Gender & Society

Work Family Policies and Poverty for Partnered and Single Women in Europe and North America

WORK–FAMILY POLICIES AND POVERTY FOR PARTNERED AND SINGLE WOMEN IN EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA

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Work–family policy strategies reflect gendered assumptions about the roles of men and women within families and therefore may lead to significantly different outcomes, particularly for families headed by single mothers. The authors argue that welfare states have adopted strategies based on different assumptions about women's and men's roles in society, which then affect women's chances of living in poverty cross-nationally. The authors examine how various strategies are associated with poverty rates across groups of women and also examine more directly the effects of specific work–family policies on poverty rates. They find that while family benefits and child care for young children unequivocally lower poverty rates, particularly for families headed by a single mother, long parental leaves have more ambivalent effects. The findings suggest that it is critical to examine the gendered assumptions underlying work–family policies rather than viewing all work–family policies as the same.

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Work–family policies, which help men and women balance the competing demands of work and family, have been heralded as one of the most important welfare state expansions of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. In many European countries, care is available for those who need it, either through benefits for family caregivers or through high-quality, affordable, state-provided or state-subsidized care. As a result, families need not be at risk of poverty due to care demands. Yet work–family policies also reflect gendered assumptions about women's and men's roles in society and appropriate family forms. These policies may reinforce traditional gendered notions of women as caregivers, require women's allegiance to paid work over carework, enable women greater choice in how they allocate their time between carework and paid work, or even support a gender egalitarian distribution of carework. We ask which of these strategies is most effective for alleviating poverty for both partnered and single mothers. Such questions have animated feminist debates about family policy for more than a century. For example, when the Women's Committee of 100 (http://www.wc100.org), "a group of feminist academics, professionals, and activists concerned with the relationship between women, economic survival, and the work of caregiving," called for a caregiver's allowance to support U.S. women's carework in the home, it provoked significant controversy among feminist scholars.

We argue that welfare states have adopted work–family policies based on gendered assumptions about women's and men's roles in society and that these policies then affect women's risk of poverty cross-nationally. We find that work–family policies that reinforce women's caregiving roles lead to greater risk of poverty, particularly for single-mother families. These single-mother families "raise fundamental issues about the balance between family, state, and individual financial responsibilities; and about the roles of men and women as parents and workers" (Millar 1996, 25).

POVERTY, GENDER, AND WORK–FAMILY POLICIES

Cross-national research on poverty and gender identifies the sources of the gender gap between men and women in poverty and examines how different groups of women fare (Casper, McLanahan, and Garfinkel 1994; Christopher 2002a, 2002b, 2002c; Christopher et al. 2002; Kilkey and Bradshaw 1999; Krysik and Nichols-Casebolt 1997; Wiepking and Maas 2005). Although there is significant cross-national variation in the extent of poverty for single mothers, research shows that single mothers tend to be poorer than all other groups (McLanahan, Casper, and Sorensen 1995;

McLanahan and Garfinkel 1995). Differences in the gender gap in poverty cross-nationally are primarily shaped by different configurations of family, labor market, and welfare state policies.

Casper, McLanahan, and Garfinkel's (1994) classic article argues that differences in rates of employment and single parenthood—rather than human capital factors such as age and education—play key roles in creating different gender gaps in poverty. Gaps can be reduced by pursuing high rates of marriage (as in Italy), high employment for women (as in Sweden), or high levels of social transfers (as in the Netherlands). Yet due to the low wages many women earn, high levels of women's employment are not enough to lower women's poverty, making social transfers crucial (Christopher 2002a, 2002b, 2002c; Christopher et al. 2002; Krysik and Nichols-Casebolt 1997). As Krysik and Nichols-Casebolt (1997, 34) argue, "combining market and the state is a more realistic strategy for lessening the incidence of poverty among these families than a reliance on either source of income alone."

This literature has not yet addressed the influence of work–family policy on risk of poverty, however. Work–family policies include paid or unpaid parental and family leave, caregiver allowances and pensions, child care policies supporting subsidized or state-provided care, and work-time policies (Gornick and Meyers 2003; Hantrais 2000; Morgan and Zippel 2003). The swift development of these policies across Europe suggests a critical shift is taking place in how policy makers conceptualize women's roles—as employed workers as well as caregivers (Fraser 1994; Gornick and Meyers 2003; Jenson and Sineau 2001; Michel and Mahon 2002). Indeed, both policy makers and scholars have touted these work–family policies as key factors behind the successful integration of so many more women—particularly mothers—into the labor force.

Many scholars continue to treat family policies as if they all share the same goals and have the same impacts, for example, measuring policies solely in terms of overall expenditures (Moller et al. 2003) or through indices that combine both child care and parental leave policies in one summary measure (Gornick and Meyers 2003; Mandel and Semyonov 2005, 2006; but see Esping-Andersen 1999; Leitner 2003). Scholars justify these measures by the correlation between generous child care and leave arrangements. Yet we believe more fine-grained measures lead to more precise understandings of policy effects. We argue that work–family policies reflect particular gendered understandings of women's roles. For example, long-term parental and care leave policies may weaken mothers' employment continuity and earnings while reinforcing women's role in

care (Bergmann 1998, 2001; Morgan and Zippel 2003). Unless leave policies include generous transfers to replace women's lost income, these policies may exacerbate poverty. On the other hand, high-quality subsidized child care for young children, by allowing women the opportunity to work for wages, may lower poverty rates (see Pettit and Hook 2005 regarding employment outcomes). Similarly, while policy support for part-time employment may benefit women with another source of income, such policies may hamper the ability of single mothers to earn enough to lift their families out of poverty. We argue that it is important to recognize the different assumptions embedded in work–family policies and their potential impact on differing groups of women.

