place. Sweden was actually the first nation to replace "maternity" leave with "parental" leave in 1974. Even so, only about 6% of fathers were taking advantage of this leave in 1991; this minority population was sometimes referred to as "velvet dads." However, with further incentives over the years to get fathers more involved, a universal social acceptance developed around fathers taking time off work to spend with their families. It is now considered a norm for fathers to request leave when they are preparing to welcome a new child into the world, and for the most part, employers do not resent this request and often expect it. Although mothers continue to take

the longer portion of parental leave, 85% of Swedish fathers now take some portion of their paid leave. An astonishing 80% take one third of the 13-month leave, while 9% take at least 40% of the total leave. Several articles have discussed a redefining of masculinity occurring across the nation due to these large-scale changes in father's contribution and participation in childrearing. Statistics have even showed a decline in divorce and separation rates since "daddy leave" was introduced, even though rates have risen throughout the rest of the world (20-first). Parents are developing a newfound respect for one another and their roles within the family.

One father admits there has been a deep societal process at work in Sweden, and a shift in the very notion of masculinity. In his article describing his lengthy parental leave experience, he made me chuckle by stating, "I truly owned my masculine parenting skills when I had mastered the snack bag" (Hegedus, 2010, August 31). Not native to Sweden, Hegedus describes the generous leave policies this country offers and deeply appreciates the overall 18 out of the last 36 months he has spent at home caring for his two children. He illustrates the streets of Stockholm, where "the daddies and their strollers come at you both singly and in waves." They are often on their way to open preschools, which serve as municipal-run play places, where many men interact with other parents, teachers and their children over a cup of "cheap coffee." This sounds so unlike the hustle and bustle of mostly mothers in the U.S. who rush their children to daycare each morning and drop them off to frantically make it to work on time, scooping them up several hours later with minimal interaction. Hegedus illustrates how funny it

is to him the way “dads act just like the moms,” talking with one another about what was in their baby’s diaper, how long they’re napping and when they started to crawl; he admits that adventures in “Daddyland” caught him somewhat by surprise and was not what he expected! It almost made me teary-eyed reading his final remarks about the great joy he has had with this rewarding experience, and how he can’t quantify how much closer he is with his child. Hegedus discloses that the chance he has had to bond with his children was “revolutionary” as a working dad, and closes with a thank you to the Swedish welfare state for “this chance to visit Daddyland” (2010, August 31).

Norway. With the same level of support and ideals about parenting and families, Norway is very similar to Sweden in the social welfare policies the nation offers and demonstrates an example of a quite “dualistic” set of family policies (Lappegard, 2010, p. 101). Although not quite as adaptable as Sweden, Norway offers flexibility and choice for parents to take their leave in a couple different ways. They are similar in that they offer a “parental” leave that can be taken by either parent for up to 52 weeks at 80% wage replacement, or they may choose to take a shorter leave of 42 weeks to earn 100% of their income. Parents are also entitled to an additional year of unpaid childrearing leave after the standard leave is up (Columbia University). These options afford parents the opportunity to plan a leave that best fits their employment and financial situation. Norway was the first nation to introduce a father’s quota in 1993 (with Sweden to follow two years later) in order to encourage gender equality in families and higher participation among fathers in child rearing and family responsibilities

(Duvander et al., 2010). The quota has been lengthened several times and is now up to 12 weeks as of July 1, 2011; any portion of this allotted 12 weeks not taken by the father is lost. This paternal quota may be used at any time during the benefit period, with the exception of the first six weeks, which are reserved for the mother for medical reasons. For example, the father may use up this quota in one continuous period, or he may choose to receive his benefits in a variety of ways, such as working part-time or a limited number of days per week until his total quota has been met (Stay in Norway). Statistics have shown approximately 80% of fathers in Norway utilize their daddy quota (Ronsen & Sundstrom, 2002).

Eligibility for leave requires the parent taking leave to have been employed six out of the last ten months prior to child bearing. Parents must also build up eligibility after each birth and be employed for at least six months to earn another set of leave benefits for their next child (Duvander et al., 2010). Like most countries, the benefit is capped at a certain amount; however, a small percentage of parents exceed this amount. Those parents who do not meet the requirements to earn a paid leave can receive a one time, tax-free lump sum cash payment at birth, which was 4,700 Euros in 2007, a fairly significant amount for many. These leave benefits are financed through general taxes with no direct cost to employers (Lappegard, 2010).

Like Sweden, part-time work is high among mothers in Norway, and is the highest among the Nordic countries (Ronsen & Sundstrom, 2002). Most mothers take advantage of the leave policies and stay at home throughout the allotted duration, with many returning to work part-time while their children are young.

Parental care of infants and toddlers is incredibly important to Nordic parents and the policies put in place afford them the opportunity to do this. Further benefits to parents include a breast-feeding mother's right to reduced work hours, extended leave durations for multiple births, and entitlement to leave with sick pay for up to ten days per year to care for children's needs (15 days when more than two children in the family), as well as special accommodations and arrangements for single parents and those with disabled or chronically ill children (European Industrial Relations Observatory).

Additional leave policies across the Nordic region. I now intend to provide just a glimpse of the basic leave policies across the remaining countries of the Nordic region, which include Denmark, Finland and Iceland. Parents in Iceland are entitled to a very generous leave, with three months each for the mother and father, and an additional three months that one parent can take at an 80% wage replacement; this nine-month leave can be spread over the first 18 months after birth. They may also take an additional unpaid leave until their child is eight years old (Columbia University). Mothers in Denmark are entitled to a pregnancy leave with full pay four weeks before the expected delivery date. Immediately following the birth, the mother is entitled to 14 weeks of maternity leave, two of which are mandatory. The father is permitted to take two weeks of paternity leave during the 14 week maternity period, which is usually taken directly after the child is born. This portion of leave is paid at 100% salary to those who meet the qualifications. Parents are then entitled to 32 weeks of joint parental leave which they may share as they choose (Expat in Denmark). All

wage earners who are entitled to sickness pay are eligible for parental leave, which is usually paid in full salary but sometimes at a flat rate equivalent to unemployment benefits which is covered by the state (New to Denmark). Finland provides mothers 18 weeks of maternity leave in addition to 26 weeks parental leave for parents to decide amongst themselves who will take the time off. The leave is paid at 70% of prior earnings for those who qualify. Parents may also choose to take an additional childrearing leave until the child is three years of age at a flat rate, or opt for a home-care or child allowance instead to help with care expenses for children under seven years old. Parents of children under the age of three also have a right to reduce hours and work part-time to help facilitate their child care needs. Parents in all of these countries are guaranteed either their same job or one comparable when they return to work after their leave (Columbia University).

Child Care Policies and Programs

Similar to the variance in parental leave policies across the nations, child care programs also differ greatly around the world, with some countries offering a higher amount of public assistance than others. You will find that not only the amount of public funds, but also the way in which they are distributed and to whom, can vary greatly from place to place. These dissimilarities can be due to different societal and governmental views on the importance of child care and whose responsibility it is, as well as how governmental structures and budget distributions are carried out. In her thorough discussion of the state of child care today, Penelope Leach (2009) argues that “it is a pity that not every nation or

community recognizes that [issues revolving around childrearing] is not just a familial responsibility but a social one” in which we should all contribute as a society (p. 8). One commonality we will find across the board is an increase in the number of women in the workforce over the years, which has led to an overall higher demand for child care; although in some countries where women stay home with their newborns much longer, this demand doesn’t kick in until the child reaches toddler or preschool age. In the following section I will point out the assorted ways in which nations have responded to the rise in dual parent employment, and what provisions have (or have not) been put in place to support the combination of work or school with parenthood in today’s modern world. The three major concerns surrounding child care that I will discuss include affordability, accessibility, and quality; all of which are affected depending upon the mandates put in place at the state or federal level.

Liberal/Anglo-American Welfare States. Just as with leave policies, there is great divergence in child care programs and services across the liberal welfare states of Australia, Canada, and the United States. Not only are child care programs more difficult to universalize and standardize than parental leave policies, but these three welfare states are among the largest of those comprising the OECD nations, resulting in variations of quality, affordable and accessible child care across the states and provinces. All of these countries have made national efforts over the years to improve the state of child care, with some major strides; however, they are still named as less regulated and more costly to parents in comparison to European nations, with the exception of a few major initiatives

and reforms. In regards to cost, Sheila Kamerman (2000) points out that only in the Anglo-American countries do parent fees cover most of the costs; whereas in other OECD nations, the programs are funded through a greater amount of support from the government. She also describes the overall absence of national policy supporting early education, which creates two separate “streams” of “education” and “daycare” partly due to the continued ambivalence over who is primarily responsible for child rearing and education and different stages (Kamerman, 2000, p. 9). There is a divided responsibility between education and welfare for young children in the Anglo-American model, without any consistency in assigning responsibility or administering programs.

Canada. Each of Canada’s jurisdictions have their own approach to early childhood care and education with a number of various programs to meet each of their objectives in meeting the needs of parents and children; thus, there is not one national strategy or program supporting child care. Each province or territory has its own program that provides requirements, which usually falls under a social or community services ministry. Although the range of early childhood education and care (ECEC) services “vary enormously by region and circumstances,” I will attempt to provide an overall sense of the state of child care in most of Canada (Friendly, Beach & Turiano, 2002).

Similar to the United States, the major services available to children in Canada are child care centers and family day care homes. Data and statistics are inadequate due to the fragmented nature of the system across provinces; however, according to various studies, unregulated family day care is the most prevalent

form of ECEC across the country (Columbia University). One study showed that most children with working parents are cared for in unregulated care while mothers were at work or school, which are provided by family child care providers, in-home caregiver, or a relative. Organized, regulated centers are in short supply and/or are too costly for many parents to obtain (Friendly, et al., 2002).

Parental fees in Canada are somewhat lower than those in the U.S., but still significantly high in relation to most European nations, up to 82% of the cost in some provinces (Kamerman, 2000). All jurisdictions provide some subsidized care to low-income families; however, the limitations on the availability of subsidies prevents many eligible parents, and many more who should be deemed eligible, from having access to this support. As in the U.S., child care is mainly a private service that requires parents to cover most of the fees, other than a select group of “needy” families who receive funds from the government (Friendly et al., 2002). It is also interesting to note that for-profit center care remains almost non-existent, except in Canada (except Quebec), the U.S., and the UK (Kamerman, 2000).

Quebec. Thus far, Canada seems to be experiencing the same problems as the U.S. in the realm of early child care; however, one province has developed a unified system that highly contrasts with the rest of the nation. In Quebec, children of all ages have a legal right to early care and education. The province has significantly increased the number of licensed child care facilities available to children and accounts for almost all of the increase in regulated centers in Canada

since 1998. Whereas only 24% of children across the country have access to regulated care, the rates for Quebec are considerably higher at 43% (OECD, 2006). With more enforced regulations, a right to a child care place, and reduced fees, Quebec accounts for approximately 40% of the total child care in the nation (Columbia University).

