



OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers No. 6

**Social Policies, Family  
Types and Child Outcomes  
in Selected OECD Countries**

**Sheila B. Kamerman,  
Michelle Neuman,  
Jane Waldfogel,  
Jeanne Brooks-Gunn**

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## SUMMARY

1. Child development and child well-being are major concerns in many OECD countries and are the subject of ongoing work at the OECD. These concerns have led to a search for policies to offset poverty, deprivation, vulnerability, and the risk factors that can trigger a lifelong cycle of disadvantage. It is in this context that we carried out a review of the research literature on child outcomes and of the different social policies that may affect them. The paper is organized in four parts: (1) a summary of child outcomes of concern in various OECD countries; (2) a discussion of one particular outcome, child poverty, and its negative consequences for children; (3) a summary of the research linking different family types with different outcomes; and (4) the social policies that may lead to different positive and negative outcomes.

2. Our main conclusions from this literature review is that knowledge-building is proceeding, in particular, with regard to child poverty and the policies that can reduce or eliminate this problem. Going beyond poverty, early childhood education and care services have positive consequences for children, especially children aged 2 or 3 to compulsory school entry, which can reduce early disadvantage. And one-parent family status and parental unemployment seem to have negative consequences for children, but there is less research addressing these associations. Large and important gaps in the research continue to exist, especially with regard to comparative studies of child welfare (child protection; foster care; adoption) and the prevention of child maltreatment, and studies of the situation of children of immigrants and ethnic and racial minorities.

## RESUME

Le développement de l'enfant et son bien-être constituent, dans bon nombre de pays de l'OCDE, d'importantes préoccupations qui font l'objet de travaux suivis à l'Organisation. Le souci d'y répondre a conduit à rechercher des moyens d'action qui permettent de compenser les effets de la pauvreté, du dénuement et de la vulnérabilité, et de parer aux facteurs de risque qui peuvent faire de la vie entière une succession de difficultés. C'est dans cette optique que nous avons passé en revue les études consacrées au devenir des enfants et aux différentes politiques sociales qui peuvent influencer sur lui. Ce document comprend quatre parties : (1) récapitulatif des sujets de préoccupation concernant le devenir des enfants dans différents pays de l'OCDE ; (2) examen d'une situation particulière, la pauvreté chez les enfants, et des conséquences négatives qu'elle a pour eux ; (3) résumé des travaux de recherche faisant le lien entre plusieurs types de famille et différents résultats ; (4) exposé sur des politiques sociales pouvant avoir diverses retombées positives ou négatives.

Cet examen nous a principalement permis de constater que les connaissances progressent, en particulier au sujet de la pauvreté chez les enfants et des politiques propres à faire reculer ou disparaître ce problème. Abstraction faite de la situation de pauvreté, les services d'éducation préscolaire et d'accueil des tout jeunes enfants ont des effets positifs sur ces derniers, surtout ceux qui ont entre 2 ou 3 ans et l'âge du début de la scolarité obligatoire, qui peuvent atténuer les handicaps précoces. Il semble que le fait de vivre dans une famille monoparentale et celui d'avoir des parents au chômage aient des conséquences négatives pour les enfants, mais il existe moins de travaux sur l'incidence de ces situations. La recherche présente encore beaucoup de lacunes importantes, surtout en ce qui concerne les études comparatives sur l'aide sociale à l'enfance (protection de l'enfance, placement en famille d'accueil, adoption) et la prévention de la maltraitance, ainsi que les travaux sur la situation des enfants d'immigrants et des minorités ethniques et raciales.

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## INTRODUCTION

3. Child development and child well-being are major concerns in many OECD countries (OECD, 1999c and 2001a). They are the subject of ongoing work on early childhood education and care policies under the auspices of the OECD Education Committee (2001a) and have been discussed as well in the ongoing OECD “family-friendly” policy reviews regarding the reconciliation of work and family life (OECD, 2001a; 2001b; 2001c; 2002) Social policies to address disadvantage (poverty, unemployment, school failure, social exclusion) often focus on children or families with children because of the perceived long-term effects of disadvantage on child development. As noted especially in the OECD reports and discussion regarding family friendly policies, these concerns have led to a search for policies to offset deprivation, vulnerability and the risk factors that can trigger a life-long cycle of disadvantage. It is in this context that we have carried out this review of the research literature on child outcomes and the effects of social policies.

4. Our objective in this paper is:

1. To identify in a selected group of OECD countries, the child outcomes of particular concern;
2. To explore one particular outcome– child poverty –and discuss current levels, trends, what is known about the effects on children, and the policies that can make a difference;
3. To identify the family types that are also of concern and often associated with these outcomes; and
4. To identify the social policies that are linked with these outcomes or with the family types associated with these outcomes, and the relevant research that assesses their effectiveness in achieving more positive outcomes (or reducing negative ones).

5. The paper is a synthesis of the national and cross-national research literature in selected OECD countries. Except for a discussion of adolescent (teen) pregnancy and parenting, the focus is on children (ages 0-15) rather than youth (ages 15-24).<sup>1</sup>

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1 We use the standard international age division here although different definitions are used by others. For example, some child development scholars define children as age 0-10, adolescents as 11-18, and youth as 18-24. In some countries children include those age 0-17 and youth as 18-25.



6. The paper is organised into four parts: Part I is a brief summary of the child outcomes of concern in selected countries. Part II is a discussion of the state of knowledge about one particular outcome – child poverty – its effects on child development and the policies that make a difference. Part III presents the data on the family types of concern and summarises the research linking the various types with positive and/or negative outcomes. Part IV describes the policies that impact on the various outcomes and the relevant research which documents this. The paper ends with some concluding comments about the state of knowledge regarding social policies and child well-being: Which social policies lead to enhanced child well-being? An Annex includes some illustrations of child and family policy “packages” in a few countries and some other salient policy research in these countries.

## 1. Child Outcomes

7. The child outcomes that tend to be highlighted in all countries, and in both national and comparative child well-being literature, include: child poverty; child abuse and neglect; unsatisfactory child development (socio-emotional, physical, and cognitive); and poor school performance. (Micklewright and Stewart, 2000). Additional child outcomes of concern in some countries include: infant mortality; school drop out rates; teen pregnancy and parenting rates; and social inclusion/exclusion (Micklewright and Stewart, 2000; See also, Unicef, 2002).

8. Still another concern in several countries is deaths by accident or injuries to children aged 1-14 as a consequence of drowning, fire, falls, violence, traffic accidents, or suicide (Unicef, Innocenti, 2001a). A Unicef Innocenti Center report (2000a) states that deaths by accident or injuries are the leading killer of children in the advanced industrialised countries, accounting for almost 40% of all child deaths; and 41% of these are in traffic accidents. Sweden, the U.K., Italy, and the Netherlands have the lowest rates and the U.S. among the highest.

### **BOX: Explicit objectives for child development**

The Anglo-American countries offer a more detailed list of outcomes of concern than those mentioned in the text. For example, one Australian report (Moon, Meyer, and Grau, 1999) lists, in addition to the concerns already mentioned:

- children living in families receiving welfare benefits
- children of the working poor;
- depression
- suicide
- alcohol and drug abuse
- delinquency, violence, and crime
- homelessness
- lack of access to health care and dental care
- minority status, especially aborigines
- STDs (sexually transmitted diseases)

A new longitudinal study of Australian children (Sanson, *et al.*, 2002) states that the child outcomes that should be addressed and measured include: behavioural and emotional adjustment; language and cognitive development; readiness to learn; overall health; motor/physical development; and social competence.

The Canadian government issued a report announcing a “National Children’s Agenda” (HDRC, June 21, 2000), highlighting four goals: “physically and emotionally healthy; safe and secure; successful at learning; and socially engaged and responsible.”

The U.S. provides the most extensive, regularly reported, and systematic data on the condition of children and indicators of child well-being (Federal InterAgency Forum [FIAF] 2002; U.S.DHHS, 2001; Annie E. Casey Foundation[AECF], 2002). The government issues several annual reports of childhood social indicators that provide a detailed picture of child well-being and child outcomes of concern. In addition to many of the outcomes already mentioned, these reports (*America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being 2002* and *Trends in the Well-Being of America's Children and Youth 2001*) classify the concerns regarding child well-being under a series of rubrics:

- Demography, including fertility rates and out-of-wedlock births
- Family structure and composition
- Economic well-being including child poverty
- Employment status of parents
- Health care and health conditions, including low birth weight and infant mortality rates
- Behavioural health, including smoking, alcohol, drug abuse, suicide, accidental deaths, sexual activity including teen births)
- Education, including early childhood education, school readiness, literacy and numeracy skills, school enrolment, problems and failure, highest grade completed.

9. In some countries, low birth rates are also an outcome of concern (total fertility rates of 1.68 in the OECD countries in the late 1990s, 1.47 in the 15-country EU in 2001, and below that in Spain, Italy, and Japan). In a few others, all births outside of marriage are viewed as problematic (about one-third in such countries as the U.S. and New Zealand; and about 40% in the U.K. and France). In still others, higher rates of unwed parenting exist (55% in Sweden, for example) but most occur to two biological parents who are cohabiting albeit not legally married. What the implications of these developments are for child well-being is unclear.

10. Social exclusion and child poverty are increasingly becoming identified as outcomes of concern in the European Union (Mejer and Linden, 2000; Micklewright, 2002; Saraceno, 2002) and in several of the member countries, for example, in the U.K., (Hills and Waldfogel, 2002 and Waldfogel, 2002a), in France (Paugam, 1996), and, despite low rates by international standards, in Sweden, too (Biterman and Borjeson, 2002; see also, Phipps and Curtis, 2001 and Kahn and Kamerman, 2002).<sup>2</sup>

11. In contrast, among the most industrialised OECD countries, the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden) and the Netherlands, all have consistently good outcomes on all indicators of child well-being. According to one report (OECD, 1999a), the Nordic countries, in addition to maintaining a low child poverty rate, achieving and maintaining low school drop out rates and low rates of failure to graduate, sustaining child health, and reducing child abuse and neglect (viewed as a small problem in any case), are also concerned with: securing the well-being of children rather than increasing or sustaining population size; avoiding social exclusion and achieving social inclusion; enhancing numeracy and literacy skills and school achievement generally; and achieving the rights of children that are specified in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

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2 The term "social exclusion" is defined in many different ways in the literature but is usually viewed as a multi-dimensional concept involving economic, social, political, cultural, and special aspects of disadvantage and deprivation. It is often described as the process by which individuals and groups are wholly or partly closed out from participation in their society as a consequence of low income, constricted access to employment, social benefits, and services and to various aspects of cultural and community life. (Kahn and Kamerman, 2002).

12. A follow up Swedish report to the World Summit for Children (2002, p. 3) notes that “Children in Sweden generally have a good life. The great majority of children grow up in good material circumstances, they have good parents who care about them and they have every prospect of achieving a good life in adulthood... Schools are generally successful and educational opportunities are expanding. Children’s health is on the whole developing well.” Infant mortality rates are among the lowest in the world throughout the Nordic countries and 80-85% of children say they are content with their lives.

13. As Phipps (1999) points out, many countries share the same concerns and goals for children but may not necessarily achieve them, while in other cases even the goals (or perhaps the priorities) are not shared. Thus, she notes that all the advanced industrialised countries share the goal of ensuring that all children are well-educated, but may not define “well-educated” the same way; and only some invest to the same extent in achieving this goal. Only four of the five countries in her study (Canada, U.K., Netherlands, and Norway- but not the U.S.) share the goal of ensuring that all children are as healthy as possible, and assure universal access to health care through some form of national health insurance or health service.

## 2. Child Poverty

14. Here, we highlight child poverty, a major child outcome of concern for which there is extensive research literature dealing with policy impacts. It is not possible at this point to provide similar reviews of such other major outcomes of concern as: child abuse and neglect; school failure, or social exclusion. However, in the fourth section of the paper we do describe some research on the known impacts of child-oriented interventions.

15. The concern about child poverty (defined as low income relative to needs or norms, whether employing a relative measure such as 50% of median income or an absolute measure, a fixed standard) is pervasive in most of the OECD countries, especially in the Anglo-American and European Union countries (Unicef Innocenti Center, 2000; Bradley and Jantii, 2001; Oxley, *et al.*, 2001; Vleminckx and Smeeding 2001; Bradbury, Jenkins, and Micklewright, 2001). Of all the child outcomes of concern, and there are a large number as we have seen, child poverty is high on the agenda of all countries, even those that have already achieved low rates (see, for example, Nordenstam, 2002). However, Phipps (1999) in her comparative study of social policies and child outcomes in five countries (Canada, Netherlands, Norway, U.K., and U.S.) notes that although almost all the countries express concern about child poverty, some have far higher rates than others, and thus have far more to do if they are to achieve a significant reduction.

### *Why the Concern?*

16. Child poverty is a major concern in most of the OECD countries because poor children experience a disproportionate share of deprivation, disadvantage, and bad health and school outcomes, and because the consequences of poverty are especially dire for young children.