Based on our review, we expect family benefits—which are cash benefits paid to families with children—to simply and unsurprisingly decrease poverty rates for families. However, transfers to families with children are not enough—the combination of transfers and employment is crucial to explaining variation in poverty rates. Thus, we examine whether work–family policies also influence impoverishment, independent of family benefits. We expect child care provisioning for young children to strengthen women's opportunities in the labor market and decrease poverty rates for women. We also expect paid maternity leave to lower poverty rates both by providing income during the crucial period after the birth of a child and by helping women remain engaged with the labor market. Yet length of leave matters as well. Policies that provide long leaves for women may weaken women's labor force attachment and opportunities. We expect curvilinear effects of total leave (both paid and unpaid) on poverty, initially decreasing poverty but increasing poverty as leaves become longer.

Overall, we argue that work–family policies are not all the same—some reinforce traditional gender arrangements, some challenge traditional arrangements, and some have ambivalent effects. We begin by discussing broad welfare state strategies to clarify how policy configurations vary across countries. We then sketch the broad association between welfare state strategies and poverty rates. Finally, we test our arguments directly by examining the impact of specific work–family policies on heterosexual women's poverty rates.

GENDERED WELFARE STATE STRATEGIES

Welfare state structures rest on gendered assumptions about men's and women's traditional roles in the family and workplace. These assumptions

lead to distinctive policy configurations across countries. Historically, welfare states assumed a family wage, "male breadwinner–female caregiver" strategy (Fraser 1994; Sainsbury 1999), while welfare states currently assume that women are both earners and carers—although with varying emphases (Stryker, Eliason, and Tranby 2006). Drawing on Nancy Fraser's (1994) conceptualization, we recognize four major strategies that assume certain roles for women: the carer strategy (where women are treated primarily as carers and secondarily as earners), the earner strategy (where women are treated primarily as earners and secondarily as carers), the choice strategy (where women are treated as choosing whether they are primarily earners or caregivers, particularly when children are young), and the earner–carer strategy (where women and men are treated as equally involved in both earning and caring) (Misra, Budig, and Moller 2007). While there is variation within each of these strategies, these groupings help us capture the embedded assumptions about gender present in welfare state strategies.

The carer strategy remains closest to the male breadwinner–female caregiver strategy assumed by the family wage model. Policy in carer countries—the Netherlands, Germany, and Luxembourg—explicitly values and rewards women for providing care, reinforcing traditional gender divisions between care and employment (Sainsbury 1999). Policies include caregiver allowances, parental leaves, and flextime, and the state encourages part-time employment as an ideal strategy for women who wish to combine employment and care. For example, in Germany, despite increased women's labor market participation, most mothers are employed in part-time positions. Germany provides very generous parental leave policies but more limited state provision of child care, particularly for children younger than three (Gornick and Meyers 2003). Germany provides care allowances for caregivers and subsidizes pension contributions for caregivers for up to 10 years of care for children (Seeleib-Kaiser 2004). Instead of shifting care to the market and state (or to men), this strategy emphasizes women's caregiving within the family as the primary site for the provision of care (Fraser 1994).

The earner strategy posits a society in which both men and women are equally invested in labor market participation, with little state support for care (Fraser 1994). Earner strategy countries include Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom. State policies work to engage women in the paid labor force but do not directly address work–family imbalances. Policies emphasize removing gender discrimination in employment, although state support for care is very limited. For example, U.S. laws aim

to equalize women's opportunities in the workplace, and women are more likely to be engaged in full-time employment than in many other countries. However, most families with children must rely on private-sector family day care or child care centers, provision from family and friends, or (for two-parent families) staggered working shifts to cover child care. This strategy does provide for women's opportunities for full-time employment, although the net benefit is questionable, given the care "crunch" mothers face.

The choice strategy envisions a society in which women are valued and rewarded for providing care but also encouraged to engage in employment. The countries falling into this mixed strategy—France and Belgium—have ambivalent approaches to gender and women's roles. Policies provide substantial support both for women's full-time employment and for caregiving within families, particularly when children are young. French women, for example, have access to expansive state-provided child care, generous parental leave, and home care allowances that support parental care for two or more young children. French policies are promoted as giving women a "free choice" (*libre choix)* (Laufer 2003; Morgan 2004, 2005). While the provision of child care supports relatively high employment levels for mothers, as a whole, these policies have encouraged women's caregiving rather than promoted men's equal role in care (Morgan 2004, 2005).

Finally, the earner–carer strategy, exemplified by Sweden, Norway, and Finland, suggests a new gendered vision of society in which both women and men balance informal carework and employment. Men and women are encouraged to take parental leave, but high-quality child care outside of the home is also available (Gornick and Meyers 2003). Employers are expected to meet the needs of men and women who are involved in both paid employment and unpaid care, providing them with shorter work-weeks and employment-enabling services. Sweden provides the best example, encouraging women's employment by providing substantial state-provided care support while promoting men's caregiving through paternity leaves that only men can take (currently two months of leave available only to fathers, with a very high take-up rate by fathers) (Ekberg, Eriksson, and Friebel 2005; Gornick and Meyers 2003). Yet despite these efforts, most Swedish women are employed in gender-segregated jobs, are more likely to work part-time then men, and are more likely to take leave to care for sick children than men (Ekberg, Eriksson, and Friebel 2005; Ellingsaeter 1999; Sainsbury 1999). However, the earner–carer strategy does reflect an attempt to challenge traditional gender norms and, as such, provides a step toward greater gender equality.