There are forms of unregulated child care in Quebec that include family child care homes, where the maximum number of children permitted is six, nursery schools (Jardins d'enfants) that care for a minimum of seven children ages 2-5 on a regular basis for up to four hours per day, and "stop-over centers" (Haltes-garderies), where children can be cared for on a casual, drop-in basis for up to 24 hours. Regulated child care, which children in Quebec are entitled to, include mainly those forms of care under the title, CPE (Centre de la petite enfance), which can include care for primarily children ages 0-4 in both centers and family homes. CPE's have strict ratio regulations and must be non-profit with a board of directors. Other forms of day care centers that are not operated by a CPE or are for-profit are called a Garderie, and typically serve seven or more children on a regular basis, not to exceed 24 consecutive hours. There are approximately twice as many "child care" centers as there are "day care" centers in the province (Friendly et al., 2002).

The Quebec Family Policy began in 1997 with the extension of Kindergarten to a full day (it is still a half-day program in most of Canada) as well as the provision of child care to all four year olds at a parent cost of five dollars per day. This policy was extended to all three year olds in 1998, two year olds in

1999, and finally to all children in 2000. Not surprisingly, this led to a significant increase in the number of children enrolled in regulated child care (Baker, Gruber & Milligan, 2005). Some research has suggested that despite the increase in child attendance and parental labor supply, the program has produced negative consequences for some families who utilized the subsidized program, such as “increased physical aggression and diminished social skills” in children, and lower-quality parental relationships (Herbst & Tekin, 2010, p. 621). In my own opinion, there could be a variety of factors to consider here, and do not personally believe such negative outcomes abruptly arose from a change in out-of-pocket costs. Baker et al. (2005), researching this program on behalf of the National Bureau of Economic Research admit that although there have been consistent reports of negative outcomes, they are subjective measures with benign interpretations. They suggest that these findings could be due to other factors such as a short-term adjustment to child care that may not impose long-term effects.

Australia. Among the liberal countries, Australia is unusual in that child care fee support is available to 98% of parents through a Child Care Benefit and Tax Rebate. Approximately 60% of early childhood expenditures are public, with parents contributing an average of 38% of the cost; low-income families receive higher benefits, resulting in less out-of-pocket costs for public care. In response to previous limited supply of care facilities, this example suggests that if sufficient subsidies are made available, providers will quickly expand to accommodate higher enrollment (OECD, 2006).

Early Childhood Education and Care in Australia has separate auspices involving both federal and provincial governments, with enhanced federal activity in recent years. At the federal level, ECEC is shared among the Department of Family and Community Services and the Department of Education. Major child care services in ECEC include family day care, provided in the homes of caregivers, and “long-day child care centers,” which are available on average eleven hours per day year-round. These arrangements cover about 24.6% of children 0-3 and up to 61.5% of four year olds (OECD, 2006).

In an effort to implement an overarching framework to promote optimal child development, the Australian government drafted a National Agenda for Early Childhood in 2004. In December 2009, all Australian governments agreed to a new National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care, which promised all of the country’s children “the best possible start in life through high quality early childhood education and care and school age care services” (Tasmania Department of Education). This Framework aims to improve services that impact child development, as well as empower families to make informed decisions regarding what services will best meet their needs and those of their children. Included in this is a legislative framework consisting of a National Quality Standard with an assessment and rating system, and an authority in each state/territory that is responsible for the monitoring and assessment. In addition to this, a new national organization, the Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority, has been developed to oversee the system and ensure consistency (Tasmania Department of Education). All child care providers are

now required to participate in the national Quality Improvement Assurance System in order to maintain eligibility for government funding support. This regulation encompasses family day care, long-day care, and outside school hours services for older children. Providers must not only meet satisfactory participation requirements, but also certain opening hour guidelines and adhere to a priority of access to families. In order for parents to be granted Child Care Benefits for a facility, the services must be registered and the quality accreditation process must be adhered to (OECD, 2006).

A family may be entitled to the Child Care Benefit, which helps cover the cost of approved child care services, if they meet the following criteria: a) the child attends a registered facility that meets federal requirements in quality standards, b) the child is immunized unless exempt, and c) the parents meet income and residency requirements (Australian Government, Department of Human Services). Families may receive up to 24 hours of care per week per child if they meet basic eligibility and are using an approved service. They may be eligible for up to 50 hours of Child Care Benefit per week if both parents are involved in work or school-related activities at least 15 hours per week, although there can be exceptions where some parents may be exempt. If both parents are working and/or studying over 50 hours per week and are unavailable at the same time to care for their children, they may earn more than 50 hours of Child Care Benefit (Australian Government, Family Assistance Office). Parents who prefer to have their child in the care of a relative, friend or nanny may still qualify for the Benefit. The provider would need to register as a caregiver with the

government's Family Assistance Office, and then parents would receive their entitlement through a direct credit to their account after services have been provided and paid for. Benefits for this type of care may only be granted if a parent is working or studying for some portion of their week (Australian Government, Department of Human Services).

A parent can choose to have their Benefit for approved care paid directly to the provider to reduce their weekly child care fees, or as a lump sum at the end of the financial year. The rates are adjusted each year in line with the Consumer Price Index, in order to reflect the cost of living and provide accurate payments. According to rates for 2011-2012, the maximum rate for one non-school age child in up to 50 hours of care at an approved center was \$189 per week, and \$31.60 per week in registered care in the home. The amount of Benefit a family receives correlates to their annual income; families utilizing approved care are subject to an income test, while those using registered care are not. The maximum rate is payable to families with an income below \$39,785, or if one parent is receiving government income support. As income increases, the amount of Benefit decreases. The maximum amount in which families would receive a zero rate is effective January 2012 and is as follows: \$138,065 for one child, \$143,095 for two children, and \$161,581 for three children. As one can see, the rates are set fairly high, providing a vast number of families with at least some assistance (Australian Government, Department of Human Services).

Another form of universal public assistance offered by the Australian Government to help cover the cost of care is the Child Care Rebate. This payment

covers 50% of out-of-pocket expenses for approved child care up to a maximum amount per year, which is currently capped at \$7,500 per child. Eligibility for the Rebate requires the use of approved child care, deemed eligible for the Benefit (even if at a rate of zero), and both parents involved in work or study (for any number of hours). There is no income test for the Rebate; even if parents are not entitled to the Benefit due to income, they may still be eligible for the Rebate. The amount of the Rebate is based upon a family's annual income, but is not capped. Parents may choose to receive their Rebate in four different ways: a) directly to their approved service provider every other week, b) directly to their bank account every other week, c) quarterly payments to bank account, or d) annual payments to their bank account (Australian Government, Family Assistance Office).

In addition to the Child Care Benefit and Rebate, families may also qualify for two types of Family Tax Benefits to help with the cost of child care. Family Tax Benefit "A" helps families with the cost of raising children and is paid to families with dependent children up to age 21, and up to age 24 if they are full-time students. Family Tax Benefit "B" is meant to provide extra assistance to single parents and families with one main income, while the other parent chooses to stay home or work part-time to care for children (Columbia University). Both Tax Benefits have eligibility requirements that must be met in order for families to claim their share.

Although classified as a liberal state, Australia has placed a large focus on families and children in recent years and has implemented multiple measures to

ensure many parents adequate assistance in covering the high cost of child care. The nation has also aimed to improve conditions by standardizing quality and assessment at the federal level, and provide an “overarching framework to promote optimal child development” (OECD, 2006).

Corporatist/Continental European Welfare States. Although there is a great deal of variation across the several countries comprising the European Welfare States, myriad research of OECD nations has suggested in general, more quality and affordable child care among European nations than in the United States. Whereas the United States does not begin providing universal free access to early education until the age of five, the concept of universal access beginning at age three is generally accepted across Europe. Most countries provide all children with at least two years of free, publicly provided ECEC before they begin primary school. Early education programs are usually free to parents, and often attached to schools (OECD, 2006). Most countries that were not currently providing full coverage for children over age three in 2000 had stated their intent to do so over the next several years (Kamerman, 2000).

The dominant pattern in Europe is to provide programs that serve children age two or three to the age of compulsory school (five or six) under the educational auspices, while the younger children are cared for under health or social auspices. Some countries are aiming to extend responsibility to educational auspices for children under the age of three in the near future. Family day care providers (often referred to as “childminders”) are the major public service providers for children under three in Europe, and are often preferred by parents.

This is unlike the Nordic region, and to a certain extent the U.S., where these types of programs are seen as secondary or inferior to center based care.

Providers in family day cares in Europe are usually trained caregivers with decent salaries and benefits, and are selected, supervised, and qualified (Kamerman, 2000). The cost to parents for child care varies across countries, but on average, parents contribute about 25-30% of the costs, while the government, taxes, and sometimes employers fund the majority of the remaining cost (OECD, 2006).

There is a higher overall investment in child care services and programs in Europe than the OECD average (Thevenon, 2011).

Not only is the cost lower to parents, and the quality better regulated than in the United States, but with a few exceptions, there seems to be an overall decent supply of child care in most continental European countries. A European Social Survey in 2006 asked families how satisfied they were with the current levels of child care available. Many countries responded between 70-80% satisfaction with the current accessibility, some responding they would like “slightly more.” Supply is not currently meeting demand in France; thus, only 57.5% of parents were happy with the amount of care available. A very high percentage of parents in Mediterranean Europe would like to have a higher amount of child care, especially in Portugal, where a considerable number of parents were unhappy with present accessibility (Minguez, 2008).

United Kingdom. Kamerman (2000) places the UK model of child care into the same category as the U.S. and Canada, as somewhat “fragmented...diversified...inadequate as to supply, and of mixed quality” (p.

27), but says there appears to be a movement away from the dual-track model and towards a more holistic education-based program for children under age six. Currently, three and four year olds are under the educational auspices, while children under three fall under the welfare auspice (Kamerman, 2000). According to Lewis and Campbell (2007), there has been a continuing attempt to increase the number of child care slots available for specifically 3-4 year olds, as well as the number of hours of free early education to all children. The government has also pledged to increase the number of part-time nursery places for disadvantaged two year olds, as well as “wrap-around” chargeable care (before/after school programs) for all children. Like the United States, the UK tends to target low-income families for subsidy use, as opposed to a universal approach. Although the cost of early child care comes primarily from parental contributions and are higher than most other European nations, the out-of-pocket expenses are still on average lower than those in the U.S., which vary greatly according to service type and income category, but said to be an average of 45% (this is specific to England). Low and medium income parents may be covered up to 80%, and many parents using private services pay up to the full costs (OECD, 2006).

The highest proportion of child care for children 0-3 takes place by private child minders, playgroups and day nurseries. Most children are cared for by their parents or informally by relatives their first year of life. In 2001, only about 20% of infants under age one were enrolled in formal care. Approximately 30% of children 1-3 attend child minders or private nurseries, and about 30% of two year olds attending a playgroup, most often run by a church or other voluntary

association. The major service for 3-4 year olds are state maintained nursery schools, which may be in half of full day blocks during the academic year, and almost all children are enrolled in these programs as well as playgroups (OECD, 2006). All three and four year old children are entitled to 15 hours of free nursery education for 38 weeks out of the year, which applies until they reach compulsory school age (the term following their fifth birthday). Free early education is available at a range of settings and families can conveniently obtain information regarding these services from a Family Information Service (Directgov). In the UK, 96% of three year olds are enrolled in a free early education place, and the majority of four year olds participate in state funded reception classes, with some attending private nursery schools. Ninety-eight percent of four year olds are enrolled in a free nursery education place for at least two and a half hours per day (OECD, 2006).