17. Children in the European Union have an above average risk of income poverty (using the relative measure above) compared to non-aged adults (Mejer and Siermann, 2000) and often, the aged as well. In 1996, 21% of all children in the European Union lived in a family with income below the poverty threshold while only 16% of adults did. The pattern of higher rates for children than the rest of the population is true also for the U.S. and Canada, but the actual rates varied significantly. Almost half of all children living in single-parent households (46%) lived in income poverty in the EU, more than double the rate of children generally. Child poverty rates were even higher when the household head was unemployed. Only Germany among the EU countries and those OECD countries discussed here has child poverty rates that are not significantly higher than the rates for the population generally, although that may be changing now. (Schluter, 2001; Jenkins, Schluter, and Wagner (December, 2001).

18. Child poverty is a problem of particular concern in the U.K. and the U.S. (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, and Maritato, 1997; Smith, Brooks-Gunn, and Klebanov, 1997; Duncan and Brooks-Gunn, 1997; Gregg *et al.*, 1999; Hill and Jenkins, 2001; Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn, 2002). Child poverty rates have been consistently higher than the rates for the adult population in these countries for more than the last two decades. Poverty is more pronounced, more widespread, and more severe among younger children and it is also more persistent (Mejer and Linden, 2000; Bradbury, Jenkins and Micklewright; Duncan and Brooks-Gunn, 1997; Brooks-Gunn and Duncan, 1997; Duncan, Yeung, Brooks-Gunn, and Smith, 1998; Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn, 2002).

19. Social exclusion and poverty have been a concern in France over the past three decades (Paugam, 1996). In the 1980s, a “new poverty” was discovered among populations that were thought to be protected by their employment status. Unemployment and family disruption were linked to loss of employment-related benefits and subsequent social exclusion. Policymakers, researchers, and practitioners also have focused on “grande pauvreté” (extreme and persistent poverty), which, like social exclusion, is characterised by both income deprivation and social disadvantage. Grande pauvreté is of concern because of the links to: an accumulation of unstable employment, housing and health care; fear of family dislocation because of the risk of placement of children in child protective services; a daily battle for survival that can leave families with depleted capacities; transmission of disadvantage from generation to generation; rejection by society. Children who live in grande pauvreté often face difficulties in school that are linked to their economic, social, environmental, and cultural disadvantages. They may suffer from malnutrition, fatigue, and maltreatment which may affect their development and learning (Pair, 2000).

### ***Child Poverty Levels and Trends***

20. Data on cross-national comparisons of child poverty rates and trends are provided on a consistent basis by Eurostat for the EU countries (Mejer and Siermann, 2000; Mejer and Linden, 2000). In addition, data are provided for 25 industrialised countries from the Luxembourg Income Study (LIS) a collection of household surveys providing data that are sufficiently comparable to allow meaningful cross-national comparisons (Bradbury, Jenkins, and Micklewright, 2001; see also Vleminckx and Smeeding, 2001 and Unicef Innocenti, 2000), and a recent OECD project provides similar data (Förster, 2000). Data for several individual countries draw on country socio-economic panel surveys (Bradbury, Jenkins, and Micklewright, 2001), national longitudinal surveys, and on national census data (FIAF, 2001; U.S.DHHS, 2001).

21. Despite the growing concern, there is no evidence that child poverty increased generally during the 1990s (Vleminckx and Smeeding, 2001; Bradbury, Jenkins, and Micklewright, 2001; Unicef Innocenti, 2000, Förster 2000). Nor was there a consistent trend in child poverty across countries during the 1990s; nor is there evidence of a general “childrenisation” of poverty. However, there is evidence that there were (and continue to be) significant variations cross nationally. Child poverty rates declined in some countries (*e.g.* Canada, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden), rose in others (*e.g.* Germany, Hungary, Italy, the U.K. and the U.S. albeit declining in the U.S. in more recent years) and stayed stable in most – all regardless of the type of poverty line used. (Bradbury, Jenkins, Micklewright, 2001).

22. To illustrate<sup>3</sup>: Relative child poverty rates (below 50% of median family/household income) ranged widely during the 1990s in the OECD countries, from 3.4% in Finland to 26.3% in the U.S, and from about 4% in the Nordic countries generally to 15- 20% in the Anglo-American and southern European countries (Bradbury and Jantii, 2001 Table 1.1, p. 15). They were dramatically lower in Norway and the Netherlands (4.5% and 8.4% respectively), than in the U.K. and U.S. The highest rates are in Germany, Spain, and Italy, with U.K. following and the U.S. the highest of all and the Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary relatively low – but high when assessed according to an absolute poverty standard. Several countries are already on record as working to reduce these rates – U.K. to eliminate child poverty by 2020, Belgium to reduce it by 50% by 2010, Japan down 50% by 2015, and Ireland with specific reductions to be achieved by 2007.

23. Bradbury, Jenkins, and Micklewright (2001) point to the important distinctions among “occasional,” “transient,” and “persistent” poverty, severe and near poverty – as having significant implications for child well-being. They find that children are much more likely to experience persistent poverty than other age groups (for reasons that are not yet clear) and that this has far more serious consequences for children than other age groups. They also find that younger children are more likely to be poor than older children in most countries, either because their parents are likely to be young and earning lower wages or their mothers are less likely to be in the labour force. (see also, Aber and Ellwood, 2001). And they find that persistent poverty, too, varies across countries. They also identify the major factors affecting children’s entry into poverty: Being born into a poor family; parental unemployment, especially long term unemployment and unemployment of the family head or sole earner; low earnings; the size and composition of the family; and the presence and level of government income transfers.

24. The country-specific child poverty research tends to focus on which children are poor and on trends with regard to child poverty over time. A few examples follow:

25. Children have not been a focus of poverty research in Germany until very recently (Schluter, 2001). Child poverty rates were relatively low and stable in West Germany during the 1983-1995 period, but the rates in East Germany after re-unification, and in guest worker families, lone-parent families, and in families whose heads have no full time employment, were more than double the rates in the West during the 1991-1995 period. On the positive side, there was a relatively low rate of persistent child poverty. One recent study, among the first to concentrate on children, compares child poverty in Britain and Germany (Jenkins *et al.*, 2001). The study finds that child poverty is less persistent in Germany, poverty exit rates are higher, but poverty rates are similar in both countries among children in lone-parent families and families with a non-working head. Another study by Schluter (2001; see also Jenkins, *et al.* 2001) using a relative definition of poverty, seeks the relevant outcomes for children. The study addresses the dynamics of child poverty in Germany in the 1990s, paying attention to trends, persistence, comparisons with children in East and West Germany, and the children of guest workers. Schluter found that until very recently, children were not more likely to be poor than other age groups in Germany. Nonetheless, children in lone parent families were and are far more likely to be poor than those living in two-parent families. Children in a family with a head who is not in full time employment are especially vulnerable to poverty, in particular, if the head is the sole earner. Young children are more likely to be poor than older children. Children of guest

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3 We use the relative measure here because that is the measure used in most cross-national studies. We have not attempted to reconcile small discrepancies among the various studies cited since these may result from the use of different data sets or from variations in the reporting years. It seems clear that in order to accurately assess children’s living conditions and their economic well being, both an absolute and relative measure of poverty are needed as well as other direct measures, both monetary and non-monetary. There is need to benchmark and to use cross-sectional and longitudinal measures to assess duration and persistence.

workers are more likely to be poor than other children. And children are more likely to be persistently poor than other age groups.

26. In Italy birth rates declined in the 1990s (and in Italy poverty rates for the elderly declined also) but child poverty rates remained high (Cannari and Franco, 1999). Although child poverty received little attention in Italy until recently, in 1993 the poverty rate for families with children (26%) was more than double that of other households (12%). The rate for children in lone-parent families was far higher (40%) but these constituted only a very small share of the total, only 5% of all poor households, while two parent households with children constituted 46%. In general, child poverty rates are higher when there are more than two children in the family, and/or when there is only one wage earner (and if they live in the south). Rates are still higher for children in one-parent families, but these make up a very small part of the population.

27. In Spain (Canto-Sanchez and Mercader-Prats, 1999), relative child poverty did not change much from the mid 1970s to the early 1990s, but not all children had the same risk or experience. The child poverty rate was high for large families and lone-parent families but the first group declined in numbers during these years and the second constituted only about 1% of all families with children. The highest rate occurred among children in households in which the head was unemployed.

28. The child poverty rate in the U.S. is among the highest of all OECD countries (UNICEF, 2000). While the rate declined during the late 1990s, one out of every six (16%) young Americans lived below the federal poverty line in 2001 and 18% of very young children under six (Proctor and Dalaker, 2002).<sup>4</sup> Young children in the U.S. are more likely to be poor than adults or the elderly, or older children (Song & Yu, 2002), which is particularly disturbing given that poverty may be more detrimental to children in their early childhood years than in their adolescence (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997). The child poverty rate is significantly higher for African-American and Latino children than for white children. A recent concern is the percentage of children living in extreme poverty—those with incomes below half the poverty line (Song & Yu, 2002). Children who live in extreme poverty and those who live below the poverty line for multiple years suffer the worst outcomes (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997).

29. In short, child poverty (and social exclusion) is highest among non-working households in all countries. It is next highest in lone parent, especially lone mother families, in particular those families in which the mother is not employed or is very young. The poverty risk is next highest among the working poor, especially single-parent families but including two-parent, one-earner families. For example, poverty rates in one earner households range from over 30% in the U.S. to under 5% in the Nordic countries. Poor children in the U.S. are increasingly likely to be growing up in working but poor families, especially those headed by lone mothers; and the rates are higher for Black and Hispanic children.

### ***The Effects on Child Well-Being***

30. As Vleminckx and Smeeding point out (p.1), “Those who grow up in disadvantaged families are more likely to suffer unemployment, low pay, and poor health in adulthood and to transfer this poverty of opportunity to their own children.” Three studies that are reported on in this volume reveal the impact of child poverty on children’s educational attainment and adult labour market performance (Gregg and Machin, 2001), on children’s school attendance (Buchel, Frick, Krause, and Wagner, 2001), and on the

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4 In the U.S., the official poverty measure is an absolute standard. The other poverty data reported here reflect a relative standard, defining poverty as falling below 50 % of median income for the country.

situation of school-aged children (C. Currie, 2001) further confirming the negative consequences of childhood disadvantage. As Buchel *et al.* (2001) found in their study, low income, especially poverty, leads to lower educational achievement, and matters even more to younger children than to teens.

31. Studies in Britain have consistently found that children who grew up in poverty do worse in terms of eventual educational attainment and other adult outcomes. For instance, Gregg *et al.* (1999) using data from two British birth cohorts find that children who grew up in poverty do worse across a range of adult outcomes. Hobcraft (1998, 2000) too, using data from the 1958 birth cohort, finds that childhood poverty strongly predicts negative adult outcomes, even after controlling for a host of other child and family characteristics. Most recently, McCulloch and Joshi (2002) also using data from the 1958 birth cohort find that children from low-income families perform more poorly on cognitive tests and that their lower performance is related to the material disadvantage their families have experienced during their childhood.

32. U.S. research, drawing on national studies, large multi-site studies, and large longitudinal surveys,<sup>5</sup> measures the effects of income independent of other conditions associated with growing up in a poor family. This research also has found that poverty has negative effects on children's health, cognitive development and academic achievement and, to a lesser extent on their emotional and behavioural outcomes (Brooks-Gunn, Smith, and Klebanov, 1997). Poor children are more likely to experience learning difficulties and developmental delays and have difficulty in school (Duncan and Brooks-Gunn, 1997) and become teen parents (An, Haveman, and Wolfe, 1993). As adults, they earn less and are unemployed more frequently than their more advantaged counterparts (Duncan and Brooks-Gunn, 1997).

33. Research in several other countries reflects the consistency with which poverty is found to have negative consequences for child well-being. A Canadian report drawing on a national longitudinal survey, states that if families are to nurture children for success in school and beyond, decreasing the rates of poverty for both immigrant and Canadian families is an important step (Human Resources Development Canada, 1999; Ross, Roberts, and Scott, 2000). An Australian review of research (Sanson, *et al.*, 2002) found that poverty and material deprivation have negative and cumulative effects on children's development, both via deprivation of material resources and via psychosocial processes including social exclusion. And a French study (Maurin, 2002), drawing on national survey data, estimates the effects of parental income on the probability of being held back in elementary school in France and finds that the effects of parental poverty are much larger than the effects of a child's sex, age (within the child's grade), or parent's education

### ***Which Policies Make a Difference?***

34. As is well established by now, income transfers are a key to reducing child poverty and enhancing the economic situation of children and their families. (Bradbury and Jantti, 1999 and 2001; Immervoll, *et al.* 2001; Oxley *et al.* 2001; Solera, 2001; and Vleminckx and Smeeding, 2001 in Vleminckx and Smeeding, 2001; Bradbury, Jenkins, and Micklewright 2001; Kamerman and Kahn, 1997a; Bodnarova, 2001; and Unicef Innocenti, 2000). Differences in policies mean that some countries reduce pre-tax and pre-transfer child poverty by as much as 20 percentage points and others by as little as 5. Oxley, *et al.* (2001) found that family cash benefits are vital for the protection of children against poverty in Austria, Belgium, France, the Netherlands, and the U.K.; while clearly too low in Ireland, Italy, Greece, Portugal and Spain. They also found that child related benefits are especially important to working households/families with children, in particular, lone parents and low-income two-parent families.