Given the substantial differences in the policy configurations across welfare state strategies, it is important to determine how these policies affect poverty for mothers and nonmothers. Thus, we examine poverty rates across strategies and also determine the effectiveness of individual policies on reducing the likelihood of impoverishment among women.

METHOD AND MEASURES

We use the Luxembourg Income Study (LIS) database to develop a number of measures of poverty rates across families with and without children for Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States. We incorporated all of the LIS countries that included the variables of interest, and for which we had appropriate work–family measures. While we cannot generalize these findings beyond these industrialized welfare states, the larger gendered assumptions that animate the policy strategies of welfare states can inform us about how gender shapes state policy making. The LIS database, the best cross-national data for comparing income across Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development countries, gathers data from national surveys and harmonizes the data to ensure comparability (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development 1995). We use waves IV (mid 1990s) and V (early 2000s), where possible using wave V.

We constrain our sample to working-age adults (25 to 59) to limit the number of students and pensioners in the sample. Like most comparative researchers, we measure poverty rates relatively to capture the extent that families' incomes are less than 50 percent of their countries' median income (Brady 2003; Casper, McLanahan, and Garfinkel 1994; Korpi and Palme 1998; Moller et al. 2003). We calculate posttax and posttransfer poverty rates as the percentage of households headed by working-age adults, 25 to 59, with disposable incomes—including governmental transfers, taxes, and market income (income from wages and salaries, property income, private pension income, and self-employment income)—less than 50 percent of median disposable income.[1]

We define *partnered families* broadly to include heterosexual cohabitating and married couples since, like married couples, cohabiting couples generally pool income. All unmarried, separated, or divorced women who do not live with an adult of the opposite sex are categorized as single.[2] We also distinguish between women without children living in the home, mothers with children living in the home, and those with children younger

than age six living in the home. LIS allows us to identify as mothers only women with minor children living in their households; some mothers whose children do not live in the same household, such as adult children, will be counted as nonmothers (childless women were slightly older than mothers in our sample). While mothers of residential children should have greater care responsibilities and therefore be at a higher risk of poverty, past caring responsibilities may influence current poverty risk. To the extent this occurs, our analyses will underestimate poverty risk among mothers. The samples are relatively large, ranging from 1,000 in Luxembourg to 19,000 in the United States.

Age is a scaled variable that ranges from 25 to 49. Employment status is measured with two variables, whether the respondent was employed full-time or part-time (unemployed or out of the labor force is the reference category). We define part-time employment as being employed less than 30 hours per week (Misra, Budig, and Moller 2007). The final control variable, education, is measured using a formula created by LIS where educational attainment is categorized based on the international standard classification of education from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. We include in our models high education, which includes university/college education through postdoctoral education, and medium education, which includes upper secondary education through vocational postsecondary education. Low education (lower secondary education or less) is the reference category.

We test the impact of gendered policies on women's impoverishment via four policy variables. Family benefits are measured as benefit expenditures on family allowances as a percentage of total social insurance (Huber et al. 2004; International Labour Organization various years). Child care is measured as the percentage of children ages one and two enrolled in publicly funded child care (Gornick and Meyers 2003). Paid leave is measured as the number of weeks of maternity leave paid at 100 percent of wages (Gornick and Meyers 2003). Finally, total leave is the maximum number of weeks—paid or unpaid—taken as maternity leave, parental leave, and/or child care leave by a mother for the birth of her first child (Jaumotte 2003). Another approach would be to test the impact of these policies through the use of expenditure data; however, high-quality data that include expenditures on leaves do not exist. In addition, we would argue that it is not the total expenditures, but the types of policies, that matter. For example, total social expenditures are higher in Sweden than in the United States—reflected in very different poverty rates. However, total social expenditures are much more similar for Sweden and

Germany, although Germany's poverty rates—particularly for single mothers—are substantially higher (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development 2004).

We run logistic regressions to examine how policies affect the likelihood that women fall into poverty. We examine the impact of specific work–family policies on impoverishment for women by partnership status and presence of children in the home, while controlling for age, employment status, and education. To conduct these analyses, we pool the data for individuals across countries. Norway and Finland are excluded from these models because employment data are missing for these counties. This leaves a data set with 58,210 women within nine countries. We conduct logistic regression analyses predicting impoverishment for women while adjusting errors using the modified Huber-White "sandwich" estimator. This adjustment accounts for the dependence of errors across individuals within countries without assuming a pattern of error variance. This modeling strategy is appropriate when the number of level-two units, that is, countries, is small. Other modeling strategies, including hierarchical modeling, require a sufficiently large number of level-two units to produce unbiased estimates (Raudenbush and Bryk 2002; Rogers 1993; Williams 2000).