The UK has instituted a comprehensive, statutory framework that sets the standards for development and care of children from birth to age five, called the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). All providers are required to follow the EYFS to ensure parents the confidence that their children will receive a quality experience, regardless of what type of setting they choose (Department for Education). Any provider receiving government funding to provide free early education must be included in the Directory of Providers, follow the standards and goals outlined in the EYFS, and receive regular inspections (Directgov). All registered providers and schools were required to use this program as of September 2008. The EYFS is based on four major themes: a) every child is a

unique and competent learner, b) children learn to be independent from loving and secure relationships, c) a child's environment plays a key role in their learning and development, and d) children learn and develop in different ways, and all areas of learning and development are equally important and interconnected (National Childminding Association).

Children's Centres are "one-stop-centres" for parents and children that provide single, on-site child care as well as family support for parents, health services and even employment advice all year round from "dawn to dusk" (OECD, 2006, p. 416). There are more than 3,600 centres across England and conveniently bring all of these services together in one place so that parents can seek advice and resources, or simply socialize with other families, while their children make friends, learn and play. Not all centres are the same; however, they all must provide child and family health services, parenting advice, local child care options, access to specialist services, and information on work or training opportunities. Most of the centres offer quality child care and early learning opportunities, but those that don't will help advise on other local child care options. Children's Centres are open to anyone and most of the services are free; however, there is a fee for child care and activities such as toddler play groups (Directgov).

Nearly all parents in the UK qualify for a nominal Child Benefit, which is not income tested. The main requirement is that you are simply responsible for a child, even if you are not their parent, and also if they are not living with you. Families receive a slightly higher benefit for the oldest child, at just over 20 Euros

per week, and 13.40 Euros for each additional child. This is usually paid every four weeks but can sometimes be paid weekly to single parents or those receiving Income Support. Parents may also be entitled to tax credits to help with the costs of childrearing and child care depending on how many hours they work, how many children are living in the home, and whether you pay for child care. The amount will also depend on income; the lower the income, the more tax credit a family will receive (Directgov). There are a few additional benefits parents can receive to provide financial help, but most of them depend upon income and target low-income families and single parents, as in the U.S. However, as you can see, the nation is doing much more to provide parents with financial assistance in the realm of child care than here in the U.S., even though the majority of provisions are aimed at children above three years old. The UK still has some catching up to do with other European nations in providing more subsidized ECEC to their infants and toddlers.

France. France has a long history of supporting early childhood and the family as a whole, and see early child care and education as beneficial to all children. The country has one of the largest fertility rates in the EU, as well as some of the highest rates of maternal employment, and nearly all children three and up attend pre-school. These statistics have been attributed to the nation's importance of child care policy as well as the government and society's efforts to contribute to work and family demands, allowing parents to more smoothly and efficiently balance both worlds (Lokteff & Piercy, 2012). When a delegation of American child care experts visited France to observe their ECEC programs,

“they were amazed by the full-day, free *écoles maternelles* that enroll almost 100 percent of French three, four, and five-year olds” (Clawson & Gerstel, 2002, p. 29). They point out that the French system of ECEC has a certain appeal to U.S. politicians and experts due to their emphasis on education from such a young age, with children typically beginning “quasi-school” about three years earlier in France. Although the system in France aims to assist working parents, it is primarily regarded as educational and preparation for primary school.

Another panel of experts suggests the U.S. should look to France for ideas in the area of ECEC, and concluding in a report that they are “at a level of economic development similar to that of the United States, but far ahead of us in insuring that its young children are well and safely cared for” (Lawson, 2009). In contrast to the U.S. where so many parents weave through a patchwork of programs and struggle to find quality and affordable child care, all children in France, whether rich or poor or somewhere in between, are included in the same national system, taught from the same curriculum by certified teachers under the national ministry. Rather than targeting poor families, additional financial assistance is provided to entire geographical areas when needed. Schools in some urban areas receive extra funding to provide additional training and resources. In this way, poor children are not singled out, such as they are in the free lunch programs in the U.S. In fact, all children are provided a lunch in French schools (Clawson & Gerstel, 2002).

Approximately 64% of children 0-3 are cared for by their parents, 18% with an accredited family day care provider (*assistante maternelles*), and only 8%

in crèche services (center-based care). The generous parental leave in France allows so many parents to stay home longer with their children; therefore, it is rare to find an infant in a child care center, or what the French call a crèche. Crèche services include those run by municipalities or organizations, company crèches, and those linked with family day cares. Also available are centres multi-accueil (open centres) and haltes garderies, which provide temporary care only a few hours or so per week. These are typically used by parents who do not both work full time and only need occasional care (OECD, 2006). Parents of children that attend haltes garderies are asked to participate in an adaptation period with their child. They ask parents to either stay with their child the first couple of times they bring them in (as again, these facilities are for parents who do not work), or to drop their child off for a very short amount of time and increase the increments each time they bring them in over the first few weeks (Tots & Co.).

Assistante maternelles, also called childminders, or even “micro-crèches,” are the most commonly used form of child care for children under three in France. The government has strived to provide choice to parents and more importantly, guarantee the well-being of the nation’s children. A reformed statute in 2005 required childminders to possess at least five years of professional experience and 120 training hours, including first aid (European Union). In contrast to some other countries, many French parents prefer these smaller, more home-like places for the care of their infants and toddlers. One report suggested about 75% of these family day care providers are licensed, compared with 10% in the U.S. (Lawson, 2009). Not only are there less children, good quality, and usually easier

to find a slot, they cost less as well (albeit similar quality, unlike the argument in the U.S.). In 2008, the annual cost of one child with a childminder was about 7,515 euro, with parents fronting 10% of the total cost. The annual cost of one child in a crèche was around 10,000 euro, and parents contribute more of the costs in these facilities, at 26% (European Union).

Of course parents can also hire private nannies (Nourrices or Nounous) which are another form of childminder, but assistants maternelles specifically are registered and controlled by the “Protection Maternelle Infantile” which is a state governed organization regulating child care. A parent is technically the employer of the childminder and under French law, they must fill out a declaration mensuelle, which is simply a monthly form that states how much you have paid your assistante maternelle and for how many hours. They will have a contract for the parent to sign at enrollment that covers rate of pay and the times you are in need of care (Tots & Co.). Interestingly, while parents pay the childminder’s salary, the state provides their social, health and retirement benefits. The state may also help contribute to their salary as well for families with very low incomes (Brady, 2007).

Once children reach 2-3 years old, they join France’s extensive pre-school program, école maternelle, which is publicly funded and operates as part of the nationwide education system. Of course this provides children a place to go while their parents are at work, but the main goals of French pre-school include child development, socialization, cognitive stimulation and preparation for primary school. All children are entitled to a spot in one of their local écoles maternelles,

often in or near a public school, at the age of three. In some communities, children may enroll in this free program at the age of two, if there are open slots and they are potty-trained. Children three and older are given priority and when there is a shortage of availability for two year olds, those with working mothers get preference. The nation aims to expand accessibility and provide coverage to all two year olds (Kamerman, 2000). Nearly all of the country's 3-5 year olds are currently enrolled in publicly funded pre-school.

Pre-school in France is treated as part of the education system and has quality standards set by national curricula. In contrast to the U.S. where children begin free schooling at the age of five or six (and some four year olds under Head Start), French children are entitled to a free education by three, and sometimes two years old. One astounding piece of information I discovered was that pre-school teachers have the equivalent of graduate training in early education and their compensation is relatively high; earnings are above the mean for all women (Meyers & Gornick, 2005). Staff in French *écoles maternelles* have Master's Degrees and are paid at primary teacher's wages, whereas pre-school staff in the U.S. not only make less than "underpaid teachers" but also "less than parking lot attendants" (Clawson & Gerstel, 2002, p. 31). One report stated that panel members were struck by the quality of workers who teach or care for young children, where "staff training and experience are considered the foundation of quality care" (Lawson, 2009).

There are several forms of cash allowances and benefits families might receive to help pay for the cost of early child care. Family day care allowances

help families with children under six who place their children with a licensed family day care provider. An additional allowance varies according to age of children and annual income. Larger amounts are granted for children under three (by this point, they are eligible for free pre-school). Parents who choose to use an in-home caregiver, or nanny, while they work may earn a subsidy which is given directly to the social insurance agency to help cover their salary. This also varies according to children's ages and family income (OECD, 2006). Child benefits can take different forms including birth grants, supplements for parents who choose to care for their own children at home, and other supplements to help cover the cost of care. Some families may also be eligible for means-tested supplements, particularly in a family of three or more children, as well as single-parent allowances, which is not means-tested and available to any single parent in the care of children (Public Policy Research Centre, 2008). This is a guarantee of 512.81 euro per month plus 170.94 per child (European Union).

Family allowance funds are said to contribute approximately one quarter of ECEC operating costs, while government authorities cover almost half of the operating costs and two-thirds of capital costs, and parent fees cover the remainder (Kamerman, 2000). Nearly 80% of the costs of French child care services are covered by public funds (Lawson, 2009). Although it varies depending on geographical location and family income, the average cost to parents for children under three is approximately 27% (OECD, 2006). In Paris, parents pay annual fees from \$1,750 to \$4,000 for one infant/toddler at a center, while the poorest families pay as low as \$195 per year for the same care. While

pre-school is free from the age of three (sometimes two), parents can pay a relatively low fee for before and after care, and care during school vacations in wrap-around care and drop in centers (Lawson, 2009).

Hillary Clinton, chairwoman of the Children's Defense Fund, spoke on behalf of the French ECEC system, where "it all adds up to a systematic approach to young children," and the problem in the U.S. being that "we have no approach." Mrs. Clinton also stated that she was surprised how commitment to child care in France has support across the political spectrum, and was not such a subject for political debate as it is in the United States. Another panel member and professor, Barbara Bergmann, attributes this to France's priorities and political leadership (Lawson, 2009).

Social Democratic/Nordic Welfare States. Without question, the Nordic region is known for its dedication and public assistance to families and children, and is almost often cited as an exemplar model when compared to U.S. policy. In the Nordic countries, child care is seen as a public responsibility, just as primary schooling. Here in the United States, education is a social responsibility starting in Kindergarten; in this region, it begins in infancy. It is a common belief that proper child care not only assists working parents, but also prepares children for further schooling and social experiences (Waldfogel, 2001). The Nordic region embraces values that help keep parents in the workplace as well as enjoy quality time with young children and their families. Their policies adopt the language in the International Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC), in which

adequate care services for children should be available as a right to families, as well as the right to properly care for one's own family (Lokteff & Piercy, 2012).

