



FamiliesAndSocieties



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# ON FAMILIES

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Facts and Thoughts



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# 1 Introduction: What you will find here

The articles in this file contain results from family research.

When you have read these articles you will know:

- ▭ about the diversity of family forms in Europe and worldwide
- ▭ about consequences for policy strategies out of social science data
- ▭ about the situation of different family forms in different countries
- ▭ about reconciliation of work and family

You won't get self-help advice, neither concrete political measures to implement.

You will get background information building the basis for policy decision and arguing for a better life for families.

These articles are based on the Project FamiliesAndSocieties (a project funded by European Union's Seventh Framework Programme under grant agreement no. 320116).

Some of the articles refer to this project directly, others are related to the theme and take a global perspective. The underlying scientific articles appeared in high ranked scientific journals, which are hardly accessible for the average reader. I report the essential results adding reflections and thoughts which might inspire the reader for autonomous further thinking.

These articles appeared first on the blog [europeanfamilies.co](http://europeanfamilies.co) from 2015 to the end of 2016, when I closed the account. They are not available on the internet anymore. Therefore, I decided to put the blog posts together and structure them to headings, which were rather a result of the posts than originally intended.

Start at the beginning or with any article that catches your eye. They appeared independently, they can be read independently.

## 2 Family Forms

There are a lot of family forms nowadays, but so it was hundred years ago. What changed is less the quantity but the quality and a higher possibility to choose one's living. As people nowadays live in a variety of family forms, the vision of the nuclear family still has normative power. That is the main content of the following posts.

What you will learn:

- about plurality
- about the normative power of the nuclear family
- about immigrant families and integration.

### 2.1 On Plurality

Our times seem to be times of plurality. Such a lot of goods, of possibilities, of opportunities. Such a lot of entertainment, such a lot of information. And a lot of ways to live a family.

For decades, we had the discussion of the plurality of family forms in the western world, paralleled by the discussion of a decline of the family. Yes, we have: nuclear families (still the most widespread form), divorces, stepfamilies, patchwork families, single parent families. But that is nothing new: we had a broad variety of family forms in former times too. It is nothing we should feel special on.

Let us have a look at the 19th century Europe:

At the beginning of the 19th century Europe was still an agrarian society, only in France and England the industrial society was on the rise already. 80% of the people were working on the farm - today 3% are working in the agrarian area in Europe.

In the 19th century following family forms existed:

#### *The family on the farm.*

Family resembled not what we call "family" today, it was called „the house“.

The farmer had legal power over the members, he lived with his wife, children, farmhands and maids on the farm. Children out of the farmer couples but also children out of wedlock, those of the farmhands and maids lived in the house. Maids and farmhands could not marry as marriage was bound to property and a stable life situation. They had neither nor, being often seasonally employed and moving from farm to farm. There were mobility and plurality on the farm! (In some alpine valleys we had still in the sixties of the twentieth century a higher percentage of children born out of wedlock than in New York City). Children were raised together. A kind of modern patchwork commune.

#### *The worker family.*

With the industrial society there came the proletariat, the worker's class, rapidly growing throughout the century. Poor. Living in inhumane conditions in the growing cities (Vienna, the capital of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy had at the beginning of the century about 200.000 inhabitants, at the end: 2.000,000). Men and women worked, both. Full time, which meant 60hours a week, Saturday included. The older children looked after the younger ones - if they did not work too.

#### *The middle-class family.*

Very slowly the middle classes spread in society. This was a success story. The middle class grew and grew: small enterprises, employees and white-collar workers in industry and firms. Subsequently, the bourgeoisie model of the nuclear family became prominent: the father as breadwinner, bringing the money in, and the wife staying at home, caring for the children and the household. Upper middle classes were rich and had maids, so the housewife would care for the saloon, inviting guests for music performances or elaborate chat about literature and paintings. Romantic love started the relationship.

This model shaped our image of the ideal family, especially as the middle classes grew up to 80% in the middle of the 20ieth century.

#### *The upper class, the nobility.*

And there was still the upper class, high-income entrepreneurs, and nobility. The noble class had again different marriage patterns. Networks and family relations, marrying between people from the same class continuing the family tradition over generations or enlarging the economic power were essentially important. Marriages were arranged under that auspices.

Quite a variety, so far.

*Additionally:*

- Marriage bound to property led to an average marriage age for farmers for above thirty (as we have nowadays in highly educated population). Only then the farm was inherited by the following generation. The wives were significantly younger.
- Maternal deaths led to early widowhood and often to re-marriage, resulting in the stepfamily. Fairy tales tell us how long standing in history this form of family is.

A plurality of forms is not a new issue, is not a modern phenomenon. But there is one big difference: Nowadays, we have the choice! Not more forms of family, but more freedom to choose.

## 2.2 Family is important - is it?

Whenever you ask people of the most essential and important things for their life, family ranks top. There might be differences in age groups, thus it is more important for the older than for the young, but generally: even if in some phases of your life friends are more important, family stays in the top field.

In nearly all of the European countries more than 80%, in some even more than 90% agree that family is very important. Only in the Baltic States and in Sweden it is significantly lower, in the first only about two-thirds and in Sweden a little bit more than the half of the population find family very important. Very – not only just - important.

So, as everyone agrees to the importance of family, is there consensus? Superficially yes, but different people(s) mean different things when they talk about family.

### *The different meaning of family*

Why do we have, one might ask, a similar amount of agreement (between 80% and 90%) in so diverse countries like Greece, Germany, Romania, Poland and the Netherlands?

Does one really think that the people of Ireland, Cyprus, and Malta where more than 90% agree to the upper importance of family, have the same understanding of family? Are you sure that when a Danish person, someone from Poland, from Spain, from Italy use the word “family” they mean the same?

No, they do not.

Of course, not every country, not every region has its own understanding. We can group the countries in Europe.

The northern countries are the most individualistic. The image of the family is less being a homogeneous group but a relational network of individuals. I remember that I have been shown advertisements for family holidays a while ago. In a Swedish leaflet, the picture showed four adults, two men and women and four children. The text ran: friends making holidays. Friends! I bet in Italy the text would have been: families making holidays together.

In Southern countries, the extended family still plays a role, grandparents, but also uncles, aunts, and cousins appear more as a community than in the northern countries.

In Central Europe, the image of the nuclear family is predominant: parents with their children.

Both southern Europeans, Greeks, and Italians as well as Central Europeans, Germans and Dutch, will strongly agree to the importance of family. But in the South, they will have the extended family in mind, in middle Europe the nuclear one. In contrast, in the northern

countries, the image of a network of individual rather than the image of the family as a social group prevails.

#### *Accept vagueness*

In our language, we are using words pretending to have consent on. But they mean different things to different people. Concepts are vague and in everyday conversation, we need this vagueness. We cannot always explain in detail what we mean by a specific expression, we cannot always ask: what do you mean by „family“? Is it the couple? With children? Do you include second-grade relatives?

We take common understandings for granted but should accept that there is ambiguity in it.

### 2.3 The future of the family lies in Northern Europe

Strange as it may sound, but: The future of the family lies in northern Europe! Unexpected? Maybe, but it is very well supported by the data we have.

Usually, it needs a couple to get children. In those areas, where people are living in couples the chance of having children is higher than in those where young people are living single. In consequence, we have to look at those parts of Europe where people live in couples.

#### *Couples - married and cohabiting*

When looking at the living forms of the young adults between 20 and 35 in the European countries the first what strikes me is: there is less difference across the countries in the number of people married in this age group as one would expect given the traditional South and the individualized North in Europe. It varies from about a quarter to a third, that is 8% points. Not so much.

But the difference in cohabiting, living together without being married, is impressive. While in the Northern countries it is about a fifth of the 20 to 34 years old in 2008, in Southern countries 5% or less are living unmarried together, a difference of about 20% points.

To live in a couple raises the chance of getting children. If we put marriage and cohabitation together we will find that about half of the age group from 20 to 35 - with the tendency to be more than a half - is living with a partner in the northern countries of Europe, while this is true in the southern countries only for a third.

Many more young adults in the Northern countries are living in partnerships and thus are more likely to have children than in the South. That is reflected in the fertility rate. It is much higher in the north (Sweden: 1,9, Iceland: 2,0) than in the south of Europe (Portugal 1.3, Italy 1.4). The rate is particularly high among Nordic countries, like Norway and Sweden having more first births outside of marriage than within.

Countries with a low cohabitation rate have also a low fertility rate.

In contrast, we have people staying single: up to two-thirds of the young adults in the south are singles and nearly all of them stay at home with their family, while in the north it is less than half and most of them living in their own single households.

#### *Give coupling a chance*

If we put aside value issues that only accept marriage as the start for a family and look at the actual and in parts of Europe broadly accepted behavior of cohabitation we can say the future of the family, meaning a couple living with children, lies in the North of Europe.

And more: up to two-thirds of the young adults in the south are singles and nearly all of them stay at home with their family, this is the group most unlikely to get children.

In consequence, if you want to have a higher fertility rate give people the chance to live in a couple in a household, independent of marriage.

Sources: you find detailed data in the OECD – Family Database website.

## 2.4 The normative power of the nuclear family

„For children, it is better to live in a real family, where mom and dad are around”, a ten-year-old girl from a single parent family said to the interviewer in a study in Austria. And a boy living with his single mother said: „Actually children would need two parents, that’s what my friends say.” A single mother in a more rural area said: „... in the back of your mind, it will always be there, that a father is missing”.

In Germany, people were recently asked in a representative study what they consider as family. Everybody agreed to: “man and woman married living with their children.” Nearly everybody (97%) agreed to: “man and woman not married living with their children“, but only 82% would call a single mother living with a child and without partner a family.

It might be different in other countries in Europe but it shows the predominance of the image of the nuclear family in the German speaking area at least.

Recently we met friends, their daughter, a single parent of a four-year-old child was with us. Asking her how she is doing she said, nearly a little bit annoyed: „well, we live without a father, but we are doing well. Marianne (her daughter) does not really miss a father. Of course, it would be easier and we would have more money, but I give her love, much more than she would have when I also have a partner. We are doing as well emotionally if not better than nuclear family.”

In everyday talk, we, obviously, cannot avoid to compare and say: we are “doing as well as”, or “better than” or “worse than” or “want to look alike” and “being treated alike”. The reference point is always the model of the nuclear family: of parents with their own children. And the personal situation is measured against that. It has normative power.

Why do same-sex couples want to marry and have children? They want to be a family and recognized as one. In Germany, 88% consider them as a family, rather than single parents (82%).

Can we think differently? What if the image of the nuclear family would lose its normative power?

There would be no discussion about the issue if single parents do as well as, better or worse. There would be no discussion in same-sex couples about the necessity to marry and nobody would make it a discussion if they marry or not. There would be no need to value stepfamilies, patchwork families or families with their own biological child differently.

But: we cannot live without an image, humans need reference points, humans need norms, humans want orientation, security. And instead of a discussion on the decline of the family: the nuclear family, parents with their biological children living in the same household are still the most common lived family form in Europe.



You can't change the image, and why would you? What nations can do is offering the best infrastructure for all the living arrangements and measure them against the common standards of well-being.