WELFARE STATE STRATEGIES AND POVERTY RATES

Before presenting the regression results, we first present the association between poverty rates and gendered welfare state strategies regarding work–family policies. Posttax and posttransfer poverty rates are based not only on market income (income from wages, salaries, property, private pensions, and self-employment) but also on governmental transfers (old-age pensions, unemployment, disability, welfare, family allowances, and other benefits) as well as taxes (which include programs such as the earned-income tax credit, as well as tax payments). We examine posttax and posttransfer poverty rates because we are interested in how policies shape the experiences of families. Table 1 summarizes poverty rates across these countries for women with and without children, as well as with young children (younger than six). We are not able to distinguish between single women and women who are partnered with other women; therefore, we compare heterosexually partnered women against other women.

Heterosexual partnering appears to strongly lower poverty rates for women in every nation. Unpartnered women run a higher risk of living in poverty, whether they have children or not. Indeed, single childless women

TABLE 1: Posttax and Posttransfer Poverty Rates for Heterosexually Partnered and Other Women with No Children, Children, and Young Children

		Heterosexually Partnered Women			Other Women		
	Year	Without Children	With Children	With Young Children	Without Children	With Children	With Young Children
Carer							
Germany	2000	1.4	4.5	7.0	14.2	23.8	30.4
Netherlands	1999	7.3	6.6	7.5	4.0	22.7	22.3
Luxembourg	2000	2.5	6.1	7.5	4.1	18.5	—
Earner							
Canada	2000	4.6	10.0	11.7	13.4	32.3	49.8
United Kingdom	1999	3.9	9.0	11.2	9.1	30.5	40.0
United States	2000	5.7	13.2	15.5	13.9	37.1	42.2
Choice							
Belgium	1997	3.2	5.4	7.0	14.4	10.5	—
France	2000	3.3	4.4	5.2	5.8	13.3	12.7
Earner–carer							
Finland	2000	0.9	1.7	1.8	3.2	4.1	5.3
Norway	2000	2.2	2.1	2.4	7.3	4.4	5.0
Sweden	1995	1.2	1.3	1.4	6.1	5.9	9.0
Average		3.3	5.8	7.1	8.7	18.5	24.1

NOTE: Dashes indicate very small samples (fewer than 50 cases).

are more likely to live in poverty, on average, than partnered women with young children. Thus, women in all countries appear constrained in their ability to form autonomous households without slipping into poverty (Orloff 1993). Having children, particularly young children, continues to increase the chance of poverty significantly. On average, 3 percent of partnered women without children live in poverty, compared to 6 percent of partnered women with children and 7 percent of partnered women with young children. Single mothers with children are most vulnerable—on average, 19 percent of single women with children and 24 percent of single women with young children live in poverty.

However, we are most interested in determining whether differences in family policy affect poverty rates for partnered and single women. Do the policy strategies countries take toward supporting families affect poverty? Figure 1 describes the data by policy strategy, focusing only on partnered and single mothers. We also examined mean differences in poverty rates for single mothers with children across strategies, finding these differences significant ($F = 49.47$, $p < .001$).
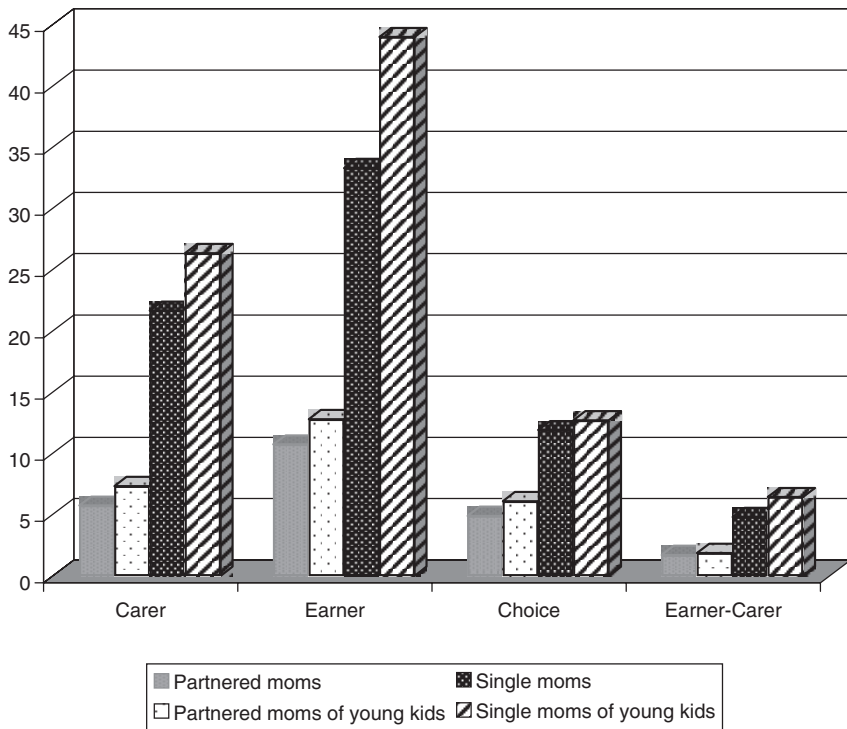
Figure 1:   Posttax and Posttransfer Poverty Rates, by Policy Strategy

   This figure illustrates that the earner–carer strategy countries—Finland, Norway, and Sweden—have the lowest levels of poverty for partnered and single mothers. This strategy includes policy measures such as leaves that support caregiving, high-quality subsidized care facilities outside the home, and policies that encourage men to do more caring. This policy strategy appears to be most effective at reducing poverty for women with children—including single mothers.