Programs in this region are increasingly serving nearly all children from a young age. They are universal, heavily subsidized by the government with low, income-related parental fees, and of very high quality. Although programs generally integrate education with care very early on, they tend to not stress the formal curricula found in other pre-school models (for example, France). (Kamerma, 2000). As opposed to "schoolifying" early education, they have adopted a social pedagogy tradition where the main goals are to support families and the broad developmental needs of young children, rather than meeting specific academic objectives. This model aims to combine care and education without such hierarchy, while linking early childhood to higher stages of learning (OECD, 2006).

Nordic policies strongly support parental care through generous leave policies for approximately the first year of a child's life, followed by a range of accessible child care services to support employment (as well as early education). In all of the countries except Norway, municipalities actually have an obligation to provide families who need care a place in a (low) fee-paying (which may be waived) facility by the end of their parental leave period (OECD, 2006). Kamerma (2000) suggests that toddler care is "close to adequate only in the Nordic countries" (p. 27). She also states that although accurate data on ECEC are generally difficult to obtain, data in the Nordic countries are the most

consistently available and reliable, as they are published regularly in statistics reports.

In contrast to the United States where parents cover most if not all of the costs of child care, state and local governments take in around 85% of the costs in most parts of the Nordic region (OECD, 2006). The owner or municipality sets the parental fee, which covers just a fraction of the total cost. Fees generally increase with family income and decrease with number of children enrolled. Siblings and children of single parents usually get priority to spaces and reduced pay rates (Ronsen & Sundstrom, 2002). Some areas, particularly in Norway and Sweden, offer care at a universal flat-rate and waive out-of-pocket costs for low-income families (OECD, 2006).

Earlier in the chapter on child care policies in the United States, I discussed three policy dimensions by which we can view family policy: a) public vs. private; b) universal vs. targeted, and c) prevention vs. treatment. The United States stood in the latter of each of these dimensions: child care being a private matter; assistance being means-tested or targeted to low-income only; and our society providing treatment once a problem has been established. The Nordic region stands on the opposite side of each of these policy dimensions. As I have already mentioned above, they feel that child care is a public responsibility in which society as a whole should contribute. Although some parental fees are income-related, government funding is still offered to all families, and low cost, subsidized care and education is provided for all children. Lastly, countries in this region aim to put preventative measures in place to assist families before they

are in need of treatment. They recognize that conditions should be addressed before intervention can be effective. Therefore, they have put a variety of preventative and proactive policies in place, which helps them achieve goals while also saving on later reactive costs (Baker, 1995).

Sweden. Regularly cited as having the most extensive and generous family policies among all developed nations, Unicef called Sweden one of the best countries in the world to be a child. Various organizations are dedicated to children's well-being, and have a duty to look out for their best interests and follow the UN CRC and enforce this in Swedish society. Having an interest in children's rights and well-being for several years, Sweden was one of the first countries to join this convention and aims to follow to the best of their ability (Swedish Institute).

Swedish society recognizes that child care is necessary for economic and social strength and believes the government should play a role in family growth and support. Unlike the U.S., they don't see child care as "their" problem alone, but "our" problem collectively (Polk, 1997). Sweden has upheld an international reputation for its progressive family policies and comprehensive, publicly supported child care system. This system has been ranked as the best among developed countries and proposed as a "best practice" example for others to follow (Krapf, 2009).

As opposed to having their youngest children under a separate system, auspices for all pre-primary children are unified and fall under the Ministry of Education and Science; all responsibility for national policy lies here, including

the goals, guidelines and financial framework for ECEC. The 1998 School Act removed prior distinctions between daycare and primary school and named all services for children under compulsory school age “pre-school” (OECD, 2006). Where as the Ministry of Education is responsible for the development and implementation, the National Agency for Education is in charge of data collection, research, and evaluation for ECEC programs (Canadian Union of Public Employees, 2009). Having the early education and care of all children under the same agency, with specific duties and plans of action, helps provide a cohesive set of standards and expectations that transition from one stage to the next throughout childhood.

“Pre-school” is usually the collective name used to refer to the types of ECEC programs available to children ages 1-6, or until they begin “pre-school class” usually at the age of six, or primary school. Pre-school programs have the primary goals of stimulating children’s development and enabling parents to combine parenthood with work or studies (Swedish Institute). Preschools are open year-round and offer varied opening times to fit parents’ needs. Many centers offer non-standard hours, such as into the evening for parent’s who work late shifts (Bjornberg & Dahlgren). All children have a right to a place in an ECEC center from their first birthday. In general, children begin child care outside of their home between the ages of 15-18 months. Very few children under 18 months and almost no infants are found in non-parental care outside of their home, due to the extensive leave policies put in place (OECD, 2006). Swedish society strongly believes the best environment for a child their first year

of life is in the home, being raised by a parent. Statistics from a 2005 study showed a total of 30 infants under the age of one in a child care facility, in sharp contrast to the high percentage of infants placed in non-parental care in the United States. Almost half of one year olds were enrolled in preschool in 2005, 85% of 2-3 year olds, and nearly all 4-5 year olds (Canadian Union of Public Employees, 2009).

Preschools can be in the form of public centers or family child care homes, which are governed by the School Act and follow a curriculum and guidance document. Public preschool centers continue to be the preferred service for Swedish parents, with only about 7% of children age 1-6 being provided for in family day care (OECD, 2006). Another form of ECEC are “open pre-schools” which are drop-in centers often used by parents who do not work a regular full-time schedule or at all. Children are not registered for these services and not required to attend on any regular basis. Many are free of charge and offer a few hours of care each day, often to low-income families and parents that do not require routine child care. Parents accompany the children and they participate together with childminders in pedagogical group activities. While children play with others in the center during activities, parents have an opportunity to meet and spend time with other adults. In some areas, open preschools collaborate with social welfare services and can offer programs and resources to families. All children who do not have a preschool place or have not started school should have access to open preschool. The Local Government Act states that these programs should be regularly evaluated by the municipality and the staff. Parents and

children are also given an opportunity to participate in these evaluations (Skolverket).

The organization of these open preschool programs demonstrates Sweden's family oriented nature by having parents accompany their children in group activities together. From the time children are born, the society advocates for adequate bonding time among families and facilitate opportunities for this to occur. This is also demonstrated through the common "in-schooling" period when children first begin preschool. This is when a parent accompanies their child for the first two weeks to make the transition a smoother one for both parent and child. This process also helps develop a relationship between the parents and teachers, embracing parental involvement in their children's care and education. During this period, parents are entitled to a paid leave from work to take advantage of this transition (Bjornberg & Dahlgren).

The OECD report (2006) suggests that Sweden and Denmark are the only two countries that provide enough places to meet the demand for child care. A Child Care Guarantee in 1995 mandated municipalities to supply places for all children from the age of one in some form of preschool or family day care home, and "without unreasonable delay" (Korpi, 2007, October 25, p. 56). A slot should be offered within a few months of notification that a parent is seeking care, and should be as close to the family's home as possible. Facilities should also provide sufficient coverage for parents to manage employment or schooling schedules (Bjornberg & Dahlgren). In addition to the other Nordic countries of Denmark and Finland, Sweden has made a formal commitment to provide "a place for

every child whose parent seeks one” (Kamerman, 2000, p. 12). The guarantee was originally promised to only children of parents who were engaged in work or school; however, children of unemployed parents were granted the right to a preschool place in 2001, as were those of parents on parental leave the following year (Korpi, 2007, October 25).

Swedish child care is financed through a combination of government grants, tax revenue and parental fees that vary, depending on income and structure of fee system across municipalities. Out-of-pocket parent fees consist of only about 9% of the overall costs of preschool (OECD, 2006). In 2003, a maximum fee was introduced, which all municipalities adopted, lowering the cost of care to many families. Parents were not to pay more than 3% of their family income on child care expenses for their first child, 2% for the second child, and 1% for the third. Although the fees are based on a percentage, there is still a set maximum amount in which out-of-pocket costs do not surpass: SEK 1,260 for first child, SEK 840 for the second child, SEK 420 for a third child, and no charge for any subsequent children (Korpi, 2007, October 25). A universal preschool free of charge was also introduced for all four and five year olds that should be made available three hours per day (Canadian Union of Public Employees, 2009).

One non-native mother in Sweden (originally from Minnesota) was “astonished” to learn that child care/preschool fees are calculated according to household income, with a maximum fee of 1,260 Krona (about \$200) per month for the first child, after hearing “harrowing tales of day care and preschool fees in the States” from her American friends (Griffith, 11 January 2008). She says that

even that fee is nearly covered by monthly allowances that families receive for children. Griffith affirms that national laws see to it that cost is not a factor in parents' obtaining proper care, and ensure all working parents (or those in school) have access to preschool for their children. Although universal care is highly subsidized and inexpensive, she asserts that the quality remains high and she is thankful for the substantial amount of support and superior care and education programs (Griffith).

In addition to the aforementioned parental benefit, all parents are also entitled to a child allowance that they receive monthly per child. Parents do not need to apply for this allowance and there aren't any eligibility requirements to receive this assistance. They will begin receiving this benefit one month after the birth of their child (this is in addition to the parental benefit if the family is receiving it) and it will continue until the child turns 16. The allowance is set at a universal benefit of SEK 1,050 per child per month (about \$157). Families will begin to receive a study allowance in place of the child allowance when the child is 16 if they decide to enroll at an upper secondary school. There are also large family supplements paid to families with two or more children (Nordic Social Insurance Portal).

Among myriad researchers and scholars, reports by the OECD cite Sweden as demonstrating the highest level of quality across the board. In a comparison across OECD nations based upon requirements for licensed family day care, centers, and public early education, Sweden was the only country to receive the highest rating in all categories. The nation was awarded a level four in

each care category, meaning that they provided quality standards and curriculum, annual checks, staff training and certification, and “pedagogical supervision ensured regularly by an accredited supervisory body” (OECD, 2006, p. 132). In a 2008 study of early child care in OECD nations, UNICEF announced Sweden as the only country to meet all ten of the organizations’ proposed benchmarks that served as a step toward establishing a set of standards for ECEC programs to adhere to (UNICEF, 2008).

Because all early childhood services fall under the same auspice, there is not the issue of disruptive transitions from “child care” to “early education.” One central agency, the National Agency for Education (Skolverket) oversees all children in the ECEC system, providing a cohesive program with a set of standards and common curriculum. A variety of strategies are used to link early childhood centers to the next stage of learning through an advanced integration of systems and programs. Pedagogues and teachers are brought together for interactive training and to establish a set of general learning areas and fundamental concepts and values. All forms of child care facilities and preschools are required to become registered, participate in reviews, complete training, and follow national curriculum and standards guidelines. Not only are ECEC quality indicators developed and monitored on a national level, but also are published by Skolverket in annual reports (OECD, 2006). Each municipality is required to produce an annual quality report for all preschool activities in the community. The preschools are also obliged to create their own report on an

operational level. Parents and children are also given an opportunity to participate in the findings of the quality reports (Skolverket).