Sources: Ulrike Zartler, How to Deal With Moral Tales: Constructions and Strategies of Single-Parent Families. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 76 (June 2014): 604–619. DOI:10.1111/jomf.12116  
Schneider, Norbert, Sabine Diabate, Kerstin Ruckdeschel, Hrsg.: *Familienleitbilder in Deutschland*, Verl. Barbara Budrich, Opladen, 2015.

## 2.5 What cohabitation means

Why cohabiting, living together without being married, why not marrying? A young student in my class raised his hand: „I want to be free, not take responsibility“. He hit the point.

A demographic study carried out by social scientists in different European countries was looking how people understand cohabitation in different European countries. They let focus groups discuss the matter. The analysis showed similarities as well as differences.

### Similarities:

In all those countries - Germany, Austria, Netherlands, Italy Poland, Norway, UK - commitment was the point of difference. If they marry, people feel more committed, emotionally, economically, empathically. Cohabitation gives more flexibility, it is easier to separate.

Freedom and independence, having space for self-fulfillment for a longer time in younger years, space for developing an own identity - that is what cohabitation is favored for.

It is a phase of testing, kind of trial and error. Reasonable in a society where social roles are not well defined anymore and lifestyles dazzling.

Thus, cohabitation reflects the insecure, unclear, ever-changing situation in today's society. Responsibility for a family is postponed.

### Differences

The study also reports some differences.

Religion, the position of the Catholic Church matters. Take Poland and Italy, both countries with low cohabitation rates. Religiosity, the scientists found, was a cause, but in different ways. While in Poland religiosity was emphasized as heritage, in Italy it was more the tradition of marriage and family which was accentuated.

In the German-speaking countries, people referred much more to the issue of freedom and testing, self-fulfillment and flexibility than in the other countries. Marriage was thus imagined as a „secure haven in a fast moving world“. Protection, economic security, and safety in the rough world, stability especially for wife and children are provided by marriage. It can wait. People marry when children are born to provide that haven.

In contrast, in the Netherlands children are not seen as the main motivating factor for marriage. The fear of divorce was a reason why informants from the Netherlands preferred cohabiting.

Britain has a liberal tradition and so cohabitation is founded in liberal thinking. Having children while cohabiting is broadly tolerated. Here the authors of the study found differences between social classes. While in the higher educated milieus marriage was the choice when raising children, lower educated people are rather cohabiting since „nobody cares“. This might reflect that marriage for these people was more difficult to achieve.

In Norway cohabitation and marriage seem to be indistinguishable forms of living, especially when it comes to children. To marry symbolizes the love and romance the couple feels, the commitment they feel for each other, maybe they are even celebrating the success of having

raised young children together already. Norwegians are not rejecting marriage, it comes later in life and is much more symbolically than pragmatically based.

Cohabitation means different things to different peoples. It is connected to the countries' tradition and history. The same forms of living together are legitimized or not legitimized in different ways.

Ressource. <http://www.demographic-research.org/Volumes/Vol31/34/> DOI: 10.4054/DemRes.2014.31.34

## 2.6 Are couples more satisfied with life when cohabiting or when being married?

What would be the choice for many young people in many European countries: Marrying or cohabiting? What would make them more satisfied?

A study in Italy looked at the developments of cohabitation and marriage between 1993 and 2013 and the connection to satisfaction levels. Spouses experience more partnership satisfaction than cohabiting couples in countries where cohabitation rate is low. What if cohabitation rate increases?

In the early 1990s in Italy cohabiters were almost ten percentage points more likely to report dissatisfaction with their family life than were married people. Within the following decade the cohabitation gap decreased; still, a significant difference of six percentage points in satisfaction with family life could be observed. However, in the final decade leading up to the early 2000's the cohabitation gap disappeared, and cohabiting couples seem to be as satisfied with their joint life as their married counterparts.

Gender differences can still be observed because women are less satisfied with family life than men.

Similar levels of satisfaction can be observed for both the cohabiting couples and married couples regardless of whether the partners experienced a separation or divorce in the past, or whether stepchildren were present in the household.

Although people with higher education levels tend to be less satisfied, it is the financial difficulties that contribute more to family dissatisfaction than other factors.

Authors conclude that family dissatisfaction decreases as the number of cohabiting couples increases.

What does this mean?

Couples' life satisfaction levels are less bound to a formal legal commitment than they are to bonding on a social level.

It would make sense to address this question legally as well without preferring one family form to another. Cohabiting couples feel as much a family as do married couples; therefore, it does not make much sense to treat them differently when it comes to the well-being and satisfaction levels of the couple. Would you agree?

Pirani, Elena & Vignoli, Daniele 2016. Changes in the Satisfaction of Cohabitors Relative to Spouses Over Time. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 78, 598 – 609

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jomf.12287/abstract>

## 2.7 Are married people happier than never married?

Having looked at the difference between married and cohabiting people in Italy in the last post, we are now looking if there is a difference in life satisfaction between married and unmarried people worldwide and if so, how has it developed over the last three decades.

We know that married people usually show higher life satisfaction over the life course than never married people. But is this true worldwide? And did it change? The World Value Survey and the European Value Study looked at data from 87 countries worldwide between 1981 to 2009.

The results of the study confirm that married people are more satisfied with their life than those that have never been married people. The difference is not very high though, but it is consistent, and there is a difference between gender.

Married men were to 3.1 percent more satisfied with their life than never married men, and married women were 2.7 percent more satisfied than never married women.

Looking at the development between 1981 and 2009, satisfaction levels of married men decreased, while life satisfaction of married women remained the same.

We might jump to conclusions that the decrease in life satisfaction of men is due to a decline of what the author calls "gender specialization", meaning more equality in the distribution of household chores — but this could not be confirmed by data.

What contributes to life satisfaction for everybody are economic growth and liberal divorce legislation as well as growing social rights for women. Married people benefit especially from a high economic level, offering more independence. Especially married people in developing countries benefit from economic growth.

What does this mean?

Economic development, liberal divorce regulations and the promotion of women's rights contribute to a higher life satisfaction of both married and unmarried people; married people benefit especially from improving economic conditions.

To promote policies which favor a decrease in gender specialization and, as a consequence, promote more equality between men and women would lead to a higher life satisfaction generally, including for married people. In contrast, to strengthen gender-traditional family arrangements would lead to a decrease of life satisfaction, including for married couples.

Living in an open and liberal society, economic independence and more gender equality would contribute to a better life for all. Though the gap between married and unmarried people becomes smaller, married people worldwide experience more life satisfaction than never married.

Source: Mikucka, Malgorzata 2016. The Life Satisfaction Advantage of Being Married and Gender Specialization. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 78, 759 – 779.  
<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jomf.12290/abstract>

## 2.8 Whom you will love is predictable

Love - a heavenly emotion, a unique experience, a very special thing.

When you fall in love you think: that's the one. The only one.

It comes spontaneously, surprisingly, it happened: you don't know why.

Well, we sociologists know that it is not so spontaneous and falling in love follows general patterns.

There are a lot of persons in the world, even in your country, in your region, in your city whom you could fall in love with. But it's not random, it's to a wide part predictable.

Romantic love, the ideal prevalent in our western world, seems to be bound to no social barriers. No, we do not have arranged marriage and we do not believe in zodiac signs to find the right partner.

Nevertheless.

Even in our westernized world, dominated by the vision of romantic love, we find homogeneous marrying circles. It is highly probable that you fall in love with somebody from a similar social background. You share similar values, thoughts, behavioral patterns. Professions in both of your families are similar. Not that the parents have the same job - though it's not unlikely - but on the level of uncles and aunts, on the level of former generations, you might find they worked in the same area. Imagine you come from a large city and the person you love comes from the same city than it is highly probable that you have overlapping family networks. Maybe your ancestors, your relatives met somewhere in the city, far away from the time you both fell in love. Perhaps the families or part of the families once lived in the same area, bought at the same butcher shop, went to the same restaurant, watched the same movies and enjoyed summer in similar country sides.

Today you may find partners across borders, partners from overseas. Look at those partnerships which came together at least for quite a while, a few years. Probably also the families are not too divergent. Perhaps in both families there were teachers, employers, businessmen, civil servants. And they live in a comparable surrounding, adjusted to the country they live in.

The internet gives possibilities, endless possibilities. Though I have no studies on that yet, the rule will stay the same: people of comparable social background couple. This is the algorithm partnership platforms rely on.

For partnerships, the proverb „Birds of a feather flock together“ is truer rather than „opposites attract“.

It is predictable whom you will fall in love with. Social background matters.

Observe it in your neighborhood? Don't you have the same experience?

## 2.9 Union formation of immigrants in Europe

Europe in former centuries was a continent of emigration, now it struggles with immigration. Immigrants today come from far distant countries, other continents, different history and culture. Integration in everyday life is one central issue.

*Union patterns of immigrants in Europe:*

A study in the context of the "FamiliesAndSocieties" (<http://www.familiesandsocieties.eu>) project of the European Commission researched how immigrants adapt in their private life. The authors of the study the union patterns of immigrants through generations in different European countries: UK, Estonia, France and Spain.

The immigration problems in Europe, though considered as problems of the European Union, are country specific. One can say: each country has its own typical immigrants. It depends on the localization of the state within Europe, on the former possession of colonies and the historical international relations. Thus, Estonia and the Baltic states had immigrants from Belorussia, Russia and the Ukraine; France, Netherlands and UK had immigrants from their colonies, from Maghreb, Indonesia or India, Pakistan and the Caribbean region; Spain had immigrants from the Spanish speaking Latin American countries. The German speaking countries recruited mainly labour immigrants from the Southern European States and Turkey. The researchers looked at one of the most private issues: union formation, marriage and cohabitation.

The main result was: the mating behavior of the immigrants resembles that of the country of their origin. This is not only true for the first generation of immigrants but also for the younger generation, though slight modifications could be observed. In Europe in the countries under research, except Spain, cohabiting is a common and an accepted form of first union formation. You might expect that immigrants adopt over generation. They do not; they rather show behavioral patterns according to their heritage.

If cohabitation is not practiced in their country of origin and is considered to be against social norms or might even be forbidden, immigrants do not cohabit, they marry immediately when leaving home. But, if cohabitation was a pattern in the country of origin you will find it also in the country of destiny, shown by the Russians, Belorussian and Ukrainians in Estonia. Caribbean women have high levels of cohabitation in the UK as have descendants from Sub-Saharan Africa in France.

Now taking into account that migrants are not necessarily the typical representative of their home country - they left it, because they were looking for a career, they have a minority or a marginal status in their home country, or were persecuted - they still were socialized with country specific values.

Shortly put: traditional culture in the country of origin matters and is maintained through generations.

What does this mean?

The results show that you cannot get rid of the values and the rewarded behavior you learned in your family. However young and influenced by the culture in the immigration country you are, you will not avoid living the history of your place of origin. Certainly, changes appear, mainly due to economic and technological factors, but traditions are deeply rooted in the person.

This has to be respected. Don't try to change values, try to offer livable infrastructure.