   The choice strategy countries—France and Belgium—provide very similar policy packages to those of the earner–carer strategy countries, yet with greater support for women's caregiving when children are young, through care leaves. This model also does less to challenge traditional gendered assumptions of men's and women's roles in society. This strategy is associated with somewhat higher levels of poverty, as compared to the earner–carer strategy, particularly for single mothers.

The earner strategy countries—the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom—provide minimal policy support for families with children, although important variation exists. However, a focus on market provision of care does not appear to address the roots of poverty for mothers and their children. Without generous benefits, leave policies, or child care, families with children must precariously balance care against employment. This strategy is associated with the highest levels of poverty, with shockingly high poverty levels for single mothers.

Finally, the carer strategy countries—the Netherlands, Germany, and Luxembourg—emphasize the importance of supporting women's caregiving through a variety of benefits and allowances, including a caregiver's pension and part-time employment opportunities. It is interesting to note that through the early 1990s, poverty among Dutch single-mother families was relatively low as a result of generous social transfers (Bussemaker and van Kersbergen 1999; Casper, McLanahan, and Garfinkel 1994). Yet welfare reform in the Netherlands has led to skyrocketing poverty rates, resulting in higher poverty rates for single-mother families than in many other Western European countries. The care strategy appears to be moderately successful for partnered mothers; however, single-mother families face relatively high rates of poverty. This strategy reflects gendered assumptions about women's primary roles as caregivers, relying on a breadwinning partner's income, which deeply affects single-mother families.

THE IMPACT OF WORK–FAMILY POLICIES ON POVERTY

The descriptive data by policy strategies suggest an association between welfare state strategy and poverty; however, to ensure that these trends do not simply reflect differences across countries in age structures or in levels of women's education and employment, we run logistic regressions with robust standard errors that control for age, women's education, and employment status. These regressions examine the likelihood that women are poor across countries. Here, we more directly examine the effect of specific work–family policies on women's impoverishment. While we are not able to examine the effects of all of the work–family policies that may be shaping these processes, we do examine several policies, including family benefits, provision of child care, paid maternity leave, and total family leave—both paid and unpaid. We also examine whether these policies affect women differently depending on their partnership and parenthood status. At the same time, we control for employment status, education, and age. Although the results below do not control

for measures of economic development, in separate analyses (not shown), we controlled for gross domestic product and found that the results remained robust. Thus, our findings do not simply reflect differences in economic development across countries. In separate analyses, we also ran fixed effects models wherein we controlled for each of the countries rather than adjusting the error term to account for the dependence of errors within countries. Our findings are the same in the fixed effects models, which control for unmeasured differences between countries. Thus, we are confident in arguing that the findings presented below do not simply reflect economic or cultural differences between countries.

We expect both employment and transfers from the government to reduce poverty. Employed women should be less likely to fall into poverty, while higher levels of family benefits should also reduce poverty. These findings should directly support previous research that argues that both transfers and employment are crucial to poverty reduction for families with children. Yet in addition, we examine how work–family policies, meant to support employment and caregiving, affect poverty rates.

We expect that most of these policies will reduce poverty. For example, child care provisioning should support women's employment and reduce poverty rates since women are not expected to juggle caregiving responsibilities with employment. We also expect that paid maternity leave should provide crucial income after the birth of a child and, therefore, reduce poverty. Yet we argue that the length of total leave—paid and unpaid—might have more complicated effects. Very long leaves might actually reduce women's labor force attachment, as well as their employment opportunities, once they return to the labor force. Therefore, while we expect that total leave length will decrease poverty, we expect that this association will decline with very long leaves, so we also include a measure of total leave length squared to test this assumption.[3]

Table 2 presents our results. The Basic Model tests the effect of family benefits, the Childcare Model adds child care, the Paid Leave Model adds paid maternity leave, the Family Leave Model replaces paid leave with total (paid and unpaid) family leave, and the Family Leave Squared Model adds the polynomial for family leave. All models present the logistic regression coefficients, standard errors (in parentheses), and percentage change in probability (in italics).[4] Negative coefficients report the reduction of poverty rates; positive coefficients report the increase of poverty rates. The Basic Model reports our findings regarding the effects of family benefits on poverty, controlling for a person's employments status, education, partnership, and parental status.

TABLE 2: Coefficients, Robust Standard Errors, and Percentage Change in Probabilities from Logistic Regression Predicting Impoverishment among Women