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5 For example, the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID), the National Longitudinal Study of Youth (NLSY), the National Health Insurance Study (NNHIS).

However, means-tested child benefits targeted on poorest families may create work disincentives especially for low-skilled, low-wage workers.

35. Phipps (1999) five-country study of social policies and child outcomes focuses on cash and tax benefits as the major policy instruments for enhancing the economic situation of children. She finds that income transfers make a big difference in four of the five countries (not the U.S.) in reducing child poverty. “Overall, it is clear that taxes and transfers can make an extremely important difference in the financial vulnerability of families with children.” (p. 87)

36. What protects children against poverty in Germany, is the German income transfer system: German unemployment insurance, unemployment assistance, housing benefits, and social assistance together provide a significant economic support system, sustaining children and their families at a better financial level than in many other countries (Schluter, 2001; Jenkins, *et al.*, 2001). As a result, for many years children were no more likely to experience poverty than adults, and are less likely to experience persistent poverty. Nonetheless, children in lone mother families and children of guest workers and immigrants are more vulnerable than others to poverty. (Frick and Wagner, 2000; Schluter, 2001)

37. Despite its low child poverty rate, its strict work requirements, its high rate of female labour force participation, and its extensive ECEC coverage, even Denmark uses a deliberate policy strategy of income transfers to achieve its goal. The child poverty rate would rise from 3.1% to 7.5% if family benefits were excluded. (Immervoll, Sutherland, and de Vos, 2001).

38. While the principal objective of French family policy is not to reduce child poverty, its package of universal and targeted (means-tested) policies protect a large proportion of French children from poverty (Jeandidier *et al.*, 2000). According to an analysis by Unicef, taxes and transfers reduce child poverty in France from 28.7% to 7.9% (Unicef, 2000). Another analysis found that family allowances and income-tested benefits reduced child poverty rates by more than two-thirds from 19.4% to 7.0% (Jeandidier *et al.*, 2000). However, the impact of transfer policies varies by subgroup. Jeandidier and colleagues conclude that family policy, which takes into account the number of children in the household, successfully reduces poverty among large families (three or more children). Transfers also significantly reduce the high pre-transfer poverty rates of immigrant families of non-European nationality, though their after-transfer poverty rates are still higher than French nationals or other European nationals living in France. On the other hand, income transfers are less effective in reducing the poverty of lone-parent families and families where at least one parent is unemployed, which suggests that family policy is not well targeted to these vulnerable groups. In addition, family policies are more effective in reducing poverty among children under three than children from three to five (Jeandidier *et al.*, 2000), largely because of the special benefits targeted on families with children of this age.

39. Italy has among the least ability to reduce child poverty through its income transfer system. Its taxes push more two-parent families into poverty than transfers lift out. It has no universal child allowance, only a small means tested benefit, and no basic minimum income program. Its social protection system favours the elderly and stresses family obligations where children are concerned. Its social benefits are linked to employment and public policies are marginal. (Immervoll, Sutherland, and de Vos, 2001; Saraceno, 2000).

40. Particular attention is now being paid in the U.K. to social exclusion and child poverty (Hills and Waldfogel, 2002; Waldfogel, 2002a). The government has taken two highly visible steps to signal its commitment to combat social exclusion and child poverty. First, shortly after taking office in 1997, it established a Social Exclusion Unit to target problems such as homelessness, truancy, school expulsions, teen parenthood, 16-18 year olds not in work, education, or training, young runaways, and bad neighbourhoods. Second, the government has also made a commitment to end child poverty in the next 20



years (Blair, 1999) and has set specific targets for poverty reduction in the interim. To meet these ambitious goals, the government has developed a three-part strategy, which consists of investments in children and communities, policies to promote work and to make work pay, and improved benefits for all children including those whose parents are not able to work (for more details, see Hills and Waldfogel, 2002 and Waldfogel, 2002b). To track progress in meeting these goals, a number of specific indicators have been identified in the areas of financial security, health, education, housing, and so on (Atkinson *et al.*, 2002).

41. The major policy targeted on children in poor families in the U.S. is the means-tested cash social assistance program Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). Enacted in 1996 the program is designed to reduce the numbers of children growing up in poor, single parent families by promoting marriage, requiring mothers of children aged one and older to move from welfare (assistance) to work (and permitting states to require this of mothers of babies aged three months and older), limiting lifetime receipt of assistance to 5 years and permitting states to set their own eligibility criteria within these parameters, and to set their own benefit levels (U.S.H.R., 2000). The numbers of families receiving assistance have declined by more than half since the law was implemented in 1997, and the labour force participation rate of single mothers has increased dramatically. Some children appear to have benefited economically as the child poverty rate declined. However, the increase in income was not large enough to substantially raise children's standard of living and deep poverty (income less than half the poverty threshold and using the U.S. absolute poverty measure) may have risen (Zaslow, *et al.* 2000).

42. The impact on children can be assessed through the results of several experimental studies of welfare-to-work initiatives. In general, these programs resulted in rather weak effects for children, which is not surprising as most such programs did not target child outcomes despite the fact that the policies have their roots in concern about children. Analyses from several studies released in recent years suggest that the new welfare policies can benefit preschool and school-age children, have negative consequences for adolescents, and have unclear effects for infants and toddlers (Gennetian, *et al.*, 2002).

43. Of particular importance, Bradbury and Jantii (1999 and 2001) find that as important as they are, income transfers alone are insufficient to eliminate child poverty. Other interventions are needed also (see also, Ross, Roberts, and Scott, 2000; Skoufias and McClafferty, 2001). Bradbury and Jantii (1999 and 2001) and Bradbury, Jenkins, and Micklewright (2001) find that a major factor in reducing child poverty rates is the presence and level of earnings and/or number of earners. Employment contributes significantly to lowering the rates of child poverty, especially the employment of lone mothers and of wives of men earning low wages; but parental employment alone does not eliminate poverty either. However these studies also find that in addition to increasing employment and reducing the number of workless households, it is essential for policies to pay attention to working poor and one earner households by providing wage or income supplements. Transfer payments (such as child allowances, housing allowances, and child-support benefits) and tax benefits, in particular, refundable tax credits that function as earning supplements, are especially important for the role they play in enhancing the low wages of the working poor. For example, a National Child Benefit is designed to provide some support to working parents in Canada and to reduce child poverty in two parent families, and does contribute to this outcome (National Child Benefit, 2002). The Earned Income Tax Credit in the U.S. and the Working Families Tax credit in the U.K. are the major illustrations of tax benefits as earning supplements and are effective in reducing child poverty (Berube and Forman, 2001).

44. For the past 20 years the Nordic countries of Sweden, Finland, Norway, and Denmark have held child poverty to about 5% or less even during the early 1990s when their economies were weak and unemployment rising. According to the Unicef report (2000), they offer lessons for other countries:

- A concern with child poverty, despite its low rate comparatively

- An emphasis on work, full employment, and high rates of female labour force participation
- A stress on universal rather than means-tested social policies, as generating broader political support
- Social rights based on citizenship rather than family status or employment
- An emphasis on services (ECEC) to facilitate women's employment, as well as cash benefits.
- An emphasis on more equality and relatively equal income distribution
- A stress on gender equality
- A focus on reconciling (balancing) work and family life, including parental leaves and early childhood education and care, to support women's employment.
- An emphasis on the importance of two wages and income transfers as supplements to earnings
- A willingness to enact and to sustain high taxes and
- High rates of social spending. (The countries with the lowest child poverty rates allocate the highest proportion of GNP to social expenditures.)

45. Vlemineckx and Smeeding (2001), Oxley, *et al.* (2001) and Immervoll, *et al.* (2001) identify a few focal points for policy makers who are committed to the reduction of child poverty and the improvement of child well-being. Their lists join income transfers with a series of other interventions:

- In every family with children, especially in lone parent families, at least one parent must be in market employment.
- The job demand for low-skilled workers should be increased.
- The level and duration of unemployment benefits (both unemployment insurance and assistance) should be sustained.
- Adequate parental leave policies to keep mothers attached to the labour force should be enacted.
- The supply of good quality, affordable child care should be increased so that women can enter the labour market and remain in it.
- Child-support/advanced maintenance benefits are critical in protecting
- the economic situation of children.
- Education and investment in human capital – can ameliorate disadvantage (Paul Gregg and Stephen Machin, 2001; Buchel, F. *et al.* 2001).
- And, finally, the number of child-related (family) benefits, either refundable child related tax credits or family cash benefits, should be increased and the benefit levels raised.

46. Vlemminckx and Smeeding (2001) in their concluding comments, Bradbury, Jenkins, and Micklewright (2001), and the Unicef Innocenti Report Card (2000) all stress that “No one factor appears to dominate the explanation of the very different child poverty rates” in the OECD countries (Unicef 2000, p. 15). “Lone parenthood, employment and its distribution, wage inequality; and state transfers to the workless and low paid – are important; but none is pre-eminent” (Unicef 2000, p. 16). A combination of factors are involved, economic as well as social policies.

47. Thus, there seems to be a general consensus among scholars that income transfers (cash and tax benefits) are key to reducing child poverty; but all agree, too, that any analysis of the impact of transfer payments on child poverty and/or child well-being reveals the need for other interventions as well, both employment-related interventions (including policies that promote maternal employment) and services (child care or early childhood education and care) that enhance child development, help reconcile work and family life, and facilitate maternal employment.

### 3. Family Types

48. Families have changed, especially in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and most of those changes have either stabilised at a high level or are continuing in the same direction. Thus, for example, marriage rates have declined in many countries while divorce rates have stabilised at high levels. Cohabitation rates outside of legal marriage have increased dramatically (and appear to be continuing to rise). The proportion of families with children headed by a lone parent has increased but there are country variations. Rates appear to have stabilised in some countries (at a high level) while still rising in other countries, where the rates were low. Fertility rates have been declining in the EU countries but also in Japan and South Korea, among other OECD countries. Children constituted 17% of the EU population under 15 but 21% in the OECD countries. Women have achieved higher levels of education; and the labour force participation rates of women with young children have increased dramatically.

49. The families that are usually viewed as being at increased risk for poverty, dysfunction, and disadvantage include: lone parent families with children, especially those headed by a single, unmarried woman and by teenage mothers; unemployed parents, especially those experiencing long term (more than one year) unemployment; families with only one wage earner, and that a low earner, and large families (those with three or more children). The English-speaking countries, the Nordic countries, the EU member countries, among others, all highlight these family types as among the most vulnerable. (Bitterman and Bojerson, 2002; Duncan and Brooks-Gunn, 1997; Bradbury, Jenkins, and Micklewright, 2001; Forssen, 1998; Frick and Wagner, 2000; Phipps, 1999; Statistics Canada, 2001; Vlemminckx and Smeeding, 2001). In addition to these family types, racial and ethnic minority families are especially likely to be at particular risk in the U.S., Canada, New Zealand, and Australia; and immigrant families are similarly at risk in these countries and France and Germany (Hernandez and Charney, 1998; Frick and Wagner, 2000; Jeandidier, *et al.* 2000; Omidvar and Richmond, 2003).

#### *Children In Lone-Parent Families*

50. One-earner couples are more likely to be poor than two-earner couples, but far less likely than one-parent/lone mother families on social assistance). (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994; Phipps, 1999). Children are far more likely to be poor if they live with a lone mother than with two parents. In the EU, children in a lone parent family were more than twice as likely to live in a poor family than those in a two-parent family (Mejer and Siermann, 2000); and almost half of all children living in lone-parent households in the EU lived in income poverty. Child poverty rates in lone mother households in most of the OECD

countries ranged from 59.6% in the U.S. to 4.5% in Sweden in the mid-1990s (Bradbury, Jenkins, and Micklewright, 2001).

51. Children living with single mothers in the U.S. are much more likely to be poor – about four times as likely to be poor as those living with married parents (8%) despite recent declines in child poverty. The effects of family structure on poverty is particularly pronounced for certain racial and ethnic groups, for example, among African-American and Hispanic children in female-headed households, just over half lived below the poverty line in 1999, compared with 11% of black children and 22% of Hispanic children in married households (FIAF, 2001).

52. In France, in the mid-1990s, single-parent families, along with large families, experienced a high rate of long-term poverty – an especially negative experience for children – and 90% of the former were headed by women. Unemployment makes their situation even worse. For example, more than a fourth of large families have very low-incomes, but 75% of those headed by an unemployed parent fall into this category. Similarly, while 20% of lone-parent families are very low-income, this figure rises to 60% when the lone-mother is unemployed (Nezosi, 2000).