Source: A Comparative Study on Partnership Dynamics among Immigrants and Their Descendants by Tina Hannemann, Hill Kulu, Amparo Gonz\_Lez-Ferrer, Ariane Pailh\_, Leen Rahnu, Allan Puur <http://www.familiesandsocieties.eu/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/WP14HannemannEtAl2014.pdf>

## 2.10 Risk of divorce for immigrants in Germany

Most of the Immigrants in Germany come from societies with traditional family patterns like South Eastern Europe and Turkey. Families from those would be considered as stable having a low divorce rate. But when people are disembodied from their original country and marry a German partner, this changes, as a on mixed marriages in Germany showed.

Risk of divorce in binational marriages is significantly higher than in marriages of partners with the same origin, significantly means about 60% higher. Though the researchers could

only rely on questionnaires measuring specific indicators, not going into depth of value construction, family relations or cultural dispositions, they found some indication for the causes of the difference.

Religious affiliation matters. Though we have no data about religious practice, the indicator shows the historical effectiveness of religion. Even only affiliation to a religion marked in the questionnaire, without deeper commitment, correlates with lower risk of divorce; and the cultural difference is higher with migrants from Turkey than from other Southern or South East European States. The risk of getting divorced declines when children are present. Cohabitation, living together before marriage, lowers the risk of divorce, but this does rarely happen with partners with a background of migration from Turkey or South of Europe. Cohabitation is not a generally accepted pattern in those countries.

Risk of separation also rises if the age of the bride was in her early twenties - than the risk is three quarters higher compared to older marriage age. If she has no or only a low educational degree than again risk of divorce increases.

The authors concentrated on women, but when including indicators for the husband like age difference or religious affiliation, the risk decreases from 60% down to a third over all the couples. If he is younger though (two years or more) than the bride and has a lower educational performance than she has or different religious affiliation the risk of divorce raises.

Those are data, what do they imply?

It might be dangerous just to conclude: it is the nation that matters. You are better advised to look more closely at the indicators. We find that religion, cohabitation, age and education matters - and that would be true with partners from the same nation too. If partners value different lifestyles, belong to distant generations or differ widely in the educational degree risk of divorce raises even when they come from the same nation. That those indicators are differently distributed between nations is another story. With emphasizing on nations we legitimize differences between nations that are differences in very specific issues within and across nations.

Source: Milewski, Nadja, Kulu, Hill, Mixed Marriages in Germany. European Journal of Population Feb. 2014, Vol 30. Pp 89-113

### 3 Children

Fertility is an issue, in Europe. Generally, the European countries have – with few exceptions like France or Sweden, too few children to reproduce themselves. Children get more and more an issue, and the time the parents spend with them is much higher than it was decades ago. Not surprisingly, because to have one or two children draws much more attention to them than if there are three, four five or even more.

You will learn in that chapter:

- about the value of children
- about time use
- about the effect of social and economic circumstances on children

#### 3.1 The value of children

Always in the papers in Germany, Austria, Italy, Spain, Greece or Portugal: too few children are born. If those countries would not have immigration, it would be much lower. Population shrinks.

What is the matter? The „Value of Children“ approach tries to answer this question. Starting already in the seventies of the last century but being more and more developed until modern times, mainly by sociologist Bernhard Nauck.

The Value of Children approach is based on the assumption that children have three advantages for parents: economic, psychological and social ones. To realize the value, one needs opportunity structures, one needs an environment open for living one's values. Or propositions who are in benefit or in misfit for having children.

It is an economic value when people need children to take care for the elderly, when they contribute either income or as labour force in their family. As a consequence, it makes sense to have more children. The more children you have the better you will be cared for when you are in old age, the better for the wealth of the house. More children add to the economic value. Economic values prevail in countries with higher economic risk and less wealthiness, as Nauck found out. They have a higher fertility rate internationally. This would not explain the differences in Europe, where wealthy countries like Sweden have more births than poorer countries like Spain.

Psychological reasons come in and dominate.

Psychological well being means emotional contact, emotional relations. Children give love, it makes fun to see them growing up. Children enrich you personality, your social competence, your everyday live. It is simple: you love them. But you can not spread these affections to a lot of children, one or two, maybe three perhaps, but not in the same way to six, seven, eight, nine, ten. That is why if psychological values for children prevail in a society, the tendency is to have less children.

Thirdly the value of children is formed by social normative expectations. What does a society see as an appropriate amount of children for parents? Could you raise your social position in having more children or are you looked at strangely if you have more than two children? Would you be rather seen as a responsible parent in raising many children or rather seen as irresponsible, as you can hardly devote the same amount of affection and attention to all the children? That influences the choice. In Germany researcher asked people with how many children they would consider families as large: those with four and more children, people answered. And they were very ambivalent on this - do not families with many children drive the family to poverty? Can they really care for such a crowd?

In the modern western world usually the psychological argument for children prevails, as well as the „responsible parenthood“ asking for spending a lot of attention to the child.

But it is not easy as that to explain the high or low fertility rate.

Opportunity structures matter too.

Living opportunities like adequate housing, available jobs, preferably part time for mothers, Kindergarten for pre-school children, cradles for toddlers, all this in reachable maybe walkable distance, parental leave systems, friends and grandparents who can care for, educational careers: - how long do you have to study before you get a job? - Yes, and finally, but not essentially in the middle tax reductions and direct one transfers.

Is the man in a breadwinner system able to find a job with enough income to raise a family? What is considered as enough income and what role does the lifestyle of the parents-to-be play? How does higher and lower education contribute to the income of the family and the value of children?

The output measure is very simple: Fertility rate usually measured as the births of woman in between 15 and 49 in a country. The background very specific and complex. Culture matters, tradition matters. And those are very diffuse concepts, difficult to measure.

What to do from family policy size? I would suggest not to fight the fertility rate, not to implement measures with the intention that people get more children but to work for a society that provides equal life chances for people with different lifestyles - children will be born.

See for example: Bernhard Nauck, Value of children and the social production of welfare. Demographic Research, Vol 30, pp1793-1824.

### 3.2 Let the children play.

A couple of days ago, while flicking through the TV channels I heard a psychologist talking about "burn-out" even in pre-school children. Though we should be careful in diagnosing by using today's catchwords, there is some truth in it.

It is commonly accepted that childcare institutions, such as kindergartens, should not only be the places where we leave our children to be cared for by others while we are working. Instead, these places should provide inspiring surroundings for children, offer a place for creativity, socializing, making friends, and, above all, learning and preparing for school.

By the way: It might be accidental, but it came to my mind that German and English offer different notions for the childcare establishment in question: Namely, while in German "kindergarten" would translate to "children's garden", —the English dictionary offers "nursery school" as an expression, therefore seemingly inferring a learning environment rather than a playful one.

Nowadays you have to look at children in a professional, science-informed way. That necessitates professionalization of personnel working in the nursery school; Nursery teachers have to be trained in caring for small children, they need to know how to react to their cries or moans and, if necessary, how to interpret their mimics. They should be aware of their well-being and have an idea of the meaning of social interaction between the children. Professional training is well and truly needed. In addition to this, and especially so, nursery teachers should prepare children for school because children should already start to learn in a proper sense of the word: Perhaps languages, writing or even math. Step by step, children should also become accustomed to the daily school schedule.

This is a significant change to the former times when children grew up more or less unguided in their homes and supervised by their siblings rather than by their parents. There is certainly no desire to return to the old ages and most would surely agree that the advantages of child care institutions are vast.

The problem, however, is that rationalization and professionalization might have negative consequences when overemphasized. And I think that it is already overemphasized.



One of the consequences of this is a de-institutionalization of childhood. Children's living arrangements already show many characteristics of adult life: scheduling, performing, and rationalizing. I do not think it makes much sense to fight against this development because the science, as well as most parents, support this approach as almost a need if children want to perform at school or, better said, if parents want children to perform at school. But I do believe that we should and even must think of the unintended outcomes: Loss of creativity, psychic disorders, and symptoms such as burn-out that the psychologist I mentioned above spoke about.

George Herbert Mead, a classical sociologist in Chicago in the 1930's made the distinction between "game" and "play": game entails rules, while play does not. I believe we should now give our children more room to play simply and only to play, rather than to play games.

### 3.3 Obedience or independence? How parents educate children.

Authoritarian systems suppress education knowing that it is a danger to them, whilst open societies promote education because they rely on the independent and self-reliable citizens. This is true worldwide.

A recent study followed this general remark in more detail looking at educational goals worldwide.

The study compiled several worldwide databanks and analyzed the educational goals of 227,431 parents from 90 nations across five study waves (1981–2008). Data came from the European Values Survey, the World Values Survey and the World Bank Data Catalogue.

The researchers looked at both the national and the personal socioeconomic status in comparing obedience and independence as educational goals. We are therefore able to see what matters more: the wealth of nations or someone's personal situation.

The results firstly confirmed an already well-known correlation between wealth and educational priorities: In prospering nations with a highly educated population independence was an important educational goal, whereas in poorer nations with a lower percentage of highly educated people obedience was a favoured goal. So far, these findings are applicable on the national level.

Secondly, the personal socioeconomic status of the parents was shown to be influential: The higher the annual household income and the level of achievement in formal education, the more is independence prioritized as an educational goal over obedience.

Furthermore, and more surprisingly, the study showed that it is the parent's social class and not the national situation that is more influential in predicting whether children are educated towards independence or obedience. Therefore, the level of financial security and educational performance shape educational strategy more significantly than the national performance.

The study is restricted insofar that the obedience and independence are accorded different meanings worldwide. Nevertheless, whatever meaning people attribute to such goals the overall intention is clear.

These results strengthen the importance of education and prosperity that is not limited by the borders between nations: Parental priorities are much more influential in predicting educational goals than is the overall national situation.

As a consequence, if we invest in education and provide opportunities for prosperity, we will also provide opportunities of an open society, thereby posing a threat to authoritarian regimes.

Source: Heejung Park and Anna S. Lau, Socioeconomic Status and Parenting Priorities: Child Independence and Obedience Around the World (pages 43–59) In: *Journal of Marriage and Family* 78 (Feb.2016) - Article first published online: 16 SEP 2015 | DOI: 10.1111/jomf.12247

### 3.4 Does mother time spend with children matter?

A recent study challenged the widespread opinion that mother's time spent with children is irreplaceable for their development.

The study tested the behavioral, emotional and academic outcomes using various scales. Time was measured with a seven-day diary in both 1997 and 2002/3.

The authors looked at the effect of mother's time on children aged three to eleven and adolescents aged twelve to eighteen, thus not providing any information about the first three years of the child. Nevertheless, the results for the age groups that were addressed by the research are provoking:

The researchers could not find any statistically significant correlation between the mother's time spent with the child and the behavioral, emotional or academic outcomes. It did not matter if the mother was only accessible for or engaged with the child.

More significantly, social status resources such as education, income and family structure did matter. Children living in stepfamilies had more behavioral, whilst children with single mothers had more emotional problems.

Additionally, in the adolescent age, the authors found no correlation between the maternal time and the tested outcome, with social status and financial resources showing more influence on the results. In particular, those adolescents whose mother had higher education performed better in reading and in mathematics.