	Basic Model		Child Care Model		Paid Leave Model		Family Leave Model		Family Leave Squared Model	
Age	-0.212* (.02)	-1.9	-0.213* (.02)	-2.0	-0.214* (.02)	-2.0	-0.214* (.02)	-2.0	-0.213* (.02)	-2.0
Part-time employment	-0.353* (.07)	-3.1	-0.346* (.07)	-3.0	-0.347* (.07)	-3.0	-0.347* (.07)	-3.0	-0.348* (.07)	-3.0
Full-time employment	-0.79* (.09)	-5.8	-0.795* (.09)	-5.8	-0.797* (.09)	-5.8	-0.795* (.09)	-5.8	-0.794* (.09)	-5.8
Medium education	-0.379* (.12)	-3.3	-0.442* (.10)	-3.7	-0.438* (.10)	-3.7	-0.46* (.10)	-3.8	-0.464* (.10)	-3.9
High education	-0.74* (.21)	-5.5	-0.793* (.20)	-5.8	-0.792* (.20)	-5.8	-0.806* (.19)	-5.9	-0.811* (.19)	-5.9
Partnered	-1.14* (.14)	-7.3	-1.214* (.11)	-7.6	-1.211* (.11)	-7.6	-1.226* (.11)	-7.6	-1.232* (.11)	-7.7
Parent	0.776* (.14)	10.3	0.76* (.15)	10.0	0.752* (.15)	9.9	0.759* (.15)	10.0	0.743* (.15)	9.7
Partnered ´ Parent Interaction	-0.343* (.10)	-3.0	-0.314* (.10)	-2.8	-0.315* (.09)	-2.8	-0.307* (.10)	-2.7	-0.292* (.10)	-2.6
Family benefits	-0.259* (.12)	-2.3	-0.202* (.04)	-1.9	-0.126 (.07)	-1.2	-0.133* (.03)	-1.3	-0.05 (.06)	-0.5
Child care	—		-0.046* (.01)	-0.5	-0.035* (.02)	-0.4	-0.035* (.01)	-0.4	-0.024 (.01)	-0.2
Paid leave	—		—		-0.015 (.01)	-0.2	—		—	
Family leave	—		—		—		-0.005* (.00)	-0.1	-0.022* (.01)	-0.2
Family leave squared	—		—		—		—		.009* (.00)	0.1
Constant	-1.551* (.20)		-1.245* (.13)		-1.316* (.15)		-1.285* (.13)		-1.168* (.14)	

NOTE: Percentage increase probabilities are in italics. Standard errors are in parentheses. Dashes indicate variables that are not included in the model.
*p < .05.

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The control variables all act as expected. Both part-time and full-time employment reduce poverty (relative to nonemployment). Age and educational attainment both decrease poverty rates. The partnered, parent, and Partnered × Parent interaction terms also act as expected. Given the presence of the interaction term, the coefficient for partnered tells us the relative risk of poverty for partnered nonmothers compared to single nonmothers. Here, partnered childless women have a 7.3 percent lower risk of poverty. The interaction term can be added to the coefficient for partnered to reveal that the protective effect of marriage is greater for mothers, who have a 10.3 percent lower risk of poverty. Similarly, the value of the coefficient for parent tells us the relative risk of poverty for single mothers versus single childless women. Among single women, mothers have a 10.3 percent higher risk of poverty. Again, we can add the interaction term to reveal whether marriage alters the risk of poverty among mothers. Doing so reveals that marriage reduces the risk of poverty for mothers to 7.3 percent.

Turning to the key variable of interest in the Basic Model, family benefits have a significant negative effect on impoverishment. Family benefits, measured as expenditures on family allowances as a percentage of total social insurance, range from 0.7 percent in the United States to 5.4 percent in Luxembourg. The results indicate that women who live in countries with 1 percent higher spending on family benefits are 2.3 percent less likely to fall into poverty, controlling for age, employment, education, partnership, and parental status. This should be a noncontroversial finding, although neoconservative rhetoric does suggest that higher levels of family benefits increase poverty rates by making women dependent.

The Childcare Model examines our findings for the effects of child care for young children. As noted above, we measure child care as the percentage of children ages one and two enrolled in publicly funded child care (Gornick and Meyers 2003). As expected, child care has a significant effect over and above the effects of family benefits. Thus, the results indicate that a 1 percent increase in child care spending reduces the chance of impoverishment by 0.5 percent. Since the percentage of children aged one or two in publicly funded child care ranges from 2 percent in the United Kingdom to more than 40 percent in Belgium and Sweden (Gornick and Meyers 2003), this percentage change is substantial. Thus, state child care provisioning can play an important role in ensuring that families with children do not fall into poverty, in part by allowing women greater economic opportunities.

The Paid Leave Model examines the effect of paid leave, measured as the number of weeks of maternity leave paid at 100 percent of wages (Gornick and Meyers 2003). We find that after controlling for family benefits and

child care, paid maternity leave does not have a significant impact on the chance of impoverishment for women. We also test the effect of total family leave (both paid and unpaid) in the Family Leave and Family Leave Squared Models. This total family leave measure is the maximum number of weeks—paid or unpaid—taken as maternity leave, parental leave, and/or child care leave by a mother for care of her first child (Jaumotte 2003). Leave ranges from 12 weeks in the United States to more than 100 weeks in Germany. We find that women who live in countries with generous leave are significantly less likely to live in poverty. The results indicate that living in a country that offers 1 more week of total leave reduces the chance of impoverishment by 0.1 percent. Yet the positive effect for the polynomial indicates that the benefits of leave diminish when leave is particularly long (such as in Germany). This confirms our hypothesis that long leaves increase poverty, perhaps through undermining labor force attachment or opportunities to reenter the workforce.[5] It is interesting to note that when we include the squared measure, the effect of child care becomes only marginally significant ($p < .10$).