Norway. Similar to Sweden and the rest of the Nordic region, policies in Norway provide substantial support to growing families and aim to reconcile the balance between employment and parenthood. In regards to early childhood services, UNICEF rated Norway an eight out of ten in regards to meeting suggested standards on their 2008 Report Card (UNICEF, 2008). Overall, the nation is characterized by high expenditure levels per child compared to other countries, particularly the United States.

As of 2006, early childhood education and care was put under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Research, along with compulsory schools, out-of-school care, and pedagogical training. County governors are responsible for ECEC and schools at the regional level and are in charge of administering state grants to child care facilities and supporting policies (OECD, 2006). Incorporated and unified programs among early childhood services and schools provides for further cooperation and coordination between programs and transitions.

This transition of Norwegian ECEC to the educational ministry was a result of the revised Kindergarten (Barnehager) Act that entered into force January 2006, which stated that municipalities would be the local kindergarten authority (“kindergarten” or “barnehager” refers to institutions that care for children 0-5, although infants under age one are most often not represented in non-parental care programs). Each municipality must ensure that there are a

sufficient number of kindergarten places and that they are operating under the specified rules and guidelines (Ministry of Education and Research). In 2009, Norway made it a statutory right for all children age 1-5 to have a place in a kindergarten. In order to meet this goal and provide a sufficient number of slots, construction of facilities reached a record high in 2008, and the number of all children between 1-5 attending kindergarten rose to 87%, which continues to rise (Norway).

Major service types include family day care (FDC or familiebarnehager) and kindergarten (barnehager) that are offered year-round on either a half of full-day basis. There are also open kindergartens or drop-in centers that parents can utilize on a part-time, as needed basis. Services depend on type of facility, which can include public and private kindergarten care, with provision in private facilities growing and established as the major provider. As previously noted, children under age one are predominantly cared for in the home by parents, with only about 3% of this age group in center-based care. Statistics show about 40% of children age 1-3 being cared for full-time by parents, while the rest are enrolled in regulated ECEC programs. Nearly 90% of 3-6 year olds participate in early education services. A high percentage of school-age children take advantage of out-of-school time provision, where they are cared for outside of school hours (OECD, 2006).

Part of the Kindergarten Act includes the Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens, which states that goals must align with children's development and stimulate their linguistic and social competence. The Plan lists

seven major learning areas that kindergartens should acquaint children with that covers a wide range of learning and offers a clear connection with the curricula in primary school. In regard to the quality of staff, the Act requires teachers and pedagogical leaders to be trained teachers or have a comparable college education that qualifies them for working with young children. Although there has been a shortage of staff that meet the outlined requirements, college enrollments suggest an increase in trained teachers to soon meet regulation demands (Ministry of Education and Research).

Financing for kindergartens are shared between the state, municipalities and parents, with parent fees covering a low portion of the total cost. Maximum fees for out-of-pocket expenses were introduced in 2004, capping parental fees at about \$450 per month (Lappegard, 2010). Parent fees should not exceed 20% of the cost of services, with some municipalities charging reduced fees for low-income families (OECD, 2006). In addition to the maximum fees that limit the high costs of care, Norway also offers different forms of child benefits and allowances to further offset the burden of childrearing expenses.

Norwegian parents are entitled to a family allowance, which is granted for children under the age of 18 at a yearly rate of approximately \$2,000 per child. An additional child maintenance payment may be granted for children under age 18 if they live with only one parent, which is means-tested and granted as a percentage of a full advance amount (at \$240 per month) depending upon family income. The highest rate is received by a parent whose income is under \$30,000. (Norwegian Government Administration Services, 2011). Another child care

benefit may be granted when a child must be in non-parental care while the parent engages in work or training courses, which reimburses 64% of the cost of care up to a certain ceiling. In order to be eligible, a parent must be actively involved in work or study or seeking employment, and the child must be enrolled in a child care facility (Kindergarten) of choice. The parent is also responsible for covering their share of the expenses (Norwegian Labour and Welfare Service).

A cash benefit for children was implemented in 1998 that provides a tax-free cash transfer to families with children between one and three years old. This benefit is widely available to nearly everyone, as long as the family is not using a state subsidized facility and center care does not exceed 32 hours per week. The amount is roughly equal to the amount the government would provide for public care, allowing parents a choice between the two options (Lappegard, 2010). This benefit is changing as of August 2012 and families will be able to receive graduated benefits if they choose to enroll their child in a center part-time (Norwegian Labour and Welfare Service). The amount a family will receive will depend on the time allotted to the child in a center. The benefit is calculated at the following rates: 100% of the benefit (about \$7,000 per year) for a child that is not enrolled in non-parental care, 80% for children enrolled in care up to eight hours per week, 60% for children enrolled 9-16 hours, 40% for 17-24 hours of enrollment, 20% for 25-32 hours and 0 benefit for those using non-parental care over 32 hours per week (Norwegian Government Administration Services, 2011). There will also be age-differentiated rates, with families receiving larger amounts for younger children (Norwegian Labour and Welfare Service). The

government's purpose of this benefit scheme was to give families more flexibility and choice in regard to their child care preferences, provide a cash benefit to those parents who choose to care for their own children at home, and to compensate those who were not offered external child care provisions (Lappegard, 2010).

After providing a thorough analysis of comparative family policy across select industrialized nations, I will now move to a discussion on the overall summary of this literature review and the implications it has for families in the United States particularly. I will look at contrasting family policy through an ideological lens and political framework as a way to place our society's views on children and families. I will also observe the short and long-term effects that these views and policies have on individuals and communities, and offer an argument for why family friendly policies and programs benefit our society as a whole. In closing, I provide several suggestions for policy revision that include the ideas of researchers, family advocates, examples from other national or organizational policies, and my own opinions on what family policy in the U.S. could and should comprise.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The United States has been widely recognized as lagging far behind the advanced industrialized democracies of Europe in the development and implementation of family-friendly social policies. Myriad researchers and family advocates have acknowledged this fact and strived to address the many concerns faced by families aiming to maintain the balance between employment and childrearing. In testimony prepared for the United States Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, Sheila Kamerman (2001) stressed the fact that in most of Europe, early childhood education and care programs are “increasingly available to all children...because they are considered good for children regardless of their parents’ employment status” (p. 3). European governments typically cover a large share of these program costs through a variety of financing mechanisms. Kamerman’s testimony, alongside many others, attests the strong conviction regarding the value of these programs and suggests the appropriateness of public funding to make them universally available. Advocates of stronger social welfare programs wonder, why is the United States so far behind in the development of public social welfare programs and so hesitant to institute the kinds of family policies that are prominent across much of Europe?

Unfortunately, the answer is not so simple and involves several factors. First, a nation’s political framework will affect the programs and policies that are considered and implemented for its citizens. Contrasting ends of the political spectrum will emphasize and value different types of social programs and budget

plans. The United States has experienced conflict over the years among its own political leaders who support opposing opinions regarding Democratic and Republican ideologies and a broader spectrum of political views and policies. The organization of our government can make it difficult for compromise to be reached in certain major political decisions. The overall neoliberal nature of prevailing U.S. policy in recent decades has played a significant role in its lack of particular social welfare policies, which I will discuss further.

Also contributing to the difference across nations in regard to public spending are a nation's priorities and budget. A large amount of the U.S. budget is spent on the military, as well as other major areas other than education and family. Another factor we can't ignore is the issue of demographic differences between the United States and other countries in which I have compared. We are a much larger and more diverse nation with a significantly higher population and a vast land area that is home to various cultures and values. All of these factors play a part in the social make up of our nation and I will now provide a closer look at how some of these have contributed to our current family and child policies in the U.S.

Political Framework

Neoliberalism. Much of the reasoning for a nation's social welfare policies stem from their national political agenda in general and how society tends to overall view family affairs and public support. Kim Scipes (2009, May 30) points out that the economy and social inequalities in the U.S. did not "just happen," but were "conscious political decisions" that have produced the current

results that differ so greatly from other advanced nations. Politics, history, and surrounding conditions have all contributed to our current social welfare state. An overall concern for human capital (such as investments in education, families, medical care, etc.) and development of our nation's resources created the idea of neoliberalism in the United States, which comprises a shift from the notion of a welfare state to a market focus with a strong economic reference. (Bloch, Kennedy, Lightfoot & Weyenberg, 2006). Although classified as a welfare state, it is a weak one, especially in comparison to many nations in the European Union, and most specifically the Nordic region. As opposed to a strong focus on the well-being of families and individuals, neoliberal economic policies in the U.S. aim to maintain dominance over the global political economy. Resulting policies seeking to support this goal have only further widened the social stratification gap between groups of citizens in our society.

In discussing the effects of neoliberalism and how the U.S. economical structure has helped the rich become richer and the poor become poorer, Martinez and Garcia outline the five main points of neoliberalism which help us to understand the policies that result from this political framework: (1) The rule of the market: It has been proposed that an unregulated, free market is the best way to increase economic growth in order to benefit everyone; however, the wealth clearly hasn't been distributed very evenly; (2) Cutting public expenditure for social services, such as education and family services; (3) Deregulation: Reducing government regulation of anything that could diminish profit; (4) Privatization: Selling to private investors, which has resulted in a concentration of wealth in a

few hands and made the general public contribute more out-of-pocket for their needs; (5) Eliminating the concept of public good or community: This has been replaced with individual responsibility by pressuring the poorest citizens to find solutions to their own problems, such as education, health care, and social security; they are essentially blamed for their own failure as opposed to discriminating societal structures.

These five points are prominently visible in the United States, some of which I have already mentioned. It is quite obvious that an unregulated, free market has not distributed wealth equally across our country. In regards to child care services, as opposed to a universally regulated system of child care programs available to all, we have a variety of privately owned services who regulate much of their own guidelines and fees. I have already discussed throughout this paper how so many families are unable to afford these private child care programs; thus, further exasperating inequality. As for cutting social service expenditures for families, children and education, budget cuts in these areas are persistent at the state and national levels in the United States. I have shown the difference in the amount of investment the U.S. puts toward early childhood care and education; a small amount compared to many European nations.

Eliminating the concept of community correlates with the notion of our country as an individualistic society that I described earlier. The idea of individualism goes hand-in-hand with neoliberalism, in that members of a society are expected to work for what they want with minimal support, and utilize their own earned resources to meet their individual needs. This stands in contrast to

nations such as Sweden, whose long-time tradition of democratic socialism has sought to ensure the social welfare of all families through higher taxes and government contributions. In contrast, the examples of parental leave policy in the U.S. I have shared demonstrate this idea of individualism; it is often up to the expecting parents to earn a leave period or figure out on their own how they will juggle employment with parenthood, and likely with little or no pay. The child care system also highly demonstrates our country's individualistic ways. The government does not cover portions of child care expenses for its citizens or guarantee each child a place in a quality care facility. Only a small percentage of parents will receive child care subsidies, and only if they are considered below poverty by means-tested measurements and qualify for welfare services. Other than these few, most families are expected to fend for themselves and maintain employment while ensuring their children have someone to care for them while they are at work. There has been a strong tension between those who feel the government should intervene and assist families with such matters, and those who feel it isn't their place.