In adolescence, though, when both parents spent time with children in a more engaged way, the authors found less behavioral problems.

The researchers advise that we should see mothering in a more relaxed way, and recommend to mothers who have a child aged between three and eleven to "ease up". Adolescents may need more interaction with both parents and especially with mothers in order to optimize their well-being.

It is not surprising that these results raised conflicting views most likely because the researchers provoke when proclaiming the "end of the ideology of mothering".

I cannot unfold the discussion here, and would assume that the results certainly need to be verified by further studies. Nevertheless, the time spent with children does seem to be overestimated as a criterion, and the study confirmed the importance of education and social status for the well-being of children. The study further confirmed that behavioral and emotional problems, as well as difficulties in academic performance, occur less with adolescent children of married couples than with those growing up in stepfamilies or single-mother households.

The study is a plea for de-intensifying mothering time, but it could also be seen as a plea for better education. Consequently, it requests policies in intensifying efforts to educate citizens rather than letting the individual mother bearing all the pressure.

Source: Milkie, Melissa A., Namaguchi, Kei M. & Denny Kathleen E. (2015). Does the Amount of Time Mothers Spend With Children or Adolescents Matter? *Journal of Marriage and Family* 77, 335 – 372.

### 3.5 Children's time use and family structure in Italy

Single parents have a legitimation problem: besides the fact that most of them are economically disadvantaged, they have always to state that they are as good a family and can care as good for their children than do families with both parents. An Italian group within the FamiliesAndSocieties (<http://www.familiesandsocieties.eu>) project analyzed if children with a single parent read and study less or more than those with both parents, using data for the Italian Time Use Survey.

The authors found that children living with a single parent read and study almost half an hour less than those living with both parents.

Differences by education of parents were found. If the single parent is highly educated, the children spend even more time on studying than those with both parents highly educated. The big difference is in the families with less educated parents. In the less educated spectrum it is more than 30 minutes less.

Besides education income of the household matters even more. In poor single-parents households children devote almost 40 minutes less to human capital accumulation, while there is only 19 minutes difference in richer families.

It is not at all sure if only the status of single parents matter. There might be temporary effects shortly after separation or the age of the children at the time of separation matters. There are also no data on how long the separation already exists.

Quantitative studies always give a focussed perspective and cannot deal with everything simultaneously. Nevertheless, they show indicators of influence, indicators that matter. And again, this study from Italy—and it might be true for all the Southern European countries, as they have, like Spain or Portugal, the same little developed welfare system—shows the disadvantage of children in single parent families. Besides the strong efforts usually of single parents to care for the children and give them a warm home, the material necessities do not allow an overall care. Again, as seen in a lot of studies, education matters. The more education you find in the household the less disadvantaged children are in reading and studying.

I agree with the authors when they conclude that welfare system and school system should take care of easing disadvantages. The welfare system can do that in offering mainly financial support for single parent families and the school system in organizing it in a way which needs less involvement of parents.

If we would look at the help for families from the point of view of children, new solutions for distributing efficiently the benefits will emerge.

Source: Letizia Mencarini, Silvia Pasqua and Agnese Romiti  
<http://www.familiesandsocieties.eu/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/WP21MencariniEtAl2014.pdf>

### 3.6 Happiness after childbirth

We seem to have a lot of information on various things in life; Nevertheless, we are sometimes tapping in the dark when we want to find out why certain things happen.

This came to my mind when I read an article about happiness and children written by Murskylä and Margolis and published in "Demography".

The authors compare Great Britain and Germany using the SOEP (socio-economic panel) for Germany and the British Household Panel survey for Great Britain. In their report, the authors look at the change in the levels of happiness before and after childbirth.

We have known for a long time that happiness levels in partnerships follow a U-curve: They are high at the beginning of the partnership, declining with the birth of the children, and increasing after the children have grown up, unless the couple divorce, of course. The study by Murskylä and Margolis now sheds a little more light on that issue.

Among other variables, the authors looked at the ages of the partners in question: The older the couple, the happier they are and the lesser the drop in happiness levels after the birth of their first child. Thus, when the couple have their child in late thirties, happiness levels drop after the birth, but not as significantly as with couples in their early twenties. On the other hand, happiness levels of couples in their early twenties fall significantly below the level of their early childless partnership. It is evident that older couples deal with the change involving the "first-child shock" better than younger couples. Even ten years after the birth there is a difference in happiness levels, with the happiest of younger couples still being not as happy as the least happy couple of their older counterparts.

There is an interesting remark by the authors interpreting these results: People imitate others in their behavior. Those who observe that happiness levels are higher when you have children at an older age and at a more financially stable time may postpone becoming parents to an older age.

If, in a group of friends, people get married the chance for others in that group to get married also rises. Similarly, if children are born in a group of friends, the probability of getting a child for other childless couples in that network rises too.

I find this an interesting argument: It seeks to explain the behavior not by way of structural issues such as the job situation or difficulty in balancing work and family life, but rather by way of integration in networks and by perception and imitation of other people's behavior. When looking at imitation and integration, social networks may help in clarifying why so little is explained by way of structural measures, and why the results are so different across the European states regarding the influence of political measures. I reported on this in one of my previous blogs.

Imitation as a criterion for demographically relevant behavior is definitely underresearched. Source: Mikko Myrskylä, Rachel Margolis, Happiness: Before and After the Kids. *Demography*, Oct. 2014, Vol 51 pp 1843-1866.

### 3.7 Perceived economic uncertainty lowers childbearing intentions

Usually couples want to have children, but what is the right time for childbearing? When will the preferences for having children become more concrete intentions?

Preferences are wishes and ideals that are very much in accordance with the perceived norms in a society. Intentions, however, are much more solid: they are plans to be realized in the near future.

A study of the FamiliesAndSocieties (<http://www.familiesandsocieties.eu>) project looks at the short term childbearing intentions in ten European States. Data from the European Social Survey (2004/05 and 2010/11) were used.

The authors looked at the perceived job and income insecurity in ten European countries representing different welfare regimes. The countries are the UK, Denmark, Finland and Sweden, Germany and the Netherlands, Spain, and the Central and Eastern European countries (CEE) Hungary, Poland and Czech Republic.

The study asked if people intended to have a child, or more children, within the next three years. The information collected showed that the real turning point is the intention of having the first child: this decision influences the life course tremendously and it is the one that is carefully considered.

So, what are the decisive points for the intention to have a child?

Not surprisingly, economic issues matter greatly: the perceived employment and income insecurity make one reluctant to have a child one wishes. Intentions are low, and the realization of the wish is postponed.

The study further shows that the intentions to have a child vary with age, the welfare systems and parenthood status.

For example, referring to only a few of the numerous data collected in the course of the study it shows that the insecure economic situation hinders childless women between 25 and 34 mainly in the UK; it hinders childless men between 30 and 35 in the Netherlands and Germany; and those over 35 in the UK.

In other countries, e.g. Spain and the CEE countries, the same age groups see income insecurity as more important than employment insecurity.

Mothers with one child postpone their childbearing intentions due to concerns over the negative economic situation and their future more in Germany, the Netherlands and Spain than in other European countries. The same stands for fathers with one child living in the CEE countries. This holds true for both the job insecurity and income insecurity.

Seemingly confusing and very contrasting at first, these differences must be interpreted with focus on the national situation. If there is low institutional support and highly priced childcare as in the UK, the intention of having a child is significantly and understandably lower than in countries with good and affordable institutional care.

Labor market and weak work-family reconciliation policies make low childbirth intentions understandable in Spain.

One-child mothers and one-child fathers clearly experience insufficient support for childcare duties and are especially affected by employment and income insecurity.

Childbearing intentions are rather specifically influenced by the perceived local economic situation and expected future, by institutional arrangements and support for childcare from the side of the state as well as from social networks.

How can these study results inspire policy?

Looking at economic indicators, we see that they matter. But it is the diversity across age groups, gender and parenthood status that allows us to identify groups that feel more threatened by economic uncertainty in one country than they do in another. Looking more thoroughly at the policies in different countries might allow us to explain the differences.

Comparisons of the countries based on large data show variety. To explain it, we have to look at the specific cases - a task still waiting to be taken up and addressed.

Source: Susanne Fahlén, Livia Olah, The impact of economic uncertainty on childbearing intentions in Europe. WP 36, 2015 (<http://www.familiesandsocieties.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/WP36FahlenOlah2015.pdf>).

### 3.8 Do children get sufficient support when parents are separated?

An analysis by Matthijs Kalmijn and Jaap Dronkers looked at support networks for children living with their parents in the family home or those living with one parent after separation.

The authors analyzed the situation in four European countries, namely in the Netherlands, Sweden, Germany and England (as part of the UK) using a broad data set with on average 14-year-old school children. The focus lay on the physical availability of the persons able to provide support, their emotional availability, post-separation conflicts, compensation of the missing parental support with other kin or non-kin such as friends, girl-or boyfriend, teachers and the like.

The results in the four countries showed as follows:

The non-resident father is less included in the support network after separation than the non-resident mother. The authors attribute this to a closer emotional connection to the mother in general. Support is also more likely if the relations between the separated parents are not conflictual or if both care together for the child (co-parenting).

The reduced support for the child in case of separation is not compensated for by friends, teachers, classmate's boyfriend or girlfriend or other family members. Rather a cumulative effect can be found: children who significantly lack support from their parents can compensate much less for it than those children who have continued parental support. Therefore, the lack of support is cumulative.

There is little difference between the countries and the results do not depend on the welfare system nor on the general family policy measures introduced.

Why should we care about the results?

I find the important issue to be the fact that with separated parents the missing support is not compensated for. Although the authors did not go into further detail and did not look at stepfamilies or single families especially, the overall result is demonstrative enough: separation does not automatically lead to an extended network and if it does, this does not automatically mean support.

Children of separated parents receive less support. By focussing primarily on children, family policy could set more adequate measures than simply dealing with family formations.

Source: Matthijs Kalmijn and Jaap Dronkers: Lean on me? The influence of parental separation and divorce on children's support networks in four European countries . In: Journal fo Family Research/Zeitschrift für Familienforschung, Special Issue/Sonderheft 10: Family Dynamics after seperation, ed. By Ulrike Zartler et al., 2015: pp 21-42. <http://apps.eui.eu/Personal/Dronkers/articles/ZFF2015.pdf>

### 3.9 Personal autonomy and child-centered policy

Personal autonomy and child-centered policy

To strive for personal autonomy is the primary goal in Western societies. Nevertheless, programs that support parenting are gaining attention nowadays.

How would you answer the following questions?

Parents' duty is to do the best for their children, even at the expense of their own well-being

Parents have a life and should not be asked to sacrifice their own well-being for the sake of their children.

A study looked at the answers given in France, Germany, the Netherlands, United Kingdom and Sweden between 1981 and 2008 using data from the European Values Study.

The authors analysed the change to the answers over time.

Generally, there is an increasing agreement that the parents' duty is to do the best for their children and their well-being. While about 80 percent in France, the Netherlands, United Kingdom and Sweden agree with this statement, in Germany 60 percent of those questioned agreed. This difference between the countries reduces over the last decades, becoming less and less significant.