53. According to a U.S. review of research (Sandefur & Mosely, 1997, p. 334-5) “A good deal of evidence suggests that family structure and stability are associated with direct indicators of child and later adult well-being such as social and emotional adjustment, educational outcomes, family formation and labour force participation.” (See also, McLanahan, 1997) (See Table 1 appended, “Child Poverty Rates by Family Type). One important question raised in the literature is whether the negative effects due to lone parents or low income (McLanahan, 1997)? According to McLanahan (1997), using data from the NLSY and based on correlational evidence not experimental data, firm lone parent effects for children of divorced or never-married mothers are found in the U.S. research even when controlling for income. For example, when mothers remarry and income goes up, lower achievement and higher behavioural problems remain.

54. One of the most surprising findings of recent U.S. research is that “remarriage does not mitigate the negative consequences of single parenthood” (McLanahan, 1997, p. 36). Step-children living in married-couple families experience negative outcomes at about the same rate as children in single-parent families, which suggests that there is a critical distinction between children growing up in a married-couple family with two biological parents, and those growing up with stepparents (McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994; FIAF, 2001). Australian researchers (Sanson, *et al.*, 2002, p. 16) also point out that “while remarriage may provide a route out of poverty, living in stepfamilies provides other challenges with stepfamilies consistently being found to be associated with a range of poorer outcomes for both children and adults.”

55. In addition to the increased risk of poverty, U.S. research has shown that children living in divorced and single-parent families face great obstacles later in life. Children who live with only one parent or with a parent and stepparent, experience more disadvantages in terms of psychological functioning, behavioural problems, education, and health (Hernandez & Charney, 1998; McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994). Children who grow up in single-parent families are twice as likely to have a child before the age of 20, and one and a half times as likely to be out of school and out of work in their late teens and early 20s as their counterparts who grow up in two-parent families (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). Despite the finding that income explains about half the difference in educational achievement of children raised in one- and two-parent families, children raised by only one parent are disadvantaged in that they have less parental supervision and less social capital, as well as less economic security.

56. Phipps (1999), too, reports that based on her review of the literature in five countries, children growing up in lone mother families have worse outcomes than those in two-parent families, including: being born with low birth weight, having asthma, living in poverty, experiencing accidental deaths, being

anxious and frightened, doing worse at school, and becoming a teen parent. Unicef Innocenti Center (2000) reports that the risk of death by injury is higher for children in these families and for children growing up in poverty.

57. A Canadian study (Williams, 2001), using data from the 1995 General Social Survey found that children of divorce are more likely to live in low income households, to have emotional, behavioural, social and academic problems, to leave home earlier, to be less likely to finish high school and more likely to receive social assistance as adults, and to have a higher chance of marital instability (see also, McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994). They are also less likely to think that they had a happy childhood. Another Canadian study (Lipman, *et al.* 1998) using data from the Canadian NLSY, found that the children of lone parents, especially those whose parents have experienced long term unemployment, show a series of negative outcomes that go beyond the likelihood of growing up poor or of suffering abuse or neglect. They found a significant link between living in a lone-parent family and such outcomes as social impairment and low math scores. “Low income, parenting problems, low maternal education, and maternal depression are consistently and significantly associated with child difficulties and represent important areas for policy consideration and intervention.”

58. Referring to the 1998 German Child and Youth Report and using data from the German socio-economic panel, Frick and Wagner (2000) point to the positive correlation between child poverty and future malnutrition, drug abuse, and violent crime and the close association between all of these problems and growing up with a lone parent. They state: “The group exposed most to poverty is made up of children of single parents.” They find that this is due mostly to “low female labour force participation of single mothers... often caused by insufficient day care facilities preventing lone parents from finding adequate jobs or even forcing them to stay out of the labour market” (p. 28).

59. Researchers in Britain have also examined the impact of growing up in a single-parent family on later child outcomes. Children from single-parent families perform more poorly on cognitive tests and have lower educational attainment but these links apparently are explained by low income; once income is controlled for, the association between single-parent family structure and later cognitive and educational outcomes is no longer significant (Joshi *et al.*, 1999). This latter result differs from findings for the U.S. (*e.g.* McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994) suggesting that growing up with a single parent may not be as disadvantageous in the U.K. as it is in the U.S. However, there is a link between growing up with a single parent in the U.K. and going on to have non-marital births and/or multiple partnerships in adulthood (see, for instance, Hobcraft, 1998; Kiernan, 1997).

60. Despite the consistency with which negative outcomes are reported for children reared in lone-mother families, children in lone-mother families have much better outcomes in Norway and the Netherlands than in the U.S., Canada, or U.K. Thus, for example, from the perspective of economic well-being, children in lone mother families in Norway have incomes that are 81% of the incomes of all Norwegian children but receive only 66% of the incomes of all children in Canada, U.K., and the Netherlands, and only 52% of that income in the U.S. (Phipps, 1999. p. 86).

61. Of particular importance, a major finding reported by Bradbury and Jantii (1999; 2001), Bradbury, Jenkins, and Micklewright (2001) and in the Unicef Innocenti analysis (2000), is that contrary to common belief, disparities in the percentage of single parent families do not explain the cross-country variations in child poverty and disadvantage already noted. The varied results depend more on how countries treat these families in their policies. Countries may have high rates of single mothers and low rates of child poverty, such as Sweden and Denmark, or low rates of lone mothers and high rates of child poverty, such as Italy, or high rates of single mothers and high rates of child poverty, as in the U.S., Canada, and U.K.

***Children and Maternal Employment***

62. Maternal employment is an important source of economic support for all families. As mentioned earlier, research suggests that measures aimed at facilitating labour market participation of mothers, increasing their employment and earnings capacity, are essential ingredients of any successful policy to reduce child poverty (Bradbury and Jantii (1999; 2001; Bradbury, Jenkins, and Micklewright, 2001; Immervoll, *et al.* 2001; Oxley, *et al.*, 2001; Solera, 2001; Vleminckx and Smeeding, 2001). U.S. research also finds that the additional income available as a result of maternal employment can lead to lower rates of child poverty and thus, plays a significant role in reducing poverty (Morris, *et al.*, 2001). However, Morris *et al.* (2001) conclude in their synthesis of the results of five large-scale U.S. studies, “Raising employment without increasing income may not be sufficient to boost the healthy development of children in low-income families.” (p. 63)

63. Because market or pre-transfer income plays such an important role in reducing poverty, mother’s earnings are another key to protecting children against poverty and economic deprivation. Maternal employment is especially important for lone-mother families. In addition, it is increasingly clear that adequate income for a family with children requires two earners. Even in a traditional husband/wife family, one male breadwinner is no longer sufficient for adequate financial support in most families; and for a lone mother family, mother’s wages are key to avoiding poverty. Nonetheless, there remains some concern in some places, that maternal employment may have negative consequences for children.

64. Australian researchers Russell and Bowman (2000), reviewed the literature on the effects of maternal employment on children and their families and concluded that there were no significant developmental problems for children as a consequence. In referring to other research, they note that workplace variables affect job satisfaction and tensions which then impact on parenting behaviour and in turn on children’s behaviour (Stewart and Barling, 1996, cited in OECD, 2002, P. 48). Russell and Bowman concluded that it is the quality of child care that is most important in determining positive development of the children of working mothers. Other Australian researchers are more cautious in their conclusions. Sanson *et al.* (2001. p. 30) find that “Maternal employment has been found to influence different developmental outcomes differently, with both positive and negative effects reported”.

65. There has been an active debate on the effects of early maternal employment in the U.K., and two sets of longitudinal studies have recently been carried out there. Ermisch and Francesconi (2000) investigated the impacts of parental employment on outcomes for young adults born in the 1970s from the British Household Panel Study and found that children whose mothers worked more extensively during their pre-school years had somewhat lower educational attainment as young adults and that these effects held up (in fact, become even stronger) when they controlled for unobserved heterogeneity among mothers by estimating family fixed effects models. Joshi and Verrropoulou (2000) examined outcomes for children born in the 1970s and 1980s to mothers from the 1958 birth cohort and found that these children tended to have slightly poorer outcomes when assessed at ages 5 to 17 in 1991 if their mothers worked in the first year of life, although only the effect on children’s reading performance was statistically significant. They then examined children born in 1970 and found (consistent with the results of Ermisch and Francesconi (2000) from a different dataset but from roughly the same period) that children whose mothers worked more extensively during the pre-school years had somewhat lower educational attainment as young adults; however, the effects of poverty and of low parental education were more important.

66. Maternal employment rates are higher in the U.S. than in all but the Nordic countries, especially for women with very young children. About 60% of women with children under age one are in the labour force (U.S. Department of Labour, BLS, 2000). While maternal employment is not associated with negative outcomes for school-aged children, the results for very young children have been more concerning (see Smith, Brooks-Gunn, & Jackson, 1997 for a review). In particular, there is evidence that employment

begun in the first year of life may have negative effects on children's cognitive development, whereas employment *after the first year of life* seems to have positive effects (Baydar & Brooks-Gunn, 1998; Blau & Grossberg, 1992; Desai *et al.*, 1989). More recently, studies have found that full-time maternal employment in the first year of a child's life has significant negative effects on white children's cognitive outcomes even after controlling for other variables that are correlated with both employment and outcomes (Brooks-Gunn *et al.*, 2002; Han *et al.*; 2001; Ruhm, 2000; Waldfogel *et al.*, 2002), and these negative effects persist until ages 7 or 8 (Han *et al.*, 2001; Waldfogel *et al.*, 2002). Some negative effects for child behaviours have been found as well, although these appear not to persist to age 7 or 8 (Han *et al.*, 2001).

67. Also, recent findings from U.S. welfare-to-work evaluations, using meta-analytic techniques and synthesizing survey data from eight large-scale studies, suggest that maternal employment (of low-income women) may negatively affect their adolescent children (Gennetian *et al.*, 2002). Parents in the programs under study reported worse school performance, a higher rate of grade repetition, and more use of special educational services than did control group parents. The negative consequences for adolescents seem to be linked with their mothers being required to work full time when they leave social assistance (TANF), thus either leaving their teenagers relatively unsupervised in the late afternoon and/or perhaps overburdening them with family responsibilities, such as caring for younger siblings (Gennetian *et al.*, 2002; Morris, *et al.*, 2001).

68. Maternal non-traditional work schedules may have negative consequences for children. The move toward non-standard shifts, covering both nights and weekends has forced families to juggle work and family responsibilities 24 hours a day, seven days a week. With more than 42% of shift work found in the service sector where lower-paid jobs prevail, finding a work/family balance is increasingly stressful for low-income U.S. families. Presser (2000) found that night and rotating shifts increased marital instability among families with children. Another study found that for every hour a parent works between 6 and 9 p.m., his or her child is 16% more likely to score in the bottom quartile on math tests. Children whose parents work at night have a 2.7 fold increased risk of being suspended from school, even after controlling for parents' income and education (Heymann, 2000). Using data from the National Institute on Child and Human Development (NICHD) Early Child Care study, Han (2002), found that children whose mothers have ever worked non-standard hours – evenings, nights, or variable schedules – have lower cognitive scores at 15, 24 and 36 months than children whose mothers only worked standard hours.

69. An Australian article (Pocock, 2001) reviews U.S., Australian, and some other international research and concludes that long hours of parental work are bad for children (and individuals, couples, as well as communities) and especially bad for women whether the long hours are their own or their partners. The main problem is that long work hours curtail parental time for children.

70. Mother's education also plays an important role in contributing to different child outcomes, because higher maternal education is associated with mother's employment status and higher earnings as well as other aspects of mother/child relationships (Klasen, 1998).

### ***Parental Unemployment and Underemployment***

71. Parental unemployment constitutes another aspect of family disadvantage. Unemployment rates averaged 6.7% in the OECD countries in 1998 and about one-third of this was long term (more than one year). The Unicef report (2000) and the Bradbury and Jantii article (2001) found that there is a close relationship between child poverty rates and the percentage of households with children in which there is no employed adult. Parental unemployment also contributes to negative child outcomes in school.

72. British research has found that about 20% of children were living in “workless households” in 1997 (households where no adult was employed) up from 14% in 1990. Such households are of concern because they are at elevated risk of both poverty and social exclusion (Hills and Waldfogel, 2002).

73. U.S. research, too, finds that parental unemployment – and underemployment –has negative consequences for children. These children are more likely to be poor and less likely to access the health and family benefits than children who live with parents who have more stable employment. Many parents who cannot find regular employment end up working at temporary or part-time jobs that do not provide enough money to support a family, lack benefits such as health insurance, vacation days, or sick leave, are at odd hours requiring unusual child-care arrangements, and offer little overall stability (AECF, 2002). The family stress related to underemployment and unemployment can have negative psychological effects on children (Mayer, 1997; Smith, Brooks-Gunn, & Jackson, 1997).