Neoliberal policies tend to discourage government intervention in regards to economic, financial and social affairs. Because of this, and the powerful autonomy and leverage of large, private corporations, the neoliberal model has generated massive wealth for some people, while leaving those in financial need with little resources to advance their economic condition. In other words, "the beneficiaries of neoliberalism are a minority of the world's people" (Martinez & Garcia). This is apparent in the economic structure of the United States where

“poverty is...an essential ingredient to wealth” (Polakow, 1993, p. 44). Rajesh Makwana (2006, November 23) affirms that neoliberalism has “exacerbated global inequality” and “failed to combat extreme poverty,” only perpetuating it further through favoring the free-market and privatization of resources. He asserts that economic dominance has always been the U.S.’s primary objective. In regards to the nation’s principal concern for financial supremacy and resulting social inequality, Polakow (1993) argues that poverty “is neither natural nor necessary in a wealthy, postindustrial state that generates not scarcity but surpluses” (p. 44).

Democratic Socialism. Those supporting this political ideology believe that both the economy and society should be run democratically to meet overall public needs, as opposed to profiting only a few. The Democratic Socialists of America argue that socialism typically emerges wherever the idea of democracy has taken root, almost everywhere in the world except in the United States (Democratic Socialists of America). This group argues that the notion of democratic socialism has produced false and negative connotations in our society and they aim to clear these up and educate citizens on this political view. Those supporting socialism do not want the government to own and control everything, as many assume. Their main concerns are the large bureaucracies, corporate executives, and the few wealthy stakeholders that make all of the economic decisions that affect our entire society. Proponents of democratic socialism are upset by the fact that resources are being used to profit the already elite, rather than meeting the general population’s needs. Although they advocate for

decentralization to a certain extent, they do believe the government could for example, use regulations and tax incentives to entice private corporations to act in the best interest of the public society as a whole. This particular group, along with countless researchers, suggests we can learn from nations that practice democratic socialism and the universal public social policies they institute, such as the comprehensive welfare state maintained by Sweden as well as the nationwide child care program in France (Democratic Socialists of America).

Nations that practice Democratic Socialism demonstrate less of a disparity between the rich and the poor due to their higher emphasis on economic and social equality. For example, while the earnings multiple is 14-to-1 in the U.S., it is less than half of that in Denmark at 6-to-1, meaning that there is a much larger gap between the rich and the poor in the U.S. than in Denmark and the rest of the Nordic Region (Garofalo, 2011, December 5). This is highly due to the social welfare programs put in place that offer the same services to groups of people from all economic backgrounds. Because of the payment structures put in place and high levels of government assistance and intervention, services such as child care are widely available to all, as opposed to only those that can afford the high costs of private care.

A high emphasis is also placed on early childhood education and care in nations with democratic socialist policies such as Scandinavia, which gives young children a head start in social and academic development and acquiring life skills. This also provides an avenue for parents to continue working or attending school, which in turn places them higher on the SES ladder. Democratic Socialists place

less emphasis on extreme wealth and world leadership and focus more on ensuring a proper standard of living and equal resources to the general population of citizens. This is demonstrated in the universal preschool programs that I have described as well as family policies such as parental leave that are prominent across much of Europe. It is believed that all children should have access to the same quality care and education, and families of all backgrounds should receive equal services. Whereas the U.S. thinks of universal programs as having to help other people's children, Socialist nations see it as helping all of society's children, benefiting everyone.

General Policies in the U.S. as a “Welfare-State”

The United States lacks in overall social services, including funding for early childhood, higher education, affordable and adequate housing, transportation, and basic health care needs. The U.S. is the only industrialized country without a national health insurance, leaving approximately 37 million people without coverage. The government does not provide universal basic health care, and employers aren't obligated to provide coverage either; many citizens obtain insurance in the private sphere. Even when employees are covered through their employer, they lose coverage while between jobs or unemployed, and often must wait a certain period for new benefits to begin (Hellburn & Bergmann, 2002).

Even when an individual is employed by a company that does offer benefits, the U.S. Internal Revenue Code gives employers the right to offer different benefits to their employees based on their part-time or full-time status.

Thus, it is common for part-time workers to be exempt from most if not all employer benefits that are available to full-time employees. This is especially relevant in regards to health care insurance; most part-time employees are excluded from the group insurance packages and are left to fend for themselves. This poses a considerable problem for many people whose access to affordable health care and the right to adequate coverage should not be determined by their employment status. Children have no control over their parents' employment or income status and, in my opinion, deserve a universal right to basic health care. In many instances, health care coverage is offered; however, the premiums are so high that individuals are unable to keep up with the payments. This has been especially the case with women, particularly in regard to pre and post-natal care.

For the first time in my own life I am under an individual, private insurance plan, one that does not cover any portion of maternity costs. I am only one of many who must plan their family around employment and insurance carriers. Why is this not covered in the same manner as other major medical care? This is yet another example of how our nation views families as a private entity that must survive with little government interference and public assistance. Other nations provide much higher levels of benefits in all aspects of social welfare, which not only provides families with access to necessary entitlements, but limits the gap between classes of citizens and provides government assistance that is seen as a universal entitlement rather than stigmatized public assistance (Polakow, 1993).

Ideologies

Value of personal and family time. The United States places a lower emphasis overall on the value of individuals' personal time spent with family away from the workplace. This is evident in several aspects of the nation's social policies. As discussed in chapter two, the United States is the only industrialized country in the OECD that does not offer a universal paid parental leave for expecting and new parents, demonstrating its lack of appreciation for families recuperating, adjusting and bonding during this crucial time. While parents (particularly mothers but a significant rise in the number of fathers) in every other advanced nation are enjoying at least a few months of rest and quality time at home with their newborns (or newly adopted children), those in the U.S. are often rushing back to work within twelve weeks from the time their leave began. Many women work almost right up to delivery in order to extend the amount of time they will have with their newborn, and/or because they simply can't afford to take any more time off. A very high percentage of women are not provided with any supplemental income while they are on maternity leave; thus, emphasizing the importance of returning to the work place as quickly as possible.

Lokteff and Piercy (2012) describe two care ideals in regards to the construction of family policies that demonstrate the different values placed on reasons for instituting a leave policy. They define policies as promoting "time-to-care" or "time-to-work," the former supporting the care of families and children and the latter facilitating the maintenance of women in the workforce. Care ideals can be deciphered by region, classifying France and the Nordic countries as

“optional familialism” where both “time to work” and “time to care” policies are supported and families are provided choices through lengthy parental leave and public child care. The U.S. is classified under “implicit familialism,” characterized by fewer choices for families, limited policies in both areas, and few alternatives in the highly privatized market (p. 122).

Our government seems to be first and foremost concerned with getting parents back to work and supporting our political economy. They support the mantra, “work is the way out of poverty,” which is not always the case when children are involved with limited public assistance (Leach, 2009, p. 260). Child well-being seems to fall secondary to work schedules. Moss and Deven (2006) suggest that national differences in leave policy are apparent in what department a government chooses to locate their leave policy, as different departments bring various perspectives and objectives, placing different emphasis on parental leave. Not surprisingly, the U.S. includes parental leave policies under the employment department, which has “very little to do with family and child welfare, typically being more concerned with labor market issues” (p. 257). Other nations have implemented leave policies under various social welfare departments, which are concerned about family matters and child well-being. Palley and Shdaimah (2011) question why when we have policies that strongly support the value of work, the work of caring for one’s children is not considered to be “work” and is undervalued? (p. 1163).

In addition to less than generous leave policies, the United States’ lack of value placed on personal and family time can be seen in its general provisions on

time spent at work. The total average working hours in the U.S. are among the highest of all industrialized nations. Statistics have shown an overall fewer number of hours worked in other countries, with limits placed on these hours as well as restrictions in regards to overtime. The U.S. Fair Labor Standards does not prohibit mandatory overtime; therefore, an employee who refuses to work overtime could face repercussions (Meyers & Gornick, 2005). Another interesting finding is that the U.S. is the only country among the 21 wealthiest nations that does not mandate any amount of annual paid vacation or leave from work. Of course several companies provide this to their employees, but at their own discretion and will, and almost always correlates with full-time status and length of time in employment with the company; thus, paid vacation is earned as a right as opposed to an entitlement and many employees work hard and long to earn a rather short period of time, often 1-2 weeks per year. By contrast, the European Union has set a mandate for paid vacation at a minimum of four weeks (or 20 days) per year, with several individual countries offering more than this. The Nordic countries provide employees with 25 days of annual paid vacation time, and France offers the most at 30 days per year of paid time off. Each country has their own provisions for eligibility as far as earning this time off; however, it is mainly universal and often pro-rated for employees who have been employed less than one year. Most of the nations also mandate a certain number of paid holidays, with some extending bonuses to those who work on these national holidays. These statistics demonstrate the drastic difference in the value

of personal and family time away from the workplace in every other industrialized nation.

ECEC discourse and views. Early childhood education and care has unfortunately not been viewed as a core social policy concern in the U.S. even though it deeply affects the lives of many families and should be seen as significant. Most of the concern begins with primary school age children, as the U.S. tends to separate notions of day care and schooling. Many European countries by contrast, particularly those in the Nordic region, see these as going hand-in-hand. Norwegian Minister of Education and Research, Kristin Halvorsen, stated in a national report that, “We [the Nordic region] believe that there is no education without care, and no care without education” (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2011). This commitment to an integration among care and education is demonstrated through the region’s comprehensive programs and unified structures. Yes, ECEC serve as a place for children to be cared for while their parents engage in work or study; however, it needs to be recognized that these services act as more than mere “day care.” Researchers, practitioners, policymakers and advocates in Scandinavia and other parts of Europe acknowledge the educational, social, economical, and societal effects that early childhood care has on children and families.

Head Start. One large-scale example of an ECEC program implemented in the U.S. is Head Start, which was developed in the 1960s as an anti-poverty program taking a comprehensive approach, in order to provide intervention to disadvantaged children with a goal to “interrupt and reverse the effects of poor

parents” and to potentially break the poverty cycle (Swadener, 1995, p. 415). Polakow (1993; 2007) and Swadener (1995; Swadener & Lubeck, 1995) both describe the intentions of Head Start as a cost-benefit analysis that offers services which differ from the goals outlined in preschool programs for middle-class children. In the past two decades, consistent with neoliberal policies including No Child Left Behind and Smart Start, Head Start has shifted in emphasis from a comprehensive family-centered program to a school readiness model emphasizing “early reading first” and other academic focused programs.