If parents strongly share autonomy oriented values, then they are less inclined to sacrifice their own well-being in favor of the children. But this correlation also became weaker between 1981 and 2008.

Women in the 1980ies were more likely than men to believe that parents should sacrifice their own interests for the children.; these gender differences became insignificant in the 2000.

Compared to the younger generation, baby boomers born between 1946 and 1964 are less likely to sacrifice their own autonomy for that of their children.

Interestingly, education, income and social status cannot explain different opinions to these questions. It also makes no difference if people are married or not.

Nowadays, the primacy of children is a common shared value.

What does this mean for policy?

The authors conclude that a child-centered policy, as promoted nowadays in Europe, will be in accordance with the values of the population. Thus, policies which promote parenting-support programs are not only accepted but seem to be welcome for the parents, helping them assume their role.

Source: Ivan, Georgiana; Da Roit, Barbara & Knijn Trudie 2015. Children First? Changing Attitudes Toward the Primacy of Children in Five European Countries. *Journal of Family Issues*, Vol. 36(14), 1982 – 2001.  
<http://jfi.sagepub.com/content/36/14/1982.abstract>

## 4 Generations

Today, the typical form of the family is the bean-pole family: Three or even four generations live at the same time. This never occurred in history before. And the generations have better relations than they had in the sixties of the 20ieth century. The posts in this chapter deal with those issues.

You will learn:

- about social and geographical distance between generation
- about mutual help.

## 4.1 Distance matters for family gatherings

Let's start with a fictional dialogue:

He: We shall meet Aunt Augusta.

She: We haven't seen her for a while. We seldom meet.

He: So shall we?

She: Well yes, but it takes an hour to go to her place.

H.: And we first have to take the bus, then the train, then the metro, then walk five minutes.

She: Why not take the car.

He: We won't find parking space or have to place it in an expensive parking lot, and then we will have to walk anyway, as there is no parking lot nearby.

She: We could take the car to the train station instead of the bus.

He: Hmm, yes we could. It's complicated still.

She: Let's call her - and have a quiet day at home.

To meet is less a matter of geographical distance as much more a matter of time and comfort.

Regardless how many kilometers you are distant from your friends, parents, grandparents or aunts, the time it would take to reach them matters. Experience shows: Fifteen minutes or less are great: you meet frequently. If it takes 30 minutes it is acceptable too, though the frequency of meetings drops. When it takes longer than thirty minutes you have a good chance that Christmas or Thanksgiving meetings will be the only occasion you meet. It does not matter if you go by foot, bicycle, by car or by public transportation.

Comfort matters too. If riding one metro line leads you to your destination that is fine, changing once acceptable, but if you have to use several kinds of transportation, it lets you think twice to take the ride.

If you have to take to aunt Augusta the car to the train, the train to the city, the metro within the city and walk the last five minutes, then you will meet aunt Augusta likely only one time in a year, though she is a beloved aunt: at Christmas or Thanksgiving, or Chinese New Year or at the end of the Ramadan - whenever your culture celebrates a family gathering mostly.

How many family members or friends have you met at Christmas time, whom you don't see within during the year because they are uncomfortable to reach?

## 4.2 Norms or values: What causes estrangement between mothers and adult children?

Nowadays, we observe a strong and rewarding relationship between children and their parents; the generational conflict such as the one seen in the sixties and seventies of the last century seems to have vanished. Nevertheless, the quality of relationships can suffer under tensions caused by different values and norms. A study in the US state of Massachusetts researched mother-child dyads and looked more intensively at 64 mothers who reported estrangement from at least one of their children. The authors defined the relationship as estranged when mothers reported on having no contact with the child – either face-to-face or via telephone – in the last month, or having contact of any type but less than once a month.



Do norms or values matter? To answer this, the researchers used following indicators for measurement: The similarity of values was measured by asking the mothers to describe to which degree was their children's global outlook similar to their own. Norm violation was measured by looking at the children's problems with drinking or drugs and with the law in adulthood. No major crimes occurred in the sample.

Though the authors controlled for family size, race and depression, no significant correlation between these indicators and estrangement was found.

Only one indicator on the mothers' side showed significant results: married mothers were less likely to have one estranged child than widowed or single mothers.

The remarkable overall result was that values did have influence, whilst the norms did not: When there was a strong dissimilarity between mothers' global outlooks to those of their adult children estrangement was likely to occur, whereas no such correlation was found in the dissimilarity of norms accepted by the mothers and those accepted by their adult children.

This qualitative study allowed the researchers to look deeper into the correlation. Mothers explicitly placed higher importance to their values and less to societal norms, and tolerated a violation of norms as long as the values were similar. Fathers' relationships to their adult children was not under study in this research.

What do the results mean?

In my opinion the results are very much "american" in the sense that the dominance of values over societal norms might occur in a rather individualistic and pluralistic society where the single person counts more than the society as a whole. I doubt that in collective societies as in, for instance, the Chinese society, the results would be the same.

Qualitative interviews also show that religious values were often very important to the mothers: This fact is likely to be found in a less secularized society such as the United States where religion plays a more important role than in, for instance, Europe. We should therefore avoid generalization of the results and their application across the world.

A further explanation more related to sociological theory can also be offered: We always observe a gap between the values and the norms, and although we usually assume that people behave according to their values, this is not true. People sometimes express opinions without following them in everyday behavior. One example within family sociology can be offered, namely that although there is a great prevalence of fathers participating equally in parenthood activities in Europe, the practice still shows a discrepancy.

Although limited to a specific society, the study shows that emotional relations, a consensus view of reality and a very diffuse but consistent feeling of belonging matter more than deeds.

Source: *Estrangement Between Mothers and Adult Children: The Role of Norms and Values*  
Gilligan, Megan; Suito, J. Jill & Pillemer, Karl.  
*Journal of Marriage and Family* 77, 908 – 920.

### 4.3 Mutual help across generations.

Today's family is a beanpole family, a multigenerational family. Never in the history of mankind have so many generations lived simultaneously.

Though co-residence hardly exists any more, contacts and solidarity prevail. A study by Dykstra et al. (2011) identified four different types of help based on data from the European SHARE project.

These four types of help are as follows:

The first type is where help goes from parents to children in what the authors called descending familialism. Out of the eleven European countries under research, descending familialism was found present in around a third of the countries.

The second type titled ascending familialism, which goes from children to parents, varies starkly across Europe. In Sweden, for example, it was found to exist in 19 percent of the cases, and in Spain in as many as 44 percent of the cases. It can roughly be said that ascending familialism is high in the south of Europe and low in the north.

The third type of help has been named autonomous, and it describes the situation where family members belonging to different generations are not living geographically near one another, are not obliged to family norms and have few support exchanges. In the European average, a third of all family contacts fall in this category, with the lowest reaching 19 percent in Greece and the highest 45 percent in France.

The fourth type is named supportive-at-distance, and it describes the type of help where people do not live nearby but have frequent contact with one another and maintain that their contact is not based on obligatory family norms only. On average, only 7 percent of all families falls in this category.

What do these results mean?

First of all, we can confirm that structure matters: Availability of contact makes it more likely to take place, whereas with distance such contact becomes less likely as does, in turn, mutual help. Secondly, there are different positions as regards family norms: Most of those who live near one another feel an obligation to help. Therefore, when families live at a distance the obligation to help loses strength.

This is said to change in future if we take into account the increasing importance of the Internet. Though help cannot be provided physically through WhatsApp or Skype, Facebook or Twitter, or any social media that will appear, families can nevertheless communicate. It is also true that Internet communication does not provide the quality of a meeting face to face, but one can still exchange information about everyday life, discuss matters, share insights and chat.

The Internet will change family communication even more than it has already. Just take one example: In the time of landline telephones, any household member could lift the receiver and call the family. Nowadays, in the time of the cell phone, we all call the actual person we wish: mothers or fathers, for instance.

For those unable to meet, the Internet is a useful tool that will bring families closer together across borders and, in case of migration, it is said to become even more important than it already is.

Source: Dykstra, P. A., & Fokkema, T. (2011). Relationships between parents and their adult children: A West European typology of late-life families. *Ageing & Society*, 31, 545-569

#### 4.4 Norms of filial obligation do not necessarily serve to support ageing parents

There might be a worldwide agreement that children are obliged to provide care to their elderly parents. However, the manner in which this value manifests itself is rather diverse in different countries.

Researchers analyzed the circumstances in which the financial, emotional or instrumental help is given to the parents by their children across European countries. The study used data from the generations and gender surveys conducted in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Georgia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Russia, France and Norway.

Though in the Western European countries of France and Norway the level of filial obligation is lower compared to the Eastern European countries, this does not translate to more or less help for the elderly from their children.

The results are as follows:

Eleven percent of those questioned in Romania offer emotional support compared to 31 percent in Norway.

Instrumental help is given in case of concrete need when parents are not able to carry out their everyday activities independently.

Financial help is the type of support the least given to the elderly. There is no clear distinction between the East and the West: on both sides, less than 5 per cent of support is afforded.

Many daughters offer instrumental and emotional support in all countries, whereas there is no gender difference in the financial support given.

Since higher education level means higher income, there is more likelihood that financial support is provided in those families in which children have higher education.

What does this mean?

All in all, while filial obligations as a norm are stronger in Central and Eastern European countries than in Western European ones, such as France and Norway, the level of support is sometimes higher in Western European countries than in Central and Eastern. This means, as the authors conclude, that the welfare state only provides a support measure additional to the one already provided by the children.

Filial obligations therefore correlate with the support but not in an easy way and not in every country in the same way. While in France and Norway emotional support has a higher prevalence than in the Eastern European countries, there is no evidence that this support is connected to filial obligations. It seems rather to be a matter of give-and-take, which very much depends on the personal relations of family members.

Instrumental help is more likely to be provided by adult children if there is less support from the welfare state and it also correlates with the filial obligations in the Eastern European countries. Financial support is provided to the parents when there is no other solution.

The general conclusion is that the level of help is not higher when the children feel traditionally obliged to help their parents. Instead, help is given if needed, and in the Western states it is additional to the help provided by the welfare state.

One would not be wrong in assuming that the socially oriented labour market regulations and the welfare state measures help children to support their parents rather than impair the support to the parents.

Therefore, the better the welfare state is organized, the more the children are able to support their parents in addition to the support provided by the welfare state.

Mureşan, Cornelia and Hărăguş, Paul-Teodor 2015. Norms of filial obligation and actual support to parents in Central and Eastern Europe. *Romanian Journal of Population Studies* (2015), IX (2): 49 – 81.  
<http://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=303298>

## 5 Equality

Equality of men and women in being parents is an essential value policy follows. Equality is not reached really, and maybe it will never be reached. Some processes hinder gender equality in the work sphere, as well as in the values – which you might see from the article on fathers' day cards. A lot of processes might enforce equality in the long run, especially education.

What I will deal with is:

- about distribution of housework
- the impact of economy and values
- the impact of education.

### 5.1 Division of housework between couples in Europe

The equal distribution of housework is - as we all know - not equal.