To determine the extent that policies differentially affect the risk of impoverishment for mothers and nonmothers, we conduct additional analyses that examine interactions between the policy variables and the partnered, parent, and Partnered × Parent interaction terms. Each of the policy variables is examined in separate logistic regressions. Figure 2 presents these results as the percentage change in odds.[6] All models control for women's age, employment status, and education. Furthermore, since we are interested in the effects of work–family policy variables independent of spending on family benefits, we also control for family benefits.[7]

Figure 2 illustrates that the presence of child care provisioning at the state level does not significantly reduce the odds of impoverishment for nonmothers. This finding is expected given that nonmothers do not seek child care. The figure also illustrates that child care policies at the national level do not significantly alter the odds of impoverishment for heterosexual partnered mothers, independent of family transfers. This means that heterosexual partnered mothers are less dependent on child care provisioning from the state, perhaps due to higher incomes and a greater likelihood for mothers to care for young children at home. Yet single mothers who reside in countries that fall one point higher in the percentage of children in publicly funded child care have 6 percent lower odds of impoverishment, independent of family transfers. Paid leave has the weakest effect for heterosexually partnered mothers, as it reduces the odds of impoverishment by only 0.8 percent. Again, single mothers benefit the most from paid
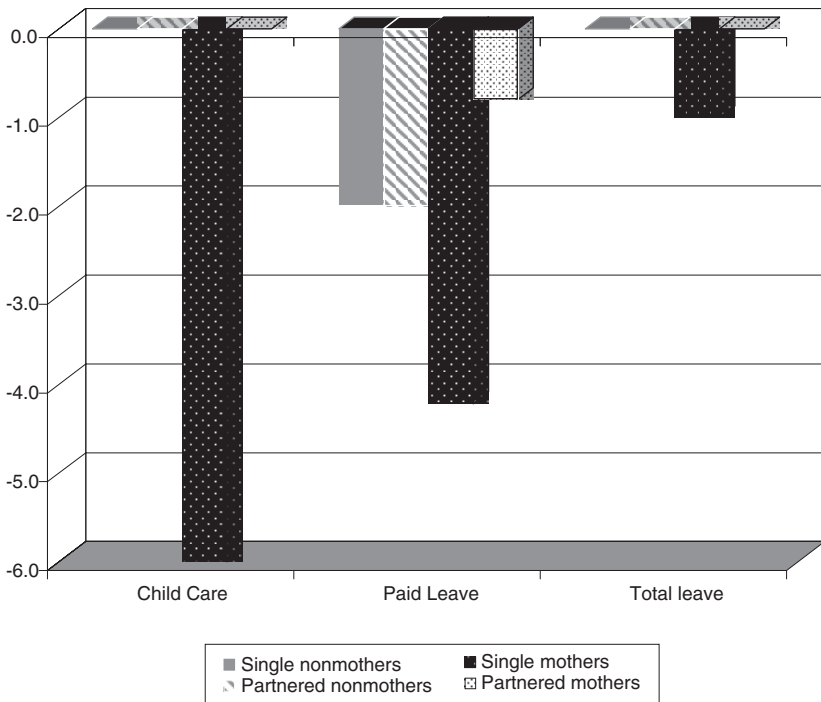
Figure 2: **Percentage Change in Odds of Impoverishment, by Policy Type, for Single Nonmothers, Partnered Nonmothers, Single Mothers, and Partnered Mothers**

leave, as a one-week increase in paid leave at the country level is associated with a 4.2 percent reduction in the odds of impoverishment for single mothers. Total leave (which includes paid and unpaid leave) does not significantly affect the odds of impoverishment for nonmothers and heterosexually partnered mothers. However, a one-week increase in total leave at the country level reduces the odds of impoverishment by 1 percent for single mothers in those countries, independent of family benefits.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The gendered assumptions that underlie broad welfare state strategies and specific work–family policies result in different patterns of support for families. These patterns are linked to differences in poverty rates for families with children. Poverty rates remain remarkably high in many nations, particularly for single mothers with children. However, these

rates vary by policy strategies. Poverty is much lower in countries with the earner–carer strategy, which emphasizes policy approaches meant to balance care and employment for both men and women. At the same time, poverty rates are significantly higher in countries that employ the earner strategy, which takes a market-driven approach to care issues.

Perhaps most interesting, poverty rates are significantly higher for single mothers and particularly single mothers of young children not only in countries that employ the earner strategy but also in those that employ the carer strategy. We might expect high levels of poverty for single mothers in countries that provide relatively few work–family supports, such as the United States and Canada. However, in the countries that employ the carer strategy, adopting policies that encourage women's continued caregiving responsibilities for their families, single mothers are also particularly disadvantaged. As Hobson notes in her analysis of single mothers in a variety of countries, in nations such as Germany, "solo mothers have no policy domain as either full-time carers or as paid workers. Within the gender logic of the German policy constellation that is organized around marital status or paid work, solo mothers are a residual category" (Hobson 1994, 182). If policies that support caregiving within the home are not combined with policies that support care outside the home, single mothers may be particularly disadvantaged. Indeed, our regression results further show that policies that support care outside the home—such as child care provisioning for children younger than three—reduce poverty more for single mothers than for partnered mothers. If our aim is helping families that are most vulnerable to poverty, we must recognize the importance of state provision of care outside the home, as well as support for care within the home.

Our regression findings also suggest the importance of combining market and transfer income. Employed women are less likely to fall into poverty, while family benefits unsurprisingly also decrease poverty. Yet our analysis goes further to examine how different work–family measures affect poverty for different groups of women. State provision of child care for children younger than three has an important impact on reducing poverty, particularly for single mothers. High-quality, state-provided or subsidized child care programs for infants and toddlers can make a substantial difference for women and their families. At the same time, the total number of weeks of leave, which allow women to provide caregiving for their families, has somewhat ambivalent effects. This leave initially reduces poverty, but when it becomes very long, it increases poverty rates. These findings support our assertion that it is critical to examine the gendered assumptions underlying work–family policies rather than viewing all work–family policies—or expenditures on family policies—as equal.