74. In France, too, unemployment and under-employment are strongly linked with poverty and social exclusion (Paugam, 1996). French family members touched by unemployment—particularly long-term spells—are more likely to suffer from stress and depression. Even if they are not directly affected by the loss of income, children are still vulnerable to the psychological consequences of unemployment which may negatively impact their emotional well-being and view of the world. The impact of unemployment on couple dissolution is less clear. Paugam (1996) found that employment instability (particularly for men) is strongly negatively correlated with marital stability, which can also impact children’s well-being. On the other hand, Herpin’s research found only a weak effect of unemployment on couple dissolution (cited in Nezosi, 2000).

75. Child abuse and neglect are closely linked to parental unemployment as well. The Danish scholar, Christoffersen (2000a), found that 3-5 year olds (1) whose parents felt appreciated at work experienced less punitive behaviour by their parents than the children of other parents, especially unemployed parents; (2) that unemployed mothers were more likely to behave punitively toward their children than working mothers; (3) that mothers who are dissatisfied with their role may reduce their involvement in parenting and become less sensitive toward their children’s needs, and (4) that in general, unemployment and unstable employment lead to lower income, more stress, and negative consequences for children, including increased rates of child abuse and neglect.

76. Another study by Christoffersen (2000b) included all Danish children born in 1973 who had been hospitalised due to physical abuse or neglect, between 1979 and 1991 when the children were between the ages of 6-18. The results show that the incidence of abuse or neglect of children and adolescents are seen more often in families suffering from: (1) father’s mental illness; (2) diminishing social networks; (3) violence or crime in the family; (4) mother’s alcohol or drug abuse; (5) parental lack of vocational training; and (6) mother’s long term unemployment (more than 21 weeks in the prior year). Christoffersen concluded that the link between unemployment of parents and child abuse and neglect was found even after taking into account parents’ education and other aspects of deprivation. “Unemployment seems to be a factor which solely or together with other critical life events could explain a large number of the social problems in childhood which influence how children develop during their formative years.” (P. 437; see also, Christoffersen, 1994 and 1996).

77. Employment, especially the employment of lone mothers, contributes significantly to lowering the rates of child poverty, and unemployment contributes to negative outcomes for children. However, like lone parenthood, neither maternal employment nor employment status alone, explains cross-national variations in child poverty and disadvantage (Unicef, 2000; Bradbury and Jantii, 2001). But they are important factors in the risk for each family and work type. The differences in the rates have more to do with how different countries respond to these situations than the situation itself.



### ***Teenage Parenting***

78. Teenage unmarried pregnancy and birth are outcomes of particular concern in several countries but especially in the U.S., and the other Anglo-American countries (Unicef, Innocenti Center, 2001; Darroch, J. E., Frost, J. J., Singh, S., 2001; AECF, 1998). According to the Unicef Innocenti Center report (2001b) “Despite dramatic declines in the numbers of births to teenagers, teenage births are seen as a problem today because they are strongly associated with a range of disadvantages for the mother, the child, the society in general, and tax payers in particular”<sup>6</sup> (Unicef Innocenti, 2001b, p.3). On average across 13 countries of the European Union, women who gave birth as teenagers are twice as likely to be living in poverty. Moreover, when assessed against five different indicators of disadvantage, including poverty, unemployment, and school failure, those who gave birth as teenagers are far worse-off than those who gave birth later on, in 12 of the 13 EU countries for which data are available.

79. Babies born to teen mothers are at a higher risk for low birth weight and infant mortality. The children of teen mothers are more likely to live in poverty, grow up without a father, become a victim of neglect or abuse, do less well at school, become involved in crime, abuse drugs and alcohol, and eventually become teen mothers themselves, starting the cycle all over again. The authors of the Unicef report (2001b) find that “becoming pregnant while still a teenager may make the (associated) problems worse (to an extent that is still undetermined) but not becoming pregnant will not make them go away.” (Unicef Innocenti, 2001b, p. 6).

80. Teenage pregnancy and childbearing are a national concern in the U.S. because they can lead to negative outcomes for both the child and the mother, because the U.S. rates are among the highest in the industrialised world despite recent decline<sup>7</sup>, and because the rates are twice as high for Blacks and Hispanic teens as for whites (U.S. DHHS, 2001; Maynard, 1997). Children born to teen mothers are less likely to benefit from the emotional and financial resources they need to thrive in later life.

81. Compared to other countries in Europe, Britain has high rates of both teen parenthood and of parents with low educational qualifications themselves. These two risk factors often occur together – that is, teen parents are disproportionately likely to be low-educated, and vice versa. Both groups – teen parents, and parents with low educational qualifications – are at elevated risk of social exclusion and other adverse outcomes as adults (see for instance Hobcraft and Kiernan, 1999). Teen motherhood has been found to be a strong predictor of low cognitive test scores for children, although much of this association appears to be due to lower parental education, which strongly predicts lower test scores and lower eventual educational attainment for children (Joshi *et al.*, 1999). Indeed, low parental education evidently explains much of the associations between low income, teen parenthood, and low attainment for children (McCulloch and Joshi, 2002).

### ***Children in Immigrant Families***

82. A repeated theme at a conference of the European Observatory on the Social Situation, Demography, and the Family (June, 2002) was that “all EU Member states have become immigration countries,” but unlike the U.S., Canada or Australia no Western European country sees itself as an immigrant society. Immigrant children or those born to immigrant parents are only beginning to receive attention in the research literature.

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6 Although the Unicef study focuses on all teen births, it is clear that the group seen as a problem are the unmarried teens, the vast majority of early child bearers today.

7 While levels of sexual activity are comparable, teens in the U.S. are less likely to use contraceptives than teens in other countries (UNICEF, 2001b).

83. Since one out of every five children under 18 in the U.S. is an immigrant or has immigrant parents, and the number of children and youth in immigrant families has expanded almost seven times faster than the number in U.S. born families, it is not surprising that outcomes for immigrant children are also a special concern in the U.S. Recent research has found that immigrant children and youth tend to be protected from negative risks (infant mortality, low birth weight, acute and chronic health problems, early sexual activity, delinquency, substance abuse); but their advantage tends to decline with the length of time in the U.S. and from one generation to the next (Hernandez and Charney, 1998). There is particular concern about outcomes for children with origins in 12 specific countries<sup>8</sup> that account for close to 50% of all children in immigrant families. Children from these countries have average poverty rates of more than 25%, their parents tend to have very little formal education, and they are at high risk of living in overcrowded housing. In addition, they are highly likely to live in linguistically isolated households and communities (Hernandez & Charney, 1998).

84. There is growing concern in Germany about the difference in the living conditions between native-born German children and those born to immigrants, foreigners, and ethnic Germans (those who migrated from Eastern European countries to Germany). Foreign-born children have a higher poverty risk and tend to be on less favourable educational tracks than native-born German children. One result is poorly qualified youth who are likely to face severe problems in the labour market (Frick and Wagner, 2000).

85. The demographic diversity of children in France has increased with immigration from former colonies, along with arrivals of refugees from other parts of the world. Along with this is growing concern regarding these immigrant children (or French-born children of immigrant parents). Children from non-European immigrant backgrounds often have difficulties mastering the French language and integrating into French schools. In addition, they may face other problems, including overcrowded living conditions, violence in their neighbourhoods, social exclusion and poverty (Glassman, 2000).

86. In Greece, immigrant children are of particular concern because of their overall vulnerability (Moussourou, 2002). In addition to all other problems, they face an educational system to which they cannot easily adapt, since they do not know the language and are often unwelcome among the other children. Sweden is increasingly diverse as well. About 1 out of every 4 children in Sweden has their roots in other parts of the world, and in the larger cities the proportion is close to half (Nordenstam, 2002).

### ***Children in Ethnic and Racial Minority Families***

87. Children in racial and ethnic minority families are likely to be at particular risk of poverty and deprivation in Australia (Aborigines), Canada (Inuit), New Zealand (Maori), and U.S. (Black, Hispanic, and Native American) (See for example, Moon *et al.* 1999; Sanson, *et al.*, 2002; Baker & Phipps, 1997; Shirley, *et al.*, 1997; Kamerman and Kahn, 1997a). There is particular concern in the U.S. with regard to differential outcomes by race and ethnicity and careful monitoring of trends (FIAF, 2002; U.S.DHHS, 2001; AECF, 2002). Children from certain racial and ethnic minority families (Black and Hispanic, in particular) have consistently poorer outcomes than white children on a number of dimensions (FIAF, 2002; DHHS 2001; AECF, 2002). They are more likely to be poor, at risk of school failure, lacking health insurance, living in mother-only families, and becoming pregnant while a young adolescent and a teen parent.

88. Some research is beginning to emerge regarding the impacts of ethnic and racial minority status on children. For example, a Danish longitudinal study of children born in 1995 ("The Social Responsibility

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8 These countries are the Guatemala, El Salvador, Cambodia, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Honduras, Laos, Mexico, Nicaragua, the former Soviet Union, Thailand, and Vietnam.

of the Family”)), is being carried out by the Danish National Social Research Institute (European Observatory, Austrian Institute for Family Studies, *Puzzleweise* 13/2002, August 1, 2002,) and includes special attention to children whose mothers are immigrants or refugees from the three major immigrant and refugee nationalities in Denmark. The aim is to describe the social, economic, and health conditions of these children who will be followed until adulthood. The Millennium cohort study in the U.K. will include data from areas with a high proportion of ethnic minority families and should provide data on the children in these families as well. A recently launched Australian longitudinal study (Sanson *et al.*, 2002) is also expected to have relevant data.

### ***Large Families***

89. Large families, especially those with only one wage earner are another family type that is especially vulnerable to negative outcomes, in particular higher rates of child poverty. This is a finding in French and Italian research among other countries. However, this is a less significant problem now than earlier because fewer such families exist than in previous years.

## **4. The Policies that Make a Difference**

90. As we have seen, with regard to child poverty, policies can make a difference to outcomes. Income transfers and maternal earnings are key to reducing child poverty and enhancing the economic situation of children and their families. (Bradbury and Jantii, 1999 and 2001; Immervoll, *et al.* 2001; Oxley *et al.* 2001; Solera, 2001; and Vleminckx and Smeeding, 2001 in Vleminckx and Smeeding, 2001; Bradbury, Jenkins, and Micklewright 2001; Kamerman and Kahn, 1997a; and Unicef Innocenti, 2000). We note as well, however, that income transfers have other positive impacts too, for example, a French study (Maurin, 2002) found that increased income transfers to poor families have a potentially very large positive impact on children’s early performance at school.

91. In what follows we focus on those policies that existing research highlights as having consequences for child well-being. Cash income transfers and tax benefits have been discussed already in relation to reducing child poverty. Here, we will discuss other policies that can make a difference: policies that promote employment, especially maternal employment; parental leave policies; early childhood education and care policies; and the policies directed at preventing teen pregnancy and parenting.

### ***Employment Policies***

92. Promoting maternal employment is an important strategy for preventing child poverty and disadvantage. Recent changes in employment policy and working hours policies have had an important impact on French children, albeit indirectly. In 2000, France adopted a 35-hour work week, creating a flexible work schedule rather than a rigid work week for public and private employees in firms with 20 or more workers. The goal was two-fold: to reduce unemployment (which was about 12% at the time) and to help working parents reconcile work and family life. According to a report of a recent survey by French authorities, 57% of parents with children under the age of six say the new law helps them better balance work and family responsibilities, especially child care. But one caveat is that the employer’s prior attitude towards his/her employees is critical. If employers were “family-friendly” before, employees found it possible to negotiate the type of flexibility they needed. A French researcher, Jeanne Fagnani, reported in an interview, also, that without the French ECEC services, parental leave policies, and income supports already in place, this reduction in work hours would not have made a significant difference to working parents and their children (Child Care Action News, 2002).

93. Other surveys (Estrade, Méda, & Orain, 2001; Méda & Orain, 2002) have also found that the introduction of the 35 hour work week has had positive effects on the reconciliation of work and family life.<sup>9</sup> Among families with children under 12, 43% of women and 35% of men report that they have found a better work/family balance since the enactment of the policy. The policy seems to have been particularly beneficial for working mothers. About two-thirds of mothers with children under six responded that the quality of their daily life has improved with the shorter work week. Almost half of parents with children under 12 report that they spend more time with their children since the enactment of the policy (63% of women, 52% of men). For example, 43% of parents report spending more time with their children on at least one of the following activities: outings or walks, accompanying children to their activities, talking with them, and playing with at home, engaging in sports with them, attending their performances or sports matches, hosting their friends, and taking part in school outings. About three in ten parents of school-age children find that they spend more time with them on their school work.