A study by Susanne Fahlen sheds light on the situation in Europe: She compares different income types of couples in 20 European countries with data from the European Social Survey in 2010/2011 and distinguishes between dual career and dual-earner couples, male or female career or earner couples, and single male or female career or earner couples. The study does not include childcare or leisure activities. According to the International Standard Classification of Occupations, to earn money from a career means to be in a managerial or professional position. Housework means cooking, washing, cleaning, caring for clothes, shopping and maintenance of property.

The results of the study show that the average hours required for housework where either both partners are in a career position or only one amount to 23, whilst with other types of couples named above these, hours amount to 30. In all types, men contribute on average eight hours to housework. Two extremes were found: if the man is the single earner (not in career position) the woman spends 30 hours on housework, with the man contributing only seven hours, while in the female single-earner couples the closest equal distribution went along the lines of roughly 17 hours of housework being carried out by the woman and 13 hours by the man.

The results show as follows:

Men's contribution to housework is around a third of all the required hours. Couples share housework more equally when both are earning and when at least one earner is in a career position. Higher income reduces the gender gap in carrying out housework.

More equality in the distribution of housework is due to a reduction of hours dedicated to housework by women rather than it is to an increase of hours dedicated to housework by men. In countries with more elaborate policy on combining family and work the distribution is more equal than in countries without such policy.

These results answer the question of "What is the situation today in terms of gender equality and sharing of housework?". They do not answer the questions such as "How come?"; "What lead to the concrete distribution?"; "How did the couple negotiate?"; or "Was there any negotiation at all, or did the division simply 'happen'?".

I encourage the reader to do an exercise: For one week look at the distribution of housework in your partnership and reflect on how it came to it. What did you as a couple do to get to this point? Did it just happen? Were there negotiations? What needs to happen if it should change?

Source: Working paper 48(2015) of FamiliesAndSocieties: Gender equality within dual-earner and dual-career couples across different policy regimes and norm systems in Europe. By Susanne Fahlén / [http://www.familiesandsocieties.eu/?page\\_id=3558](http://www.familiesandsocieties.eu/?page_id=3558))

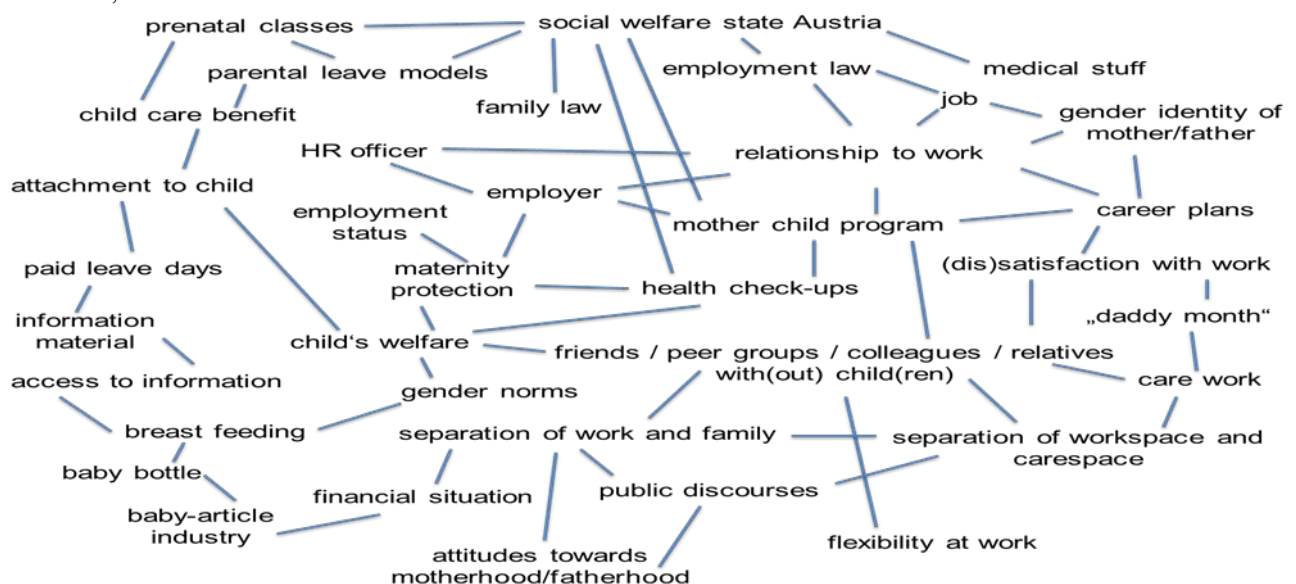
## 5.2 “Parenthood” – The Making of.

Guest blog post by Irene Rieder and Eva-Maria Schmidt

Worldwide, every second 2,6 babies see the light of day. Some of these babies help to transform their producers into first-time parents, a transition which involves specific gendered imaginings and manifestations. As a group of family sociologists at the University of Vienna, we are currently looking behind the scenes of these gendered practices and processes at the transition to parenthood in order to shed more light on the (in)equalities between mothers(-to-be) and fathers(-to-be). Against the backdrop of sociological research revealing a (re-)traditionalization of family roles after the birth of the first child, we ask: How does this happen?

Within this project we explain the practices which women and men are part of during the transition to parenthood. We focus on particular circumstances that support or prevent gender inequality during this transition. Furthermore, we are interested in the involvement of mothers(-to-be) and fathers(-to-be) in all upcoming tasks and responsibilities concerning pregnancy- and child-related care work. Based on practice theory, we want to know more about the making of parenthood: How are parents made and figured within the transition to parenthood? How do they transform from being a couple to being (gendered) parents? What are becoming mothers and fathers doing at the transition to parenthood? Which participants are entangled within the process of becoming a parent?

Parents are produced through the manifold assemblages they are embedded in. At the transition to parenthood women and men are entangled with a variety of other participants in activities, as shown below:



As one piece of the puzzle, the Austrian parental leave models ([http://www.leavenetwork.org/fileadmin/Leavenetwork/Country\\_notes/2015/austria.pm.pdf](http://www.leavenetwork.org/fileadmin/Leavenetwork/Country_notes/2015/austria.pm.pdf)) act as an important tool for creating the gendered division of labor between parents. Being embedded in very specific and situated processes with entangled parts/participants like other human subjects, social environments, discourses, non-human objects, structures, bodies,

norms and thoughts, it has the potential to become a tool to divide unpaid and paid work equally between the mother and father or to divide it in an unequal way. Therefore, the question of whether a certain structure increases or alleviates inequality within parents' division of labor cannot be answered without taking numerous other processes and assemblages into consideration. All parts of the assemblages can be seen as small cogs in a big machinery which drive equality and inequality.

Dear reader, now we want to invite you to think about and reflect on the making of parenthood:

- When does the transition to parenthood start, and when does it end?
- At what point can we say: this is a mother or this is a father, e.g. when we see them with their new born child?
- When are they addressed by others as father and mother, be it their friends, their neighbors, be it at the doctor's or the welfare office?
- How can it happen that women and men do different tasks within this process?
- How different is becoming a mother from becoming a father, or does each just becomes a parent?

What would be your answers? Please share with us your experiences and knowledge! We are very interested in your associations and reflections on this topic!

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### 5.3 Are equal couples happier?

A well-known proverb claims that birds of a feather stick together. Perhaps this is so. But does similarity in a partnership lead to more satisfaction with life and in the relationship? A study in the Netherlands addressed precisely this question, looking at similarities in the socioeconomic domain and in what the authors called "companionate" domain relating both to life satisfaction and satisfaction in a partnership.

Similarity in the socioeconomic domain was measured by income and working hours. For the companionate domain the authors used indicators of similarity in the opinions on gender roles. For example, firstly a statement was offered with a 1 to 5 scaled-answer ( from "agree" to "disagree") option reading as follows: "It is unnatural for men to be supervised or managed at work by women." Secondly, as regards family support, using statements such as: "Family members should be ready to support one another even if they do not like each other." Finally, opinions on traditionalism with gradual acceptance of statements such as: "Men and women are allowed to live together outside of marriage." It was not the individual answer that was of interest here but rather the grade of difference between the partners.

General questions about satisfaction with life and happiness within the relationship were used to define the level of satisfaction in life and in the relationship.

Returning to the proverb mentioned above, it is interesting to state that the results support it in principle, but provided further details:

General satisfaction in life and relationship satisfaction are strongly correlated but do not overlap totally.

Women showed less satisfaction in the relationship than men did, whereas this difference did not appear in life satisfaction.

More dissimilarity in the socioeconomic field leads to lower life satisfaction with both men and women.

Differences in the companionate domains on gender roles and family support did not affect happiness levels in a relationship, whereas these could be measured in the field of traditionalism.

When men showed less traditionalism and women showed more, their happiness levels increased.

What do these results mean?

Does similarity between partners make them happier?

At present one can only be certain about the impact of similarity and dissimilarity on life satisfaction in the economic domain. Satisfaction in relationships, though overlapping with life satisfaction, shows some peculiarities. Besides the fact that women are less satisfied with their relationships than men, different values as measured do not affect happiness in the relationship. Do values not matter?

The weak influence of values in this study can be explained by the fact that values do not automatically equate to behavior. Even if one does not approve of the notion that women and men are allowed to live together outside marriage, parents might not object if their son or daughter does so.

Values referring to a collectivity might not predict behavior of a specific person in a specific situation; consequently, to find causes for satisfaction we should rather look at everyday behavior than at approval of general statements.

Source: Are "Equals" Happier Than "Less Equals"? A Couple Analysis of Similarity and Well-being  
Renske Keizer and Aafke Komter In: *Journal of Marriage and Family* 77 (August 2015): 954–967  
DOI:10.1111/jomf.12194

## 5.4 Father's day cards

How traditional are Father's Day cards?

How delighted, do you think, would a "new" father be upon receiving a Father's Day card thanking him for being the breadwinner, praising him as a great, powerful man? Or do you believe he would prefer being addressed as an emotional, caring and loving parent? There is a big chance that, even if the father wishes to be praised as an emotionally oriented parent, he will most likely receive cards highlighting the traditional breadwinner role, whilst the loving, caring role is usually reserved for mothers.

A study published in the *Journal of Family Issues* revealed significant differences in Mother's Day and Father's Day greeting cards. A total of 442 cards on the Hallmark website consisting of 259 Mother's Day and 183 Father's Day cards in the English language were analyzed.

The following are some of the results of the study:

81 percent of Mother's Day cards highlighted that she made the child feel loved, whereas this was true for only 19 percent of Father's Day cards.

89 percent of the cards saying that the sender was "grateful for the recipient" were Mother's Day cards and only 11 percent were Father's Day cards.

Mothers rather than fathers seem to bring "joy, smiles and laughter" to the sender and "make people happy" as indicated by 75 percent of cards intended for mothers.

Father's Day cards praised him for being the breadwinner or a great man.

”Teaching children lessons for the future“ is seen as a quality of fathers as shown by 87 percent of the cards addressed to fathers.

80 percent of humorous cards specifically related to Father’s Day and only about 20 percent to Mother’s Day.

The study also observed objects and pictures depicted on Father’s Day and Mother’s Day cards finding that:

Flowers are for mothers, with only 8 percent of Father’s Day cards being designed with flowers.