This issue of stratification among children is not as prevalent in nations where universal care and education is provided to all children under the same program, with a shared curriculum and standards. As opposed to segregating children into regular pre-school for middle and upper-income children, and subsidized Head Start for low-income children, our nation should develop a universal program similar to that of Sweden or France. Sliding scale fees and child allowances enable all children, regardless of social status, to attend the same pre-schools and receive equal care and education. Not only is this fair, but it helps to alleviate the stigmatization that families feel when they must utilize separate but equal facilities and/or apply for means-tested public assistance to afford ECEC for their children. Families who can’t afford the same quality education as those in a higher economic status are stigmatized right from the start and made to feel that they will never be able to provide the resources necessary for a quality future. This can severely affect the parents’ and children’s self-worth and drive to succeed. There have been numerous arguments that the cause

of the achievement gap is partly due to the unequal care and education that children are receiving. The socio-economic status of the student population and neighboring community should in no part determine the quality of resources or the education level and training of the teachers. All students in all schools should be provided with equal resources across the nation and provided with the same access to a quality education and future preparation.

Children's rights. There seems to be much less in the social and political discourse regarding children's rights in the U.S. than in most other nations of the world. The United States is the only OECD nation (and only nation with a population over 1 million) that has not ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which is a document that aims to explicitly protect children and their rights to provision, protection, and participation. The document that our nation lives by, the Constitution, doesn't even directly protect children or family support (Walker et al., 1999). The UNCRC specifically states that governments should "render appropriate service to parents...in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities..." and "take all appropriate measures to ensure that children of working parents have the right to benefit from child care services and facilities for which they are eligible" (UNICEF, 2008). In discussing the implications of our nation's economic and social stratification, Swadener (1995) addresses the fact that U.S. government policies do not consider the care and welfare of children as a basic social right. Instead, privileges are thought of as earned or deserved, which is perpetuated through the "myth of meritocracy." This

reflects the ideology of private, competitive individualism that is present in attitudes concerning family policy (Swadener, 1995, p. 408).

In contrast to the United States' lack of recognizing and addressing the rights and voices of children, Sweden actually added children's views to a federal ECEC bill (Korpi, 2007, October 25). The Framework Plan under Norway's Kindergarten Act states that childhood is "a phase of life with intrinsic value" and gives children a legal right to participate in reviews and decision making (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research). Australia is another nation regarded for its advocacy and protection of children's rights, where federal, state and local governments offer a range of services specifically aimed at young people under the age of eighteen. Each territory has a designated authority responsible for the coordination of government policies that affect children and youth (Library of Congress). There are several other examples of countries' supporting a national framework for children's rights that place the U.S. last in this effort.

Investments

Meyers and Gornick (2005) suggest that the mere question of whether or not we can afford more generous family policies is political, and argue that social policies can be developed without sacrificing our economy. As other nations have demonstrated, these investments contribute to economic growth rather than prohibit it. It remains a question of priority and where a nation chooses to spend its money; I recognize that government assistance and family policies can be expensive, but our government can find ways to redistribute funds in a more

appropriate, cost-effective way. For example, estimates for the final cost of the war as of 2007 were said to be between \$1 and \$2 trillion in a report to the American Economic Association (Polakow, 2007). According to the National Priorities Project (2012), federal tax revenues totaled about \$1.13 trillion in fiscal year 2011, and it was determined how the government spent each of those dollars. The largest portion went to the military budget at \$0.27 per dollar, compared to under \$0.03 per dollar toward education costs. Another chart outlines the budget for 2013, dividing up proposed spending on various categories of mandatory and discretionary agendas. The proposed spending on education was just under 73 billion, with the military budget topping 653 billion dollars. Spending on veterans benefits were not far from the overall education costs at 61 billion, with an overall proposed budget of 138 billion on all veterans programs combined.

Expenditures. It is interesting to note that the U.S. ranks first in per capita income among the OECD but spends the least on children (Meyers & Gornick, 2005). In comparing public investments in services for families and young children as a percent of GDP, the U.S. ranks as one of the lowest at 0.78%. All European nations included in the comparison spend higher portions of their GDPs on families and children, and Australia is listed as almost 3%, although likely higher in more recent statistics after establishing its paid parental leave scheme last year. Expenditures on families and children in the Nordic region top 3% (Waldfoegel, 2001). In regard to expenditures on all social welfare programs, Sweden spent twice as much as the U.S. in percentage of GDP; 30% compared to 15%. Sweden spent roughly four times the percentage on family benefits

specifically (Ozawa, 2004). Investments on parental leave in Nordic countries averages 53% of per capita for each child, compared to a 21% average in other European countries, and 10% in Anglo-Saxon nations (Thevenon, 2011).

Whereas the U.S. fears the cost of family policies, Swedish society believes it is economically advantageous for parents to remain home with their child for the first year; the cost of non-parental care of infants is higher and it is overall better for the development of the child (Leach, 2009).

A vast difference can be observed in the amount of spending per child on early, middle and late childhood. Although it supports costs for middle and late childhood, the U.S. ranks very low on expenditures for early childhood; we spend much more on education related expenses in primary school. All nations spend more on later than early childhood expenses; however, the difference between spending in early and late childhood is significant in the U.S., where the Nordic countries are more proportionate. Expenditures in the U.S. per child on services for children under age 3 in 2005 averaged \$794; all Nordic countries spent above \$5,000. Only a few OECD nations spend less than the U.S. on per child expenditures. The data are difficult to navigate depending on what level the policies are managed and how they are presented; however, it appears that South Korea is the only country in the OECD that spends a smaller percentage than the U.S. of their earnings on total per child expenditures in early childhood. The U.S. spends less than half of the OECD average (Thevenon, 2011). I ponder, if K-12 education is determined to be a justified universal entitlement, without question,

why is the notion of a universal entitlement to early childhood care and education so quick to be dismissed from political discourse?

An example of this resistance to universal provision of early child care and education in Arizona was demonstrated blatantly by a state senator, who stated, “I know how to spell full-day Kindergarten, it’s MOM.” This strongly demonstrates the view of early childhood as a private responsibility and the role of the mother in the home. In contrast, Moodie-Dyer (2011) argues that “it is time to start thinking of early childhood education as a right that every child and family should be afforded” (p. 44).

Effects of Policies on Families, Communities and Society

Correlation among policy, fertility, employment and poverty. Public policies have an effect on the individual decisions families make in regards to family planning as well as labor decisions. Societies with higher levels of employment, as a result of more extensive leave policies, in turn tend to display a higher rate of fertility (Lappegard, 2010). Research has shown diminished employment in countries such as the U.S. with the least generous leave policies. Continuous participation in the workforce is a key factor in preventing poverty. Inadequate financial supports are said to be partly responsible for the high poverty rates in the U.S.; the amount of public income transfers is smallest in the U.S. compared to all other industrialized nations, and subsequently, its child poverty rates are among the highest (Ozawa, 2004). U.S. poverty rates in the mid-2000s were at 20.6%, with Poland being the only nation in the OECD with a higher rate.

The OECD total average was 11.6% and all Nordic countries (with the exception of Iceland at 8.3%) had a poverty rate under 5%.

It tends to be assumed in the United States that poor economic conditions are one's own failings. Society refuses to see structural causes of economic problems, and doesn't seem to be concerned with broader issues other than anti-poverty strategies. This in turn results in our nation taking a residual approach to developing programs and dealing with problems after they have progressed (Ozawa, 2004). Polakow (1993) affirms that children do not "catch poverty" but are made poor by inequalities in our structural economy and state neglect (p. 44). I agree with Polakow's notion that a new set of policies and change in discourse could change the lives of many children and families.

The benefit of family policy. In regard to child care, Morrissey and Warner (2009) assert that subsidy use has resulted in the use of higher quality child care, fewer work related disruptions, and improved employment stability. Child care challenges can obviously present a significant barrier to employment, particularly for low-income or single parents who require non-parental care while they are at work. Studies have shown that families with a subsidy are more likely to work than those without and are in need. Employment retention is important for economic self-sufficiency, but can prove difficult for parents who miss a lot of work due to inconsistent child care; they have a higher chance of experiencing job termination. Child care related work disruptions due to unreliable child care are predictive of job exits among women who fall below the 50% poverty line. One study showed 31% of families with two year old children have had an instance

where their child care arrangement unexpectedly fell through in the last month; of those, 46% reported missing work in the last month due to an issue with child care. These disruptions are found to occur more often with those using multiple care arrangements and family-home based care. Subsidy recipients are more likely to utilize center based care, which is more reliable; families using these facilities were found to experience fewer work disruptions. Fewer interruptions were also noted among individual families while they were receiving a subsidy than when they were not (Forry & Hofferth, 2010).

Freedom and choice. Instituting family policies and programs such as parental leave, subsidized child care, child benefits and family allowances offer families more freedom and choice to choose the best child care arrangements that meet their individual preferences and needs. The services available to parents have an impact on their decisions regarding length of time away from work and what type of care their child will participate in. The nations that offer a good balance of leave provision and child care assistance offer parents more freedom to decide how they will arrange their family care needs. They also enable families of all social backgrounds and income status to have access to the same services, which lessens the gap and reduces stigmatized views that are so prevalent in the United States.

Policy Implications

Everyone seems to agree there is a problem in family policy; however, there is a lack of consensus on how to revise current policy or resolve the issues at hand. Solving the family policy dilemma and child care crisis would require a

large and active federal program that would provide the financial and national framework for quality improvement. Only the federal government would be able to acquire the substantial costs of a completely restructured program. Many suggestions have been made for policy revisions, some of which stem from models used in other nations, while others come from specific programs already instituted in organizations in the U.S. A completely revamped system would clearly take time and wouldn't be expected to be put in place overnight, although small steps could be taken toward a more comprehensive set of family policies and programs. I will now include some specific examples of ways the United States could improve its current state of social welfare policies in the realm of families and children.

Specific recommendations. The first issue that needs to be addressed is the inconsistency in social welfare programs across the nation and the complex mix of federal and state funding. There is currently large variation in programs, eligibility, availability and funding across states, and a large proportion of families in need are left without assistance. This patchwork of erratic services is helping some families, while leaving so many more at the end of a waiting line or considered ineligible for benefits. I advocate for this current structure to be replaced with a guarantee that does not depend on a family's state of residence or welfare status. The only way to effectively address this issue is to establish a national framework for social welfare programs which would need to include a system of stable funds that does not run out and continue to leave so many families behind.

Secondly, there needs to be changes in eligibility formulas. Not only do qualifications differ across states and circumstances, but also the overall eligibility line is currently quite low and based on a federal poverty rate that is arguably inaccurate. The guidelines should be re-examined to reflect current economic conditions and the more accurate needs of families. Raising the cut off point would provide services such as child care assistance for more families who need it. The eligibility period should also be lengthened, giving parents more time to adapt without interrupting care so often. Many parents are being deemed eligible, only to be cut off a short time after due to a slight change in their employment or income status. In addition to raising the eligibility line, I propose that the U.S. adopt a model that phases out benefits gradually with increased income as opposed to the current system of being cut off once a family meets a certain threshold as a percentage of the poverty line (which varies and is often inaccurate anyway). I argue that there is little financial difference between a family just above or just below the poverty line; therefore, it is unfair to provide assistance to one family in need, and inform a neighboring family who earns a mere \$1,000 more per year that they do not qualify.