Work–family policies reflect a number of important tensions. While work–family policies may be linked to a variety of different outcomes, such as employment, fertility, developmental outcomes for children, and so forth (Misra, Budig, and Moller 2007), here we focus primarily on how they might shape poverty rates. Our findings suggest that beyond the positive impact of cash benefits paid to families with children, work–family policies such as child care and short-term leaves have powerful effects on poverty. Yet work–family policies that encourage women to take long leaves for caretaking have more ambivalent effects. While in recent years, many welfare states have restructured, providing fewer direct services to families, our findings emphasize the importance of just such services.

At the same time, our findings suggest that there need not be an either/or orientation toward work–family policies. Many nations provide both generous leaves, which help families provide care without losing income when babies are young, and high-quality child care to young children. Parallel to previous arguments about the importance of combining market and transfer income to combat poverty, our findings suggest that it is equally important to combine measures that allow families to provide some caregiving within the home with high-quality care outside the home. In such a society, where family benefits, short-term leave, and child care are available to women with children, families need not choose between either care or employment but instead combine employment and care in ways that maximize both resources and outcomes.

Of course, even these strategies may continue to reinforce traditional norms. For example, many women work fewer full-time hours in a country like Sweden than in the United States and may be less likely to advance to the highest levels professionally (Mandel and Semyonov 2005). Insofar as equity in the labor market is critical to gender equity, more progress must be made. Yet rather than maximizing women's working hours, a more balanced strategy might be to limit work hours more generally, while also encouraging men's caregiving (Hobson 2002). Indeed, the best of policies oriented toward gender equity work to ensure that men are truly involved in caregiving, as in "daddy days" of leave that only men can take; recent research suggests that the take-up of such policies is growing. For example, the fairly short French paid paternity leave adopted in 2002 has been tremendously successful; 94 percent of fathers take the leave for the maximum period (Laufer 2003; Mazur 2003). However, the leave should be longer to truly engage men in caretaking—currently, it is available for only 11 days within the first four months of a baby's birth or adoption or 18 days within the first four months of the birth or adoption of multiple babies.

Work–family policies clearly continue to reflect gendered notions of women's roles in caregiving and men's roles as breadwinners. Yet there are significant variations cross-nationally in the types of policies in place and in the outcomes of these policies. We argue for countries to adopt work–family policies that better address the needs of all families while also recognizing the need for care as well as the importance of supporting employment. By placing women's experiences at the center of our analyses, and examining how work–family policies support women's positions as workers and/or caretakers, we develop a better understanding of how policy constellations reflect conceptions of the state, market, and family.

NOTES

1. We adjust income based on household size to account for resource sharing. We utilize a common equivalence scale: the square root of the number of persons in the household (see Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development 1995 for an overview of equivalence scales).

2. The Luxembourg Income Study does not allow us to identify same-sex households consistently. Among our sample, five countries do not identify same-sex couples; of the remaining countries, the size of the same-sex population is never larger than 0.2 percent of the sample, with most countries offering data on 0 percent of the sample (having only identified 10 or fewer same-sex couples).

3. In separate analyses (not shown), we combined the work–family policies into a single index. We found that the reliability coefficient (.59) was well notably less than the typical cutoff (.8). This lends support to our assertion that it is necessary to examine work–family policies individually as they reflect unique components of countries' policy priorities.

4. The percentage change in probability is calculated by determining the new odds of impoverishment. First, we calculate the unconditional odds, finding that 11 percent of respondents in the sample are impoverished. Thus, the overall odds of impoverishment are 0.124 (calculated as $x / (x - 1)$ or 11 / 89). To calculate the new odds of the dependent variable, the overall odds are multiplied by each odds ratio, calculated as exp(b). The new probability of the dependent variable is then calculated as the new odds divided by 1 plus the new odds. This number is subtracted from the original probability to get the percentage change in probability.

5. To determine if the large sample in the United States disproportionately affects our results, in separate analyses, we examine the results after dropping the United States. We find that all of the findings for the policy variables are robust, with the exception that the polynomial is not significant. Finally, to determine if the small sample in Luxembourg (particularly for single mothers) disproportionately affects the results, in separate analyses, we drop Luxembourg. We find that all of our results are robust.

6. For single nonmothers, the percentage change in odds is calculated as $(100 \times [\exp(b\text{Policy}) - 1])$. For partnered nonmothers, it is calculated as $(100 \times [\exp(b\text{Policy} + b(\text{Policy} \times \text{Partnered})) - 1])$. For single mothers, it is calculated as $(100 \times [\exp(b\text{Policy} + b(\text{Policy} \times \text{Parent})) - 1])$. For partnered mothers, it is calculated as $(100 \times [\exp(b\text{Policy} + b(\text{Policy} \times \text{Partnered}) + b(\text{Policy} \times \text{Partnered} \times \text{Parent})) - 1])$.

7. When we interacted family benefits with partnered, parent, and Partnered × Parent interaction terms, in separate analyses, we found that the effects were insignificant, signaling that the effect of family benefits on the risk of impoverishment is universal.

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