Kitchen scenes, laundry, female clothing and children’s artwork were on Mother’s Day cards only.

Father’s Day cards generally displayed tools, scenes of hunting and fishing, cars, crowns, bedtime scenes, toys and grilling.

Fathers are also shown watching television and sitting in an easy chair indicating exemption from engaging in domestic labor.

Color is another distinguishing factor looked at by the study which found that:

Pastel tones are typically for Mother’s Day cards.

Pink and white are predominantly on Mother’s Day cards; green and brown on Father’s Day cards.

In summary, being a strong, great man, a breadwinner who teaches children life lessons were epithets intended for fathers, whereas emotional expressions, caring, making the family happy and the children feeling loved were attributes addressed to mothers.

Is this fine so far?

The roots of traditional roles reach deep, and one cannot blame companies for creating products which reproduce traditional gender roles. If these products did not sell, they would not be produced.

Nobody expects greeting cards to be revolutionary, but they are also not helpful in supporting gender equality. Which Father’s Day card will you give?

Source: Auster, Carol J. & Auster-Gussman, Lisa A. 2016. Contemporary Mother’s Day and Father’s Day Greeting Cards: A Reflection of Traditional Ideologies of Motherhood and Fatherhood?. *Journal of Family Issues*, Vol. 37(9), 1294 – 1326. <http://jfi.sagepub.com/content/early/2014/05/06/0192513X14528711.abstract>

## 5.5 Time for each other

What prevents partners from spending time exclusively with one another: Work? Children? Let us look at the results reported in a recently published study in the US.

In a recent study the authors analyzed data from the American Time Use survey carried out between 2003 and 2010 looking at the exclusive time married couples shared with each other. Diary entries showed how much time during the week was spent on chores, paid work and exclusively for the partner.

The overall results are as follows:



Concerning work arrangements: Whether both partners worked full-time or part-time, or whether one worked full-time while the other worked part-time had little impact on the exclusive time partners spent with one another.

This need not be surprising because if one partner is working she or he could not share this time with the other partner. There might be more household chores to carry out when both partners are working, resulting in less time available for themselves. However, time available to be spent together in a partnership where both partners are employed was not significantly lower than in those partnerships where only one partner works.

Children make a difference though: Parents spend much less time exclusively with one another than non-parents. Additionally, the age of the child matters: Parents with school-age children (between 6 and 17 years of age) spent the least amount of time exclusively with one another. The difference is even bigger when one distinguishes between weekdays and weekends, namely parents of children aged 6 to 9 spend 45 minutes less time exclusively with one another during weekdays and 75 minutes less on weekends than parents of children who are in other age groups.

A gender-specific perspective is also present in the amount of time partners spend exclusively with one another: Women report spending less time alone with their husbands than men with their wives.

Time spent exclusively with one another has consequences for partnership satisfaction: The more time couples spend together, the happier they are, feel less stress and experience more meaningfulness and well-being in their partnerships.

What does this mean?

employment has a lesser effect on the time partners spend exclusively with one another than does the presence of children. Since the amount of time spent with one another raises partnership satisfaction, a decline in this time reduces satisfaction within the partnership.

Is this an argument against children? Does it make sense? A family with children does not consist of the couple alone. To look only at partnership satisfaction and not at mother-child, father-child and parent-child relationships would provide an insufficiently clear picture of the social group.

To play off satisfaction in partnerships against satisfaction in families with children is an unreasonable comparison because different forms are compared: A family is not only the couple, and a couple is not a family. Therefore, it is no wonder that satisfaction has a different meaning in different forms. For instance, seen over the entire life course, married people are more satisfied with life than single people.

Source: Flood, Sarah M. & Genadek, Katie R. 2016. Time for Each Other: Work and Family Constraints Among Couples. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 78 (February 2016), 142 – 164.

## 5.6 Education matters - and changes power relations in partnership.

Whenever we face blurring dissimilarities, class structures breaking down, manifold lifestyles with fluid borders emerging, whenever differences cannot be measured any more in social science, one item still creates diversity globally: the difference in school education. It matters in private life, it matters in relationships, it matters in marriage.

*Disparities in education reverse.*

Today we face a radical shift in the disparity in education of men and women effecting partnerships.

There was a long history that men were higher educated than women. Women usually married upwards, a man with higher formal education. His status was transferred to her and in some countries like Austria she was called doctor or director if only her husband was. The household was stratified in the class system according to the status of the household member with the highest school education: the man. It did not affect the societal position of men if his wife had less school education. It was common.

In the last decades this changed gradually and now it is obvious in all countries in Europe: women have higher educational attainment than men. More women graduate from college than men do.

It started in the South of Europe. Portugal was among the first countries where more women enrolled in university than men. Then it spread all over Europe. The reason why it started in the South was simple: In the Southern European countries the breadwinner system prevails much more than in other parts: men are responsible for the financial well being of the family. The consequence: if they want to marry, they could not afford to study and disappear on the labor market, they had to look for a job. Values changed in favor of women, families sent their daughters to the universities. They were not made responsible for the income of the family, so they could afford to stay longer in the school system and study even less profitable subjects.

But education has a financial impact on partnership and this will change the power relations a study shows.

In most couples in the European countries both partners have the same educational level, but if they differ, it is more likely that women have higher educational level, exceptions found in Austria, Germany, Czech Republic and Romania. In consequence women contribute to the household income remarkably, less in countries with a strong breadwinner systems like Italy, Greece, Germany and Austria, more in the other countries.

Higher education, higher income

Higher education goes hand in hand with higher income. Women even if they have studied financially less attractive subjects become the breadwinner in the partnership if they have a college degree and their partner has none. They are increasingly likely to contribute more than half to the family income.

But the higher education of women is not followed by the reversal of the gender pay gap for two reasons: women study subjects with less future earnings than men and they suffer still from a „motherhood penalty“ as they are scaling down the paid labor market activity when having children.

Nevertheless, the roles in the breadwinner system are starting to change: women get the breadwinner position. This has impact on the power relations in partnerships, this will contribute to rethink the breadwinner system if predominant and it might contribute to more gender equality in the long run.

Source: Working paper 26(2015) of FamiliesAndSocieties. The reversal of the gender gap in education and female breadwinners in Europe. By Martin Klesment and Jan Van Bavel  
<http://www.familiesandsocieties.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/WP26KlesmentVanBavel.pdf>

## 6 Family Policy issues

The project FamiliesAndSocieties on which most of the posts in this collection refer too had one of the main goals to give advice to family policy. Thus a lot of work exists on the effectiveness and variety of policy measures.

You will learn

- about the effectiveness of policy measures
- about the diversity of policy measures
- about fathers' leave
- about the role of the economy
- about the interest of mothers and fathers.

## 6.1 On work family balance

Couples ask: „Shall we get children?“ „What about our future life“ „Can we stay in the job?“ The last question is especially substantial for women.

Combining work and family is the heart of any endeavor of people in partnership with children.

Will it be possible for both, father and mother, going to work? Will it be possible for both to stay at home when the child is sick or take parental leave within the first years? What with shopping? Will it be possible to go shopping after working hours? How long will the shops be opened? Are there enough child-care facilities?

Those are just a number of questions raised by parents.

When you ask people in different countries you will get different assessment for the combination of work and family. While people find it easy to combine work and family in the Scandinavian countries, in the middle of Europe it is experienced as more difficult, despite the fact that a lot of money is invested in childcare. A lot of it is due to values that accept more or less a working mother.

*Values and infrastructure matter.*

*The Values*

Are children better off if they stay at home, preferably with the mother or is it better for them to be in the cradle with others and later socialize in the kindergarten? Does a child need a mother at home in its first years?

In the European Social Survey in the first decade of the 21st century, only 14% of the Swedish were against the mother working if the child is below three, while in Germany, but also in the Netherlands nearly half of the population objected a working mother with a child of three, as Haas and Steiber described.

A mother in Sweden would probably be rather strangely looked at if she does not want to give her child as early as possible to the cradle. She would be seen as preventing the child from social contacts.

In contrast in Germany and Austria there is one opinion predominant: a baby needs the mother until the age of three. So mother should have possibilities to stay at home.

Value systems are very stable. And policy reacts on them.

*The infrastructure*

The infrastructure reflects the values in those countries. While Germany and Austria are well equipped with kindergartens for children from the age of three, offering cradles was not the first priority.

In the Scandinavian countries you have child-care institutions from the very beginning - as you had in former communist countries in Europe.

*And in the South?*

Family policy hardly exists there, because it was thought that the extended family cares for the child. The grandparents, mainly of course the grandmother is looking for the child, or the sister, the aunt, maybe even the neighbors. So there no state interventions and you will hear women saying they have no problem in combining work and family. The extended family takes care.

Infrastructure build by policy makers reflects the values predominant in a society. With a plurality of values policy has to find ways to serve different lifestyles.

Source: Nadia Steiber, Barbara Haas, Begrenzte Wahl – Gelegenheitsstrukturen und Erwerbsmuster in Paarhaushalten im europäischen Vergleich. In\_ Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie, June 2010, Vol 62. Pp 247-276

## 6.2 Staying at home: why not?

Making money, looking for a career, building a home, raising children - and always smiling and looking relaxed - that is what is asked from women and men in their late twenties and early thirties. It is the rush hour of life.

Why is it taken for granted that you should combine work and family? Why all this at once? Why should mothers or fathers not stay at home with their toddlers and children for several years? You will find a lot of advantages in that. Studies show that 30% of mothers in the United States would like to spend more time with their children - and I bet it is the same for European ones. (Data come from the PewResearch Center which studies Social&Demographic Trends in the US. <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org>) Even nearly half of the fathers complain to have too little time for their children. Mothers as well as fathers would have less stress if staying at home. They have more discretionary time. They do not suffer from double bind, being fully committed to payed work and family obligations. Family life is smoother. Not both, father and mother are stressed and overburdened with business and family duties. If they build a house the stay-at-home parent will have time to supervise the building site.

There are a lot of advantages for staying at home. Why does the majority don't vote for it? The fundamental issue is education. Higher educated people usually want to use what they have learned and be trained in. And society who spends money for higher education is interested in getting the costs back in using the education in employment. Higher education just for the sake of it, just for fun, is not the intention of our educational system.

Women are highly educated nowadays in Europe, more than men. From a societal point of view it would make no sense to put an enormous amount of money in the educational system and than tell people who graduated:

„Stay at home. Don't use the knowledge you gained in having a job.“ A person who stayed years in secondary education and than years at the university will generally think the same: „Now I learned quite a lot, I would like to apply it.“

But education is not the only explanation.

Our society commonly defines persons according to their position in the economic system. When you first meet people you want to know their job, you would not ask: „are you a mother or a father of a child below age 15?“ Despite the fact that doing the chores and educating children is a serious contribution to a societies well being and survival, this tasks are not seen as profession. They earn no income.

To be mother or father is considered a matter of private life not a public issue. If you want to have a position in society, if you want to be accepted as a full contributing member you have to be in the working force, even more, you have to work hard for a career.

Earning income, struggling for a higher position in the firm, building a comfortable house for the family, raising children - two would be favorable - no wonder you are stressed and in danger of burning out.