94. The U.S. social assistance legislation imposes strict work requirements on mothers of children aged one and older. A consortium of researchers conducted a meta-analysis of survey responses from parents in eight studies of 15 different welfare and employment programs in the U.S.<sup>10</sup> In each study, a group of parents were randomly assigned to a program that included a combination of mandatory employment activities, earnings supplements, or time limits on welfare receipt. Another group was randomly assigned to a control group. Parents in the employment programs—both voluntary and mandatory programs that promote work and programs with and without time limits—reported worse school performance, a higher rate of grade repetition, and more use of special education services for their adolescent children than control group parents (Gennetian, *et al.* 2002). In some cases, adolescents displayed more troublesome behaviour such as drinking, smoking, and delinquency (Brooks, Hair, & Zaslow, 2001) The programs did not influence the school dropout, suspension or completion rates (at the time of young adulthood). Nor did these programs affect the number of adolescents who had children. There were no differences in outcomes between boys and girls (Gennetian *et al.*, 2002).

95. For elementary-school aged children, a synthesis of findings suggests that welfare policies that aim to improve parental employment and income can complement school-based interventions by giving children a better start in their education. In one study with longer-term data, the benefits to children have lasted four-and-a-half years. On the other hand, mandatory participation in employment-related services had few effects on children's school readiness, nor on their longer-term academic achievement on math and reading tests.

96. For infants and toddlers, data are too limited to permit conclusions.

97. Overall, children tended to fare better on behaviour, cognitive, and academic outcomes when welfare-to-work programs resulted in both increases in employment of mothers and increases in family income. They also did better when programs led to an increase in mother's educational attainment. Children in families new to welfare were more likely to be affected negatively by parents' program participation than children of longer-term recipients perhaps because they were turning to public assistance as a result of an acute family crisis (Moore *et al.*, 2002). The negative effects for adolescents are small but concerning.

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9 Overall, one third of all those surveyed report that the reconciliation of work and family life has become easier with the new policy (38% of women, 32% of men).

10 While the programs studied began before 1996, the three policies examined have been adopted in various combinations as part of many state's program since welfare reform was passed.

### ***Parental Leave Policies***

98. As is generally recognised, parental leave policies play an important role in attracting women into the labour force and maintaining their attachment to the labour force (Kamerman, 2000). The consequences for children are less well documented. Of special importance, several researchers have suggested that generous periods of leave following childbirth improve (or have the potential for improving) child health (Ruhm, 1998; Galtry, 2000). Using data from nine European countries over the 1969 through 1994 period, Ruhm investigated whether rights to paid parental leaves improved child health as measured by birth weights and infant or child mortality. Much of his analysis incorporated natural experiments comparing changes in child outcomes to those of the elderly, whose health was not expected to be affected by parental leave. More generous leave policies were found to reduce deaths of infants and young children. He concludes that parental leave policies may be a cost-effective method of improving child health.

99. In another study, Ruhm (2000) suggests potential benefits to children's cognitive development from longer paid and job-protected parental leaves (perhaps 6 –9-12 months) or other "family friendly" policies that facilitate time at home with infants. Parental leaves also lead to longer periods of breast feeding and less maternal stress (Galtry, 2000). Parental leaves also provide an alternative to expensive (and/or inadequate quality) out-of-home care for infants (Kamerman, 2000). There is also some evidence that generous parental leaves lead to increased father time investment in their children and involvement with their children generally (Gauthier and Jatzius, 1997; Carlsen, 1998; Kamerman and Kahn, 1995).

### ***Early Childhood Education and Care***

100. There is consensus that the first years of life are particularly important for cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development (Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000; OECD, 2001a; OECD, 2002). Parental leave policies are one component but the primary policy and program is early childhood education and care services (OECD, 2001a). As noted in another OECD report (2002, p. 48), "The question of how participation in child care programs and how parental work patterns impact on child development in these years concern parents, professional, researchers, and policy makers."

101. Where two or three to five or six year olds are concerned, there is significant research now that documents that participation in good quality ECEC programs not only does no harm but has positive impacts on children with regard to cognitive, social, and emotional development, school readiness, and school performance. Positive impacts are especially strong, according to some research, on the most disadvantaged. For example, there is extensive research in Sweden, France, U.K., and the U.S. on the positive impacts of these programs on children and child development.

102. Broberg, *et al.* and Andersson (1989 and 1992) report the findings of Swedish longitudinal studies. They note that the policy goals with regard to early childcare are to facilitate balancing work and family and to enhance child development and well being. These goals are linked with paid parental leave policies, good quality childcare, and child allowances. A major finding is that children starting child care at between 6-12 months achieved significantly better on aptitude tests and got more positive ratings from their teachers on socio-emotional attributes than children entering care later and those cared for at home. Cognitive outcomes were slightly better also for those cared for in centres, but age difference at entry is the most significant factor in accounting for more positive outcomes. Paid parental leave (with full wage replacement) which permits infants to be cared for by parents, high-quality centre care, which is typical in Sweden, and well-trained caregivers, also typical in Sweden, are identified as the important factors in achieving positive results.

103. A follow up study carried out when the children were age 13 (Andersson, 1992) concluded that cognitive competence measured with teacher ratings of children's achievement in various school subjects was highest among children who entered child care before the age of one and lowest among those with home care only. For those entering childcare in their second year of life, school performance is higher by 11% at 13 and by 19% for those who enter at 9-12 months. Type of family, family's economic situation and mother's education influenced the time of first entry into centre care. High quality care is assumed – and is a basic premise.

104. Gunnarsson, Korpi and Nordenstam (1999), in reviewing the relevant research for the Swedish report for the OECD thematic review (2001a) concluded that longitudinal studies carried out in Sweden in the 70s and 80s, showed that children in full-time public day care centres developed just as normally as or sometimes better than their counterparts brought up at home. These findings combined with the extended paid and job protected leaves following childbirth, reduced possible negative impacts of early mother-child separation. They concluded, also, that some children who might need special attention might be better off in family day care homes, with specially trained staff. "The general consensus today is, that pre-schools are important for children in order to stimulate development and learning, and offer care and education in activities and relationships with a stable group of adults and peers outside the home. They also represent an important and much needed complement to home care, when parents are working or studying." (Gunnarsson, Korpi, and Nordenstam 1999, p. 60). Surveys of parents show that preschools are far preferred over family day care.

105. With the increase in the employment of mothers with young children, an increasing share of young children in the U.K. are in non-maternal childcare. The question of whether non-maternal childcare is harmful for children has been actively debated in the U.K. (McGurk *et al.*, 1993; Morgan, 1996). Studies in Britain have produced mixed results about the impact of childcare on children's socio-emotional development; for instance, Osborn and Milbank (1987) using data on children born in 1970 found negative effects of pre-school age childcare on socio-emotional development but Melhuish and Moss (1991) using data on children born in 1983 did not. The results for children's cognitive development have been more consistently positive, with both Osborn and Milbank (1987) and Melhuish and Moss (1991) reporting positive effects of pre-school childcare.

106. France has a highly developed universal preschool system for two to six year olds. Given that just about all children attend by age three and almost half the two-year olds, the focus of most research has been on the benefits of the preschool program, and on early intervention for two-year-olds, in particular. Attendance at the *école maternelle* appears to be an important factor in reducing inequalities for children in France. A 1997 study evaluated a cohort of nearly 10 000 school children in the early years of elementary school on assessments related to general knowledge, oral and pre-reading skills, logic and pre-math skills, understanding of concepts of time and space, and class behaviour. At the beginning of first grade, children who enrolled in preschool at age two outperformed their classmates who began at age three. Early school entry conferred the greatest advantage for children attending schools in educational priority areas (ZEP, see below) and for children from the lowest socio-economic categories (Jeantheau & Murat, 1998).

107. These results confirm earlier evaluations of the effects of early school entry. A national survey comparing sixth-grade children who had attended pre-school for one, two, or three years before beginning primary school found that performance in primary school is correlated with the length of time spent in preschool, even after controlling for background characteristics. Every year of *école maternelle* attended reduced children's likelihood of retention in first grade, especially for children from the most disadvantaged homes. At all levels of primary education, it was found that children who began the *école maternelle* at age two significantly outperformed their counterparts with only two or three years of preschool experience in evaluations of cognitive development, French language, attitudes toward school, and mathematics. The effect was more marked for children from disadvantaged families. These positive

impacts were sustained through secondary school (Jarousse, Mingat, & Richard, 1992). More recently, a landmark 1997 evaluation of education priority areas (ZEP) found that one important factor contributing to the success of schools in particular priority zones was a higher percentage of students schooled beginning at age two. In the “successful zones” in their study, on average 62% of two year-olds enrolled, compared to an average of 32% for zones with the worst performance (Moisan & Simon, 1997).

108. U.S. research plays an important role both in cross-national research reviews as well as in the reviews carried out in other countries, especially in the other English-speaking countries. In her review of the research on early childhood programs in other countries, Boocock (1995) begins with an acknowledgement that throughout the world enrolments in early childhood education and care programs are rising. Her focus is largely on programs serving 3-5 year olds. Her article reviews international research documenting how participation in early childhood programs influenced children’s later development and success in school. Studies conducted in 13 countries, including Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Ireland, Japan, Sweden, the U.K. and the U.S. are included. “The article summarises conclusions that are supported by research in various countries, indicating that participation in preschool programs promotes cognitive development and school success,... helps low-income children narrow, but not close, the achievement gap separating them from more advantaged children. International evidence also suggests that maternal employment and reliance on childcare do not harm children and may yield benefits if the child care is of good quality...” (Boocock, p. 94) defines quality, discusses the effectiveness of ECEC programs in redressing social and economic inequities, and understanding how research can influence policy. The Boocock review, and the literature referred to in a recent report issued by the National Academy of Science (Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000) covering still younger children, demonstrate that ECEC services can benefit cognitive development and school success. Boocock (1995) summarises her key findings (pp. 95-96):

109. The value of pre-school care for older pre-schoolers – age 3 and 4 – is now widely accepted in the U.K. The government now offers a nursery school place (half-day) to all 4 year olds whose parents want one, and will offer one to all 3-year olds by 2004. Funding for childcare for working parents has also been expanded. And, the government is working to improve the quality of childcare through initiatives such as Early Excellence Centres which aim to deliver high-quality centre-based care (Hills & Waldfogel, 2002).

- Increasingly, as childcare is more widely used, interest is shifting from the question of whether early child care or maternal employment harms children to the question of what types of early child care can be most helpful for what types of children and at what ages (Waldfogel, in press). This approach can be seen in a new British study, the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project (Sylva *et al.* 1999, 2000), which build on earlier research (such as Melhuish *et al.*, 1990; Melhuish, 1993; Sylva and Wiltshire, 1993; Feinstein, Robertson, and Symons, 1998) but with a contemporary cohort of children. This longitudinal study is following 3 000 children, from 141 pre-school settings, from age three to age seven, as they move from pre-school into primary school and is gathering data on each childcare setting attended by the children, with the aim of investigating the effects of childcare characteristics, as well as individual and family characteristics, on children's developmental progress. “There is widespread evidence that participating in a preschool program promotes cognitive development in the short term and prepares children to succeed in school.”
- “Preschool experience appears to be a stronger force in the lives of low income than more advantaged children.”
- “Preschool attendance can narrow the achievement gaps faced by disadvantaged children, though most of these effects appear to diminish over time.”

- Maternal employment and ECEC even during the earliest years, appear not to be harmful and can be helpful, although there remains concern among some, about the consequences for infants. In several countries including Australia, Canada, the Nordic countries, quality of care is an important issue.

110. The U.K. has a long tradition of early intervention efforts which have proven effective in improving children's and families' outcomes in a number of domains (for reviews, see Sylva and Wiltshire, 1993; Ball (ed.), 1994; Oliver, Smith, and Barker, 1998; and Zoritch and Roberts, forthcoming). Drawing on its own research base, as well as lessons from U.S. research, Britain is now mounting a major early intervention effort, the Sure Start program. Sure Start is targeted on children living in disadvantaged areas. It is a comprehensive program, offering a wide range of supportive services to children and families, beginning pre-natally and following children to at least age four (Glass, 1999). Sure Start is an area-based initiative and allows areas to choose their own models of early intervention so long as they meet minimum program requirements (one home visit shortly after birth, another visit at 18-24 months, and at least a half-time childcare place at age 3) and overall program goals (to improve social and emotional development, improve health, improve the ability to learn, and strengthen families and communities). A total of 60 "trailblazer" areas were funded in 1999, and it is expected that there will be some 250 programs by the year 2002, serving about 150 000 children or 5% of British children age 0-4. An evaluation of Sure Start has been commissioned and is now underway.

111. In recent years, federal and state governments in the U.S. have expanded funding for a range of early childhood programs to meet the dual goals of improving school readiness for all children and providing work supports for their families (Schumacher, Greenberg, & Lombardi, 2001b). Most of the federal funding for early childhood education and care (ECEC) is provided to the states through the two main programs: the Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) and Head Start. States use the money to provide subsidies for low-income parents through vouchers or direct contracts with providers. In addition, states can transfer up to 30% of TANF funds to the CCDF. Federal support is also provided through tax credits to assist parents with child care expenses (U.S.HR, *The Green Book*, 2000). Despite these efforts, the current level of federal and state funding is not adequate to ensure access to affordable services for all children whose parents would like them to participate. Nor, since quality is also a concern, are the funds adequate to provide the quality of services necessary to meet school readiness goals.