Greenberg (2007) describes this model as a form of “progressive universalism” that is practiced in select European countries. He presents this as a possible framework to emulate, as it has been defined as providing “support for all and more help for those who need it most” (p. 81). The progressive model provides assistance to nearly all families, but on a sliding scale as income increases. There is often a cap at which funding is no longer offered in the

countries that utilize this model; however, it is generally a fairly high income level at which most families are able to afford family and child services.

Greenberg mainly proposes support to working families and argues that no family should ever be worse off by going to work and having to pay high proportions of their income for substandard care; he also supports the notion that all working families should have enough income to ensure a decent standard of living. I definitely agree with the fact that families should not have to worry about a slight increase of income causing them to abruptly lose their benefits. A parent may on the one hand, have a desire to earn a higher income, but on the other, have a fear that this increase could end any public assistance eligibility, which could make them worse off than before a raise in income. Although he advocates for fair assistance to working parents, Greenberg's proposal does not extend to those who are engaged in education or training, which I do not agree with. So many parents have a desire to obtain a higher education or partake in training that will advance their career and are unable to do this because of a lack of affordable child care. This leaves many parents stuck in the same position without the potential for advancement and raises in income, which they might have access to if they had a place for their child to go while they attended classes. For this reason, I support child care assistance for parents who are engaged in educational activities or job training, as well as for parents who work part-time.

Universalizing child care would also help the issue of quality control, allowing the federal government to better regulate facilities and where the funds are distributed. In order for centers to qualify for reimbursement, they would

have to be licensed and certified, meet specific criteria, and participate in routine inspections. Parents, on the other side, would only be permitted to utilize funds for qualified facilities (which could include private home-based care that has been inspected and certified). As I discussed previously, the current standards for center-based and family day care services vary across the country and are not always regulated. Many facilities have been found to be operating under unsafe conditions and/or without a license; this is unacceptable and the government must intervene in order to ensure the safety of these children who participate in non-parental care. I also propose the inclusion of early childhood care and education under the auspices of primary school, which would further help regulate quality control and proper guidelines. In addition, this helps make for a smoother transition from pre-school or “day care” to Kindergarten, and children will be better prepared. The United States needs to start looking at the early childhood years as just as important as the elementary school age, and treat them as such.

Funding. All of these proposals clearly require a change in the way social programs and family services are funded, which is what makes these recommendations so difficult to implement. The manner in which social welfare programs are funded brings much debate and controversy to citizens with opposing opinions on the topic. The U.S. relies on demand-side funding, leaving parents ultimately responsible for the total funding of their desired care options, as opposed to supply-side funding in most European countries, where child care is seen as a universal right and social essential, just like primary education and health care. This comes largely from taxation and is costly to citizens, which is

the major reason many Americans oppose this model. Interestingly, Swedish citizens overall voted against a recent proposal for lower taxation which would have reduced expenditures on parental leave and child care. Although taxpayers are doling out higher percentages of their paychecks to the government, they are getting more for their money and utilizing their own income tax. Of course not many citizens like the idea of paying higher taxes; however, knowing exactly where their money will be going and trusting that the contributions are benefiting their own families among many others' may change some opinions. A redistribution of taxes could help provide some of the funds necessary for family social policies and child care assistance. According to Leach, the notion that our nation could not afford a system similar to those utilized in Sweden and other Nordic/European nations is "clearly absurd" (2009, p. 270). Maybe at the present moment we can't, but with revisions throughout the tax system, government spending, employer contributions and child care programs, affordability can be attainable. It becomes a matter of what we choose to spend our money on, and in what manner; it is a matter of priority.

Nations such as France and Sweden, often regarded as superior models, not only draw from national taxes and government funds to help cover the cost of child care services, but also mandate maximum fees for parents that are based on income. Adopting a similar model that utilizes a sliding-scale for out-of-pocket costs provides nearly all families access to the same quality care at comparable costs according to their own individual income. This provides access to universal coverage to all children and prevents parents from having to spend such

significant proportions of their wages on child care, which can easily push families into financial hardship. Researchers and advocates argue that if other nations can institute this type of structure, the United States could implement a similar model in order to help its citizens cover the high costs of child care services that so many struggle to afford.

Another strategy that some other countries, as well as a few states, have utilized or proposed, is the use of Temporary Disability or Unemployment Insurance funds to help cover portions of paid parental leave for pre and post-childbirth. Both employees and employers can pay into these funds, which cover maternity leave in the same manner they cover other forms of medical leave. One major argument against this is the fact that not all citizens plan on or able to bear children (including men, as well as women who have no plans to conceive). There are different ways to address this concern. We could recognize, like other nations, that we are one large community that should be committed to help one another thrive, or allow contributions to be voluntary with which utilization of them would be based upon whether or not one has contributed over time. Each design has its benefits and drawbacks and would take time to implement; however, any steps taken in this direction would be improvement to our current system.

Employer supported care. A final example and recommendation to improve our current state of family policy support includes employer supported care for working citizens, which benefit employer and employee, as well as the children. I will provide specific examples of programs that have been instituted in

a few corporations in the U.S. and how these benefited families in the areas of parental leave and child care assistance. Research has found that the consequences for child care problems can be a primary motivation for employers to provide assistance to their workers. Morrissey and Warner (2009) discuss the use of voucher programs given to parents by employers that can be used flexibly to meet individual family needs. They address the fact that investing in centers can be costly for smaller companies, but vouchers can be easily implemented by an employer of any size. One study looked at a voucher program at Cornell University, which employs over 10,000 workers under a broad spectrum of backgrounds and income. The vouchers were meant to meet employees' diverse needs according to income level, schedules, and preferences. The program was instituted in 2002 through a Flexible Spending Account (FSA), which is a federally subsidized pretax account. Typically, employees themselves deposit their own pretax income into these accounts; however, in this instance, the employer provided the funds. Applicants received vouchers based upon their income level, number of children in child care, and average annual cost of preferred care. These funds were processed through the payroll system, which allowed parents to utilize all of the funds on their choice of child care provider. The university's goal was to have no family spend over 20% of their household income on child care. This is a modified form of universal benefit, where every employed (part or full-time) parent has access to the benefit, but according to his or her income and needs. Results of prior studies have also suggested benefits to

employers' workforce through instituting child-care voucher programs and assistance to their employees (Morrissey & Warner, 2009).

Another company, the Calvert Group, discovered that many of their employees had long commutes and didn't want to bring their children to the center near work, so the company set up a child care savings account for their employees to utilize on any provider of their preference, in which they matched a portion of their contributions. As mentioned in chapter three, Abbot Laboratories found that their workers' child care needs were not being met due to a shortage of facilities in the area; therefore, the corporation decided to invest in an extensive on-site center where employees could bring their children each day. Another example of employer-supported child care can be demonstrated by the large corporation, Texas Instruments. The company considered constructing a corporate child care facility, but found that most parents were already using an existing center in their community; therefore, they decided to instead invest money into improving the quality of these existing centers and work with local colleges to recruit students as day care teachers. The company believed that these improvements were crucial in positively affecting their employees' lives and quality of care for their children (Kiger, 2005).

These examples demonstrate different models of employer-supported family policies that can work for the benefit of both employee and employer. Abbot Laboratories confirmed how effective and valuable an on-site company child care center was to their workers, as well as to their own advantage. All corporations of this size should consider a similar program that would provide

their employees with adequate, accessible child care, which subsequently lessens work disruptions due to child care arrangements. Colleges and school districts are other institutions that would benefit from a similar program. Staff and students would have access to a central facility where they can drop off their children on the way to work or class. Especially being affiliated with an academic institution would ensure high standards of quality, and could also be used for educational experiences and career development for students. My own high school district offered a career preparation center that ran a small child care facility, in which students interested in a future child care or education career could enroll in as a class to obtain interactive experiences regarding child interaction and development. Opportunities and experiences such as this should be utilized and taken advantage of more often for the good and benefit of all.

Understandably, not all employers have the means to institute a program of this magnitude. Benefits such as vouchers and FSAs are much more beneficial to smaller companies, and also provide the parents with choices as to which type of child care provider best suits their needs. Even if employers could offer an account that employees themselves pay into over time, with contributions by the employer, would provide many parents with at least partial assistance in covering expenses. This could be similar to health benefit structures, where both employee and employer contribute to lower the out-of-pocket expenses when a visit to the doctor is necessary. Parents then cover a co-pay, which could be utilized in a similar manner at a child care facility.

Closing Reflection

All of the previous examples and suggestions for policy improvements are ones that could be instituted in the United States to improve the current state of family policy and alleviate the high concern for the substantial cost of childrearing. Most importantly, change would first require a set of reliable funds set aside on a continuous basis as opposed to a mere policy or program that experiences shortages and dwindles away. Just as important is an entire paradigm shift in society's way of thinking, public discourse, and priorities. For any change to take place, we must recognize that other people's children are our problem, and we should work together as a society to ensure their safety, healthy development and well-being. Children as a public concern shouldn't begin at age five when they enroll in Kindergarten; it should begin at birth.

One of the most widely cited recommendations as far as family policy revision is that of universalism, for both parental leave and child care provision. Expecting and new mothers and fathers shouldn't have to earn a leave from work to welcome a new child into the world, and they definitely shouldn't face such concern and anxiety about a lack of income during this period. Just as in nearly all other developed nations, the U.S. can and should institute a universal entitlement to paid parental leave, without fear of employer repercussions. This can come in various forms, including government funds, employer benefits, disability or sick pay (although I dislike the connotation of this), and taxes through both employee and employer. If every other nation grants new parents paid time away from work to recuperate and bond with their new family, why

can't we? We are an intelligent, industrialized nation that should see this as a concern and aim to catch up with the rest of the world in this arena.

In regard to universal, public child care, I have offered several suggestions for policy implication and revision. As a society, we must understand that we live in this world together, not alone. If we want the best for our own children, we must want the best for all children, and families alike. Valerie Polakow (1993) offers a thoughtful point that redistribution of funds and services means a little less to those with plenty, and a need to share a little more in order to provide the entire human community with a decent standard of living with limited worry as to how they will get by. She stresses the fact that "other people's children deserve entitlements to a future as much as our own children do" (p. 177), as all children and families alike are deserving of the same benefits and standard of quality life.

Universal access to affordable, quality child care can also come in many forms, whether it be government grants, tax deductions, employer contributions, subsidies, reallocation of current funds, or a combination of all of the above. Our government needs to take a serious look at the current state of child care and first acknowledge there is a problem, followed by a complete research analysis of where the problems lie and what steps can be done to ameliorate the major issues of accessibility, affordability, and quality. I don't want to assume or expect that we can merely take a policy or program structure instituted in another nation and superimpose it on our own; however, we can learn from other models and incorporate aspects of these to construct and implement family policies and programs that will work for our individual national needs. One thing we can

definitely learn from other nations is their appreciation and nationwide support of families and children in general. We must recognize that we are all citizens of this large community and should all play a uniting role in ensuring the well-being of one another. Our government must acknowledge that families require support and encouragement in the industrialized world in which we live. Once we realize and accept this fact, I think the U.S. will be closer to a “land of opportunity” and an equitable society that so many of us hope for.

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