112. A recent review of 36 studies supports earlier findings that quality early childhood education can produce short-term cognitive and academic benefits for children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Barnett, 1995). These benefits were found in a range of different types of programs and across a number of different groups of children. In most cases, cognitive gains during the early childhood years were sustained until school entry, and there was some evidence of persistence into adolescence (Schweinhart, Barnes, & Weikart, 1993; Campbell & Ramey, 1994, 1995; Gross, Spiker, & Haynes, 1997; Karoly *et al.*, 1998). The evidence that participation in early childhood programs is linked to high school graduation and lower delinquency rates is strong, but based on the relatively small number of studies that have followed young people through early adulthood (Barnett, 1995).

113. Head Start is the national compensatory education program that provides education, health, and nutrition services to low-income children via grants to local grantees (both public and private non-profit entities). It serves 3 and 4 year olds primarily and brings short-term benefits to children's cognitive and socio-emotional development (see Barnett, 1995; Karoly *et al.*, 1998 for reviews). However, these advantages have been found to fade out by around the third grade (McKey *et al.*, 1985). Research suggests that white children retain lasting benefits from Head Start and that the decline in test scores for blacks and Latinos may be related to poor schools attended by these children once they leave the program. Using fixed-effect models, analyses have found that whites who attended Head Start are more likely to complete



high school and attend college than siblings who did not attend, and even more so among those whose mothers did not complete high school (Currie and Thomas, 1995).

114. Early Head Start (EHS) was created in 1994 as a federally-funded two-generation program to enhance children's development and health, strengthen family and community partnerships, and support the staff delivering new services to pregnant women and families with infants and toddlers. EHS grantees tailor their early childhood, parent education, and home visiting services via a home-based, centre-based, or a mixed approach. At the end of the program at age three, the results from a random-assignment evaluation found that EHS stimulated better outcomes on a range of measures that predict later school achievement and family functioning, though overall impacts were modest. (Love *et al.*, 2002). EHS also had favourable outcomes for parents. Parents were more likely to be emotionally supportive and provide more support for language and learning, more likely to read daily to their children, and less likely to engage in negative parenting behaviours, including spanking. EHS fostered more positive fathering and father-child interactions. EHS mothers were more likely to participate in education and job training activities and were more likely to be employed (through 26 months). They were less likely to have subsequent births during the first two years after they enrolled. EHS increased school attendance among teen parents and enhanced their children's development (Love *et al.*, 2002).

115. Studies from both model interventions and more typical early childhood programs show that quality has an important impact on children's development from an early age. Children who receive high-quality care in the first three years of life are likely to demonstrate better cognitive and language abilities, and experience more positive mother-child and social interactions than children in lower-quality arrangements (Palacio-Quintin, 2000). Children in lower-quality settings are more likely to have difficulties with language, social, and behaviour skills (see Vandell & Wolfe for a review). Moreover, benefits for children of well-designed, intensive forms of ECEC are less likely to "fade out" than in those that are merely designed for custodial purposes (Barnett, 1995).

116. Findings from the NICHD Study of Early Child Care also support the importance of quality to children's development and learning. The results for the first three years of life show that experience in group care, whether centres or homes, promoted children's cognitive, language, and social-emotional outcomes, but quality of care was associated with better cognitive and linguistic abilities among children. Children had fewer behaviour problems and better language comprehension and school readiness when programs met recommended quality standards. Higher-quality care was also associated with better mother-child interactions. However, when children spent more hours in childcare, mothers were less sensitive in their interactions with their children, and children were less positively engaged with their mothers (NICHD, in press).

117. There is also evidence that high-quality care may make a bigger difference in child development for those from lower-income families than it does in high-income families (Brooks-Gunn, Klebanov, Liaw, & Spiker, 1993). For low-income children, spending time in centre-based ECE is linked with higher rates of cognitive and language development than other formal or informal arrangements, after taking into account a range of maternal and home attributes (Fuller, Kagan, Caspary, & Gauthier, 2002). Yet, children from low-income families are less likely to attend programs that promote their early development and learning than their more advantaged counterparts. One recent study found that children of welfare recipients entering the workforce are enrolled in lower-quality ECEC compared to the quality of centres and preschools in middle-class communities. Given the inadequate supply of subsidised, licensed places in low-income communities, families often rely on informal and relative care, which does not provide adequate stimulation to promote children's early development and school readiness (Fuller *et al.*, 2002).

118. In 1998 the OECD launched a twelve-country Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care Policy with the goal of providing cross-national information and analysis that would improve

policy making in all OECD countries (OECD, 2001a)<sup>11</sup>. The conclusion stressed the importance of ensuring universal access and improving the quality of these services, and achieving these goals by a substantial increase in public investment and enhanced staff training. The countries that promote (and achieve) more equitable access to quality ECEC are characterised by eight “key elements” (OECD, 2001a):

- A systemic and integrated approach to policy development and implementation
- A strong and equal partnership with the education system
- A universal approach to access, with particular attention to children with special needs
- Substantial public investment and expenditure in services and infrastructure
- A participatory approach to quality improvement, including parents as well as children and professionals
- Appropriate and adequate training of staff
- Systematic attention to monitoring and data collection
- A long term agenda for research and evaluation.

119. Unfortunately, only a few of the country reports refer to research regarding child outcomes of national policies (or the absence of these policies) other than school-related outcomes (school readiness, school success).

### ***Teenage Pregnancy and Births: Prevention and Other Interventions***

120. Teenage births have declined as a phenomenon over the last two decades, but continue to be a problem, especially in some countries, for all the reasons mentioned earlier. (Unicef Innocenti, 2001b). A major issue has to do with the substantial variations cross-nationally in rates of teen pregnancy and parents. The Unicef report (2001b) stresses two factors as key to lower unwed teen birth rates in other countries: (1) greater knowledge about and access to more effective contraception; and (2) lower rates of income poverty and inequality which exclude youths from the benefits, cultural norms and aspirations of the majority. The report states that the Northern European countries hold the key to lowering teenage birth rates in the advanced industrialised countries. Sex education and easy access to free and effective contraception in an accepting environment, and availability of abortion are the key interventions.

121. The key conclusions of another recent report, this a five-country study (Canada, France, Great Britain, Sweden, and the U.S.) of teenage sexual and reproductive behaviour (Darroch, Frost, Singh, 2001) also found that the rates of teen pregnancy and parenting are declining in most countries, that there are significant differences cross-nationally. High pregnancy rates, not less use of abortion, are the key to high teen U.S. birth rates. Less, and less effective contraceptive use is key to U.S. high teen pregnancy and birth rates. The society’s ambivalence and conflict about sexual issues leads to difficulties for teenagers in accepting contraceptive services and large numbers of adolescents lack health insurance and have poor

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11 The participating countries were: Australia, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, U.K., and the U.S. Additional countries are expected to participate in a second wave of studies, including Canada, France, Hungary, Ireland, South Korea, and Spain.

access to health care. Finally, social and economic disadvantages create additional obstacles to teens' motivation in using contraceptives and avoiding pregnancy. Darroch, Frost, and Singh (2001) conclude that there is no one path for achieving lower teen pregnancy and birth rates.

122. According to the Canadian country study carried out by Maticka-Tyndale, McKay, and Barrett (2001), opinion polls consistently demonstrate that most Canadians accept the sexual behaviour of teenagers but are concerned about early pregnancy and parenting, and STDs. While most youth have access to contraceptive counselling and devices, STD testing, abortion services, and so forth, without direct charge, the settings may not be user friendly, especially for youth living in rural areas and those from marginalised groups such as aborigines, ethnic minorities, and gay and lesbian youth. Birth rates among 15-19 year olds have declined in the past half-century despite an increase in the number and proportion who are sexually active. Contraceptive use accounts for more of the decrease in teen births than abortion. The authors conclude that while Canada as a country has the knowledge, resources and infrastructure to respond to the several sexual social and health concerns, it does not seem to be consistent in its implementation.

123. In contrast to Canada, France is among the OECD countries with low rates of teen pregnancy and births (Bajos and Durand, 2001). However, there is concern, nonetheless. In 1999 the government initiated a new study with the objective of finding out how to reduce unwanted pregnancies, especially but not exclusively among teens. Although there is no research explaining why the French rates are low, there are several hypotheses (Bajos and Durand, 2001): (1) There is strong support for education and girls especially take advantage of the opportunities available to them, and defer getting pregnant. (2) Despite the benefits available to lone mothers on their own, most teen mothers stay with their parents. And (3) emergency contraception is readily available to teens without parental consent and without a prescription.

124. Sweden has among the lowest rates of teen pregnancy and parenting (Danielsson, Rogata, and Kajsa, 2001). The rate has not changed since 1995 and teenage births are becoming increasingly uncommon. A 1990 survey documented that teen pregnancy in Sweden is almost always unplanned, unwanted, likely to occur to girls from low socio-economic background, from broken homes, who dropped out of school, and who are at high risk for premature deaths, often by violence. Swedish research explains the low teen pregnancy and parenting rates as due, largely, to: (1) easy access to effective contraception including emergency contraception and abortion as back-up and (2) access to and incentives for employment. Contraceptives are free and readily available (Swedish Institute, 2001).

125. One of the main goals of the 1996 U.S. welfare reform legislation was to prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and establish annual numerical goals for preventing and reducing the incidence of these pregnancies, with a special emphasis on teens (U.S.HR, 2000). Limited research is available on the effects of these recent policies but we can learn from the evaluations of three earlier demonstration projects to increase the self-sufficiency and well-being of teen parents. For the teens, the Teenage Parent Demonstration program (TPD) and LEAP programs increased rates of school attendance, grade completion (but not graduation rates), job training, employment and earnings while the programs were operating. These gains faded after the programs ended and the teens no longer received the same financial incentives and/or support services. The New Chance program increased participation in education and skills training during the first six months, but these increases eventually disappeared, too. Neither the TPD nor New Chance found consistent meaningful impacts on children's well being (child outcomes were not assessed for LEAP), nor did any of the three demonstrations succeed in reducing subsequent pregnancies or births to teen mothers (Kisker *et al.*, 1998).

126. Recent reviews of experimental studies of adolescent reproductive health (Kirby, 2001; Manlove *et al.*, 2002) suggest that programs that seek to alter adolescents' life opportunities such as early childhood education and youth development appear to hold greater promise than education or service programs alone (Kirby, 2001). For example, adolescents involved in volunteer community service activities which include

preparation time and time for reflection after services are less likely to be sexually active and become pregnant than teens not involved in such programs. Intensive, long-term programs that combine a focus on youth development (*e.g.*, mentoring, employment, sports, performing arts) with sex education can have a strong impact on frequency of sex as well as pregnancies and births.

127. Sex education and HIV education programs that had positive effects on teen behaviour have the following characteristics: multiple components; based on theoretical approaches; clear, accurate messages; participants engaged in curriculum based activities; communication and refusal skills; were appropriate to the age, culture and experience of participants; and provided appropriate training for teachers or peer leaders (Kirby, 2001). One-on-one counselling and clear messages about abstinence and contraceptive use were characteristics of clinic-based programs that had a positive impact on condom and contraceptive use and the reduction of STDs (Manlove *et al.*, 2002). On the other hand, findings from evaluations of school-based health centres and programs that provide condoms have had both positive and negative effects on teen reproductive health behaviours, though these studies have not been part of rigorous experimental evaluations (Kirby, 2001). And current evidence regarding the effectiveness of abstinence-only programs is inconclusive, in part, also, because few rigorous studies have been carried out on these program thus far (Kirby, 2001).

128. Finally, while most of the programs evaluated focus on youth, as noted earlier, adolescents who as children participated in high-quality, intensive early care and education programs for disadvantaged children have fewer pregnancies and births than those who were not enrolled in such programs (Campbell, Ramey, Pungello, Sparling, & Miller-Johnson, in press; Schweinhart, Barnes, & Weikart, 1993).

### *Some Supplementary Research Notes*

129. A few other studies are noteworthy for the positive impacts they have on children. For example, one concern in several countries is education and school reform (Unicef, 2002). Since 1981, France has allocated additional resources to schools in geographic areas that are characterised by a concentration of disadvantage—including higher rates of school failure, higher percentage of immigrant children or non-French speakers, and low household income (Moisan & Simon, 1997). In these “educational priority zones” (*zones d’éducation prioritaire* or ZEP), schools have reduced class sizes, hired additional specialists and support staff, worked on collaborative educational projects across the educational system and with other partners, such as health, social services, and carried out outreach activities to immigrant parents. In Flanders, the educational priority policy not dissimilarly aims to bridge the cultural gap between teachers and pupils as well as parents in migrant communities (Nicaise, 2002). Results of this policy have been mixed, and gaps between students in ZEPs and non-ZEPs do persist. On the other hand, the relative performance of disadvantaged students has improved in some ZEP schools, and has, at a minimum, stabilised, even as the social and economic conditions in many of the surrounding communities have deteriorated (Glasman, 2000). High enrolment of two-year olds is a characteristic of the high performing schools in the ZEPs.

130. Swedish policy emphasises the importance of women’s employment and earnings. (Swedish Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, April 2002). In this context, Swedish family policy stresses an extensive and generous package of cash benefits and services designed to facilitate mothers’ labour force participation. To get some sense of its effectiveness, 84% of pre-transfer poor are lifted out of poverty leaving a post tax and transfer child poverty rate of less than 3%. This system is especially important for lone parents.

131. The major objectives of the Swedish ECEC programs are (1) to enhance child development and learning and (2) to help with reconciling work and family life. The services cost about 2-3% of GDP. All

children are assumed to have had preschool experience before entering primary school and those who do not have this experience are severely disadvantaged when they enter primary school.

132. In the U.S., three policies have been found to have significant positive consequences for children: a refundable tax credit, enforcement of child maintenance obligations, and housing and community policies.

133. The Earned Income Tax Credit is a refundable (non-wastable) federal tax credit for one or two-parent working families with children and with low and moderate earnings (Berube and Forman, 2001). Research findings indicate that the EITC lifts substantially more children out of poverty than any other U.S. government program or category of programs. It is particularly effective for Hispanic children and children who live in the South<sup>12</sup> (Greenstein & Shapiro, 1998).

134. Recent child-support and welfare (social assistance) policies specifically target unwed fathers and aim to encourage greater father involvement in the lives of their children (U.S.HR, 2000). Research has focused on the extent to which such policies influence family income, family formation, and fathers' involvement in the lives of their children. Payment of child-support is positively associated with children's well-being (Furstenberg, Morgan, & Allison, 1987) and with higher grades and fewer school problems (McLanahan *et al.*, 200-). Research has also linked strong child-support enforcement with lower rates of non-marital childbearing (Garfinkel *et al.*, 2000)—another goal of welfare reform—and reduced likelihood of marital dissolution (Nixon, 1997). However, children on welfare are unlikely to benefit much from child-support enforcement, because the money received goes to repay welfare expenditures rather than to increase income. Fathers also do not have much of an incentive to pay, knowing that their contributions do not help their children financially. Also, mothers must help locate the father which can lead to conflict and tension between the parents (McLanhan & Carlson, 2002).

135. Child-support policies and related programs also have sought to increase the role of non-residential fathers in the lives of their children. While the benefits for children of greater father involvement are not always apparent in the research, a recent meta-analysis found that increased non-residential father involvement produced significant gains in children's academic achievement and reductions in behavioural problems (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999). Research suggests that requiring fathers to pay child-support can increase their involvement with their children (Seltzer, McLanahan, & Hanson, 1998).

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137. Neighbourhood poverty is associated with less favourable child and youth outcomes, while living among socially and economically advantaged neighbours can have more positive influences on children's school readiness and longer-term educational attainment (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, & Aber, 1997; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). School-age children are more likely to have more favourable behavioural and

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12 The EITC has a strong effect in the South where there is a larger proportion of families in which one parent works but remains poor, due to a lower wage structure. It helps Hispanic children because the proportion of poor children living in families with a full-time worker is considerably greater among Hispanics than among either blacks or whites.

physical outcomes when they live in neighbourhoods with lower levels of unemployment (Chase-Lansdale *et al.* 1997). Such findings have led to large-scale, federally-funded interventions to improve children's chances of school success by helping low-income families to relocate to more affluent neighbourhoods (Katz, *et al.* 2001; Ludwig, *et al.*, 2001).

## Conclusions

138. There is no comprehensive overview of research on the social policy-child outcome links cross-nationally, nor are there comprehensive national reviews of research on this subject. The longitudinal data bases that exist in some countries, or are now being developed (for example, in Australia, Canada, Denmark, U.K., U.S.) should make such studies more feasible (Ben-Arieh, *et al.*, 2000). Similarly, the annual or biennial reports on the situation of children and their families in such countries as Germany, the Nordic countries, the Netherlands, and the U.S. should facilitate monitoring the well-being of children and their families.

139. Much of the research that exists regarding the social policy-child outcome links within or across countries, is very specialised and fragmentary. It tends to focus on a particular problem, or a particular policy, or a specific outcome. Often the expectation is that one policy intervention can achieve multiple positive outcomes but the research does not, perhaps cannot, document this. In general and unfortunately, much of the "family-focused" research seems to ignore child outcomes (European Observatory, 2002). And the large literature on differences in social welfare expenditures across countries has for the most part not tied these differences to differences in child outcomes, although the high-spending countries do seem to have the more consistently positive outcomes (Kamerman & Kahn, 1997b; Waldfogel, 2002a). Of some interest, child health outcomes do not seem to be a major issue in most countries, probably because all the countries discussed, except the U.S., have some form of national health insurance or service.

140. In general, the English-speaking countries have taken the lead in carrying out research on child poverty, but the problem is becoming of increasing interest in other countries as well. Research on social exclusion and children and how to avoid this problem (or achieve social inclusion) is only beginning to get attention, and there is not yet consensus on the definition of the problem or on how to measure it (Phipps and Curtis, 2002; Kahn and Kamerman, 2002).

141. Knowledge-building is proceeding. National and cross-national research on child poverty and the policies that can reduce or eliminate this problem have received the most attention recently, and the results seem quite robust. These findings have begun to be linked with policy interventions designed to reduce poverty – as can be seen in several countries' announcements regarding goals of poverty reduction over the next ten to twenty years (Britain, Ireland, Japan, Sweden).

142. The existing research on child poverty documents the rankings of countries with regard to child poverty rates, usually using a relative poverty measure, below either 50 or 60% of median income (for example, Unicef Innocenti, 2000). One strong finding is that child poverty and disadvantage are the consequences of multiple factors including, living in a family with no employed adult, being reared in a lone-mother family, having only one wage earner in the family working at low wages, being a teen parent, and having inadequate access to quality ECEC services. A second strong finding is that just as multiple factors are responsible for high (or low) child poverty rates, no one policy alone can solve the child poverty problem – not marriage, not maternal or parental employment, nor government income transfers.

143. Going beyond poverty, one-parent status seems to have negative consequences for children, as does parental unemployment, but there is less research addressing these outcomes. There are negative

consequences for children reared in mother-only families (and for those reared in stepfamilies) even when controlling for income, in the U.S., but possibly not, in the U.K.

144. Promoting maternal employment requires a cluster of policy interventions including higher wage levels, income transfers to supplement low wages, and ECEC services along with parental leave policies to facilitate and sustain maternal employment and labour force attachment.

145. The research seems clear on the value of pre-school and its positive impact on socio-emotional, cognitive, and physical child development, at least for 2-5 year olds, regardless of parental employment status. This appears to have had some influence on country policies expanding ECEC coverage. There also seems to be a growing body of evidence that quality of ECEC services may make a difference, although debate about the definition of quality continues. Moreover, despite recent policy attention to raising quality cross-nationally, many children still do not have access to ECEC services that promote their holistic development and well-being.

146. Large and important gaps in the research continue to exist. For example, there is research on differential aspects of maternal employment and the consequences for children, but much of it continues to treat maternal employment as a uniform phenomenon, ignoring the differences regarding part-time, full-time, and irregular work schedules, the age of the child, and other aspects of employment and conditions of work. Only the U.S. and U.K. research seems sufficiently rigorous to permit robust conclusions to be drawn. Recent U.S. research raises some question about the impact of maternal employment on infants younger than nine months, but also finds positive impacts from maternal employment when children are aged three or older (Brooks-Gunn *et al.* 2002; Han, 2001; Waldfogel *et al.*, 2002). Given the growing trend toward extending paid and job-protected parental leaves in several countries to about one year, this finding suggests there is need to study these policies and their consequences for the well-being of very young children (as well as the impacts on their mothers). If there is interest in encouraging maternal employment for women with children beyond infancy, research finds that increased investment in quality ECEC can stimulate maternal employment without negative consequences for children (indeed, with positive consequences from high-quality care). U.S. research also raises questions about the effects of mandatory full-time maternal employment on adolescent children, and this too requires further study.

147. Other research gaps include: studies of the impact of parental unemployment on children; studies of child abuse and neglect and effective strategies for the prevention of child maltreatment; studies of the situation of children of immigrants and ethnic and racial minorities; studies of effective interventions regarding the prevention of teen pregnancies and parenting; studies of the impact of guaranteed minimum child maintenance benefits on child well-being.

148. More specifically, little research exists on parental unemployment and its effects on children although this is an important subject and receives more attention in the continental European countries than in the English-speaking countries. Parental unemployment leads to higher poverty rates and has other negative consequences for children (higher rates of child maltreatment, for example); but parental employment alone neither eliminates child poverty and deprivation nor does it account for country variations in child poverty rates.

149. National research on child welfare policies (child protection, foster care, adoption) is limited. There are few, if any, comparative studies or systematic reviews. And there is little research documenting which policy interventions are effective in preventing child abuse and neglect, despite concern regarding this outcome in almost all countries.

150. Despite the increasing diversity in many of the countries, attention is only beginning to be paid to including racial and ethnic minority status as a variable in the research studies, with only a few countries

appearing to address the relevant policy issues. Most of the research on immigrant families that does exist focuses on parents, not the children, but the evidence that is available suggests that children from minority groups are more vulnerable to poverty, deprivation, and social exclusion and to a range of other social and academic problems. More research is needed on the situation of children of immigrants (and ethnic and minority children) and which policies are most important for their well being.

151. Some research documents the positive impact of child-support enforcement policies (in the U.S. for example); but there is no research that documents the impact on children of a policy providing advanced maintenance (guaranteed child-support) payments.

152. The effective policy interventions for reducing, if not preventing, teen pregnancy are well-documented in the research: easy access to effective contraceptives and programs that stress youth development, build self esteem, and increase opportunities for teenagers.

153. Fertility rates are a subject of research attention, and out-of-wedlock births are too, in some countries. However, neither seem to be amenable to policy interventions, at least not by one policy alone.

154.

155. Finally, we would note that the research is overwhelmingly focused on problems and negative indicators, with far less attention paid to positive indicators of child well-being. And there is much more systematic attention to trends in child outcomes than there is to the policies that could reduce or alleviate the negative outcomes let alone those that could enhance the positive outcomes. Nor is there much evidence of close links between the research on child well-being and the policies that are enacted. The development of longitudinal data bases and regular national reporting on the well-being of families and children will both increase awareness on child outcomes and provide scope for exploring policy-outcome links.



**Table 1: Child poverty rates by family type**

Country	Year	Population shares			Poverty rate (%)		
		Lone Mother	Two parents	Other	Lone mother	Two Parents	Other
Russia	1995	0.08	0.60	0.32	31.0	26.0	26.5
United States	1994	0.15	0.60	0.25	59.6	16.7	29.1
United Kingdom	1995	0.19	0.70	0.12	40.3	17.5	13.9
Italy	1995	0.02	0.73	0.25	20.2	20.9	22.3
Australia	1994	0.09	0.73	0.18	38.3	14.7	16.6
Canada	1994	0.11	0.69	0.20	45.3	12.3	13.4
Ireland	1987	0.03	0.73	0.24	29.8	16.7	7.1
Israel	1992	0.03	0.71	0.25	26.6	14.0	14.8
Poland	1992	0.05	0.72	0.24	4.9	13.7	17.5
Spain	1990	0.02	0.62	0.36	25.2	12.4	13.5
Germany	1994	0.09	0.77	0.14	43.3	8.5	7.3
Hungary	1994	0.06	0.66	0.28	12.0	10.9	12.9
France	1989	0.07	0.75	0.17	25.4	7.7	12.6
Netherlands	1991	0.08	0.82	0.10	29.6	6.8	4.2
Switzerland	1982	0.07	0.88	0.05	21.2	4.8	12.5
Taiwan	1995	0.02	0.57	0.41	15.2	5.1	7.5
Luxembourg	1994	0.06	0.76	0.19	30.1	4.4	6.8
Belgium	1992	0.07	0.78	0.14	11.8	6.1	3.0
Denmark	1992	0.13	0.76	0.10	10.5	5.5	2.8
Austria	1987	0.10	0.73	0.18	33.2	2.9	2.0
Norway	1995	0.14	0.73	0.14	10.4	3.4	4.4
Sweden	1992	0.15	0.82	0.03	4.5	3.6	2.6
Finland	1991	0.09	0.79	0.13	6.2	3.0	4.1
Slovakia	1992	0.05	0.73	0.22	7.6	2.1	1.4
Czech Republic	1992	0.07	0.75	0.19	8.9	1.3	1.4
Average		0.10	0.66	0.24	37.9	15.5	19.8

*Notes:* Weighted by the number of children in 1996. Poverty defined with the half overall median poverty line and countries sorted by the all-child poverty rate on this basis.

*Source:* Bradbury, Jenkins and Micklewright (2001). p. 78.

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