Does it have to be necessarily so?

Let us try to think differently: what, if the economic system with its goals would not be the predominant one? What if there is no discussion that if you enter education you do this for a job or just for your interest, for knowledge, for self-development? What if we turn the

situation upside down: private life matters not job position? What if the first question when you meet people would be: „Are you a mother?“ „Are you a father?“ instead of „What job do you have?“

We have such a long time today in our life course; life expectancy is up to the nineties in western societies, why do we have to do everything within a small period and can not spread it over the lifetime? We could - if we want to.

### 6.3 Avoiding the rush hour of life

Never in the history of mankind humans lived as long as today.

The family time shrank from about a third of a mother's lifespan to nearly a fifth in western societies. (Family time measured by the time to the fifteenth birthday of the youngest child). Some typical facts, similar in all western societies:

In 1900 in Germany a mother survived her fifteen-year-old child for 15 years, today she will have another 35 years ahead of her. The difference is not only due to the life expectancy which is 12 years higher now than a hundred years ago, it is due to the fact that the last child today is born by women in their early thirties and a century ago in the second half of their thirties.

The timespan when children are born is smaller than it was a hundred years ago: plausible as today in average one to two children are born to a family, hundred years ago it were twice as much if not more.

Life expectancy is roughly above eighty for woman and below eighty for man. That are in average one and a half decade more to live than a hundred years ago.

The family phase from the birth of the first child to the age of 15 of the last child shrank from 25 years and more to about 15 years or less.

That is: 15 years in family with underaged children, 35 years further to go.

And everything occur to mothers in the family phase when the children are born and raised: finalizing education, getting a job, making a career, caring for the household, caring for children, moving to a new settlement - all together in a few years.

While we would have so much time in life for all these tasks.

Hardly anyone wants to draw the wheel back to the situation in the sixties of the twentieth century where the income of the father was sufficient to raise a family - and brought financial dependency to the mother.

Today father and mother are usually working and cradles and kindergarten provide support. But as many as there are, they can never fully meet the needs. Family support networks are still necessary. Grandparents to care for the children on school-free days, when they are sick or the parents have late working hours.

To put everything into few years of an eighty-year long life course seems irrational.

Nevertheless, still it is practiced. It would make more sense to find a solution of the problem not only in trying to ease the overburden in the few years of child raising, we need a solution taking into account the whole life span, we need life course oriented policy.

What if we leave the focus on the family phase and overlook the whole life course? Why should it not be possible to let phases of education, work and family alternate each other rather than falling together? Why should you not return to college in your late thirties, and starting a new career for another twenty to thirty years? Models of sabbaticals, providing educational leave and ensuring an entrance to a working career in older age are necessary.

Though in some countries measures were set partially for that we would need an overall strategy to disentangle the family phase, to provide a follow up rather than having all together. We should develop models where education, working career and family alternate in succession in a life course. This needs a significant change especially in the economic system.

Family Policy measures are based on the foregone industrial society with breadwinner system and 9 to 5 working hours. Work situation aims now at 24 hours availability and women with higher education get breadwinners in the families.

We need a confirmative action of civil society, state and economy to work to for adequate family and work balance – over the whole life course.

Source: Hans Bertram, Carolin Deuflhard, *Die überforderte Generation*. Verlag Barbara Budrich, Opladen 2015.

## 6.4 The dilemma of family policy

I do not envy politicians who are commissioned to take care for families. Their efforts seem to have little effect on the well-being of families, as the social data expenditures database from OECD suggests assembled by Hans Bertram (Hans Bertram, Carolin Deuflhard, *Die überforderte Generation*. 2015).

Taken a glance on the public spending for families in percentages of the GNP the picture is manifold and frustrating. You cannot predict the risk of poverty, the well-being of the family, the well-being of the children by the amount of public spending from the governments.

The OECD database measures three kinds of expenditures: direct money transfer, infrastructure, which means equipment with child care institutions and tax exemptions. In average the OECD countries spend 2,6% of the GNP for families - the differences between countries are enormous. Korea is on the lowest side with 1% expenditures while Ireland on the upper side with 4,3% expenditures, slightly more than Great Britain with about 4,2%. In the range of 3,5% to 4% you will find Island, Denmark, Sweden, Hungary, New Zealand, Belgium, Norway, Finland and Germany. On the lowest end of 1,5% to 1% you will find Japan, Chile, Switzerland, USA (1,2%) Mexico and Korea.

High and low percentage for family expenditures are to be found in very different states with very different economic situation, with very different child poverty risk, with different fertility rates or with different women employment rates.

Moreover, the mixture of the measures differs. While Ireland gives 3,2% of the GNP as direct financial transfers, Great Britain spends a little less than 2,5%. While Ireland spends about 0,7% for Infrastructure and 0,15% in tax exemptions, Great Britain spends roughly 1,25% on Infrastructure and 0,45% with the exemptions.

The Northern European countries as there are Denmark, Sweden, Island and Finland spend more than the half of their family expenditures to infrastructure and show no tax exemptions at all.

It is a very diverse picture which does not uncover a master strategy. Liberal states like the USA and Great Britain differ widely in how much they spend on families. Welfare States for which the northern European states are typical seem to count on infrastructure to support the family, but so do Chile or Greece and Mexico, with generally very small expenditures of the GNP. France with a comparatively high fertility rate provides a mixture with a little bit more putting in infrastructure than in financial transfers and a small amount in tax expenditures.

A confusing picture. Without getting into more detail in the data, we can see these family expenditures don't relate with women's participation in the labour force. It does not have impact on fertility either, as USA has a higher fertility rate with lower expenditures than Sweden. Not all liberal countries place emphasis on private and civil society issues, as USA does, Great Britain as a liberal state gives a bigger amount to infrastructure than Germany with its social welfare system.

What does this mean?

We know that more money for families does not lead to more children or a more satisfying work-life balance. Now we can say that also more infrastructure does not lead to more children in any case. And infrastructure has to be supplemented by social networks.

What are the consequences? I think: comparison does not really help, it shows no best practice strategy, many things can work, depending on the historical and economic situation of the country, and, obviously, a lot of things – like money or even infrastructure does not necessarily work in the intended way.

Concentrating on the specific possibilities in your country, will open much more a field of possibilities than looking at other countries. No country is an ideal. Don't try to catch up with the political Miller's in other countries- Focus on a specific situation in your country.

## 6.5 How parents acquire managerial skills

Every parent has been faced with various situations involving their children: during the early years, parents take their children to the kindergarten and to school, accompany them to a football match or to gymnastics and music classes. Later in life, when their children feel nearly grown up, but are not, receiving a phone call in the early hours of the morning to fetch them from a nightclub becomes somewhat usual for the parent.

A report of the FamiliesAndSocieties project looked at the studies and asked experts in Germany, Hungary, Italy, Slovenia, Sweden and the UK about how parents make use of, and benefit from, specific childcare forms.

Besides formal structures such as kindergartens and schools, existing parental leave systems, cultural values and norms, it is worthwhile looking specifically at the way the parents deal with space and time constraints. The distance, for instance, between family home and the school or the playground, between work and the post office or supermarket and their opening hours, drop off and pick up times all structure the day, requiring parents to develop strategies for overcoming such space and time constraints.

The first reaction is to change the working schedule or to reduce working hours, though these are not the only measures required nor are they sufficient by themselves: family networks and informal care arrangements were considered an additional necessity in all of the countries researched. Firstly, the grandparents often ease the pressure of time constraints as do older siblings caring for the younger ones.

Local market providers, neighborhood organizations for exchange of services, child minders, au pairs, private civil society networks, often organized around local church, are all used by parents in order to manage the challenges of time and space constraints.

The need to be in a certain place at a certain time requires excellent organizational skills, and it trains logistic of organizing arrangements.

Everyone with children or grandchildren experiences dependency on informal local neighborhood structures and on individual adapted solutions.

What are the consequences of this for family support?

First of all, formal institutional structures cannot serve all the necessities of family care: social networks and local informal neighborhood organizations are an additional necessity. Filing systems and computer applications help organize the family further.

One of the strategies for family policy must therefore be to allow these local structures to function. One issue would be to de-bureaucratize as much as possible the engagement of daycare mothers or au pair providers. Giving thoughts to synchronizing formal and informal structures should be the focus of family policy.

But even more important would be to draw the attention of the employer: parents, especially mothers, develop enormous managerial skills in coordinating children, work and family life. An economic structure which does not take advantage of this would not sufficiently consider its core element: the costs. Therefore, employers should ask questions such as: What are the costs of offering training on such organizational and managerial skills in specific courses? What would one-year leave for further education in social competences and skills cost if it were to be paid by the firm? Parental leave is very much intensive training in managerial and organizational competences, which employers should take advantage of.

Source:

Report on incentive structures of parents' use of particular childcare forms

Alison Koslowski, Caitlin McLean and Ingela Naumann (University of Edinburgh)

<http://www.familiesandsocieties.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/WP35KoslowskiEtAl2015.pdf>

## 6.6 Different family policies - unclear effects

Family policies usually have two goals: to provide the best infrastructure for people to "have as many children as they desire and to balance work and family life". This affects the working environment, it structures care provisions within families and targets poverty in (and of) families as well.

While these general goals are consensual in society, they have to be broken down to individual needs. The pluralization of lifestyle does not make the task easier.

Welfare states provide a mix of services: The policies integrate parental leave systems, cash benefits as financial transfers and childcare institutions. Regions in Europe differ in emphasis they lay on measures in these areas. While in the Nordic countries providing childcare services is a clear priority, UK is rather generous in its financial support. Continental countries mostly offer a mix of services, with emphasis on family care during the first three years. Southern European countries have in all cases rather limited policies. There is no amount and no combination of measures which can be said to be optimal.

The following is information on some relevant data: With 4.2% GDP spent on public expenditure for family support, Great Britain is, after Ireland, the highest-ranking in Europe according to the OECD data in 2009. Germany spends about 3.2%, Sweden 3.8% and Denmark 3.9%. Most of the money in the northern countries is invested in infrastructure, with no investments being made to tax reduction, while in Great Britain direct tax transfers dominate. Childcare services might have an impact on fertility, but not worldwide: The USA has very low expenditure and a high fertility rate; the same is true for Poland and Switzerland as well.

There seems to be no evidence that providing childcare services automatically leads to higher fertility. Sometimes experts find that cash transfers and coverage of childcare services for children under the age of 3 have measurable influence on fertility, whereas the number of paid weeks of leave at birth has a much lower impact.

Looking at the data we find an essential problem of family policy: Data helps, but it is unclear which measure has what impact on which situation: Fertility? Employment? Not to speak of the well-being of parents and children. There is no determining relation between family policy measures and the outcome.



All these measures are focused on married couples, while cohabiting couples are treated differently, if at all, in most countries. This makes a difference. A special group at risk are still single parents, though welfare regimes provide measures for help.

What does this mean?

Family policies are national policies based on experiences, traditions and living habits in different countries. What works in one country cannot easily be transferred to another with the same impact. European Union as a body has little influence on family policy and introducing common measures may well result in failure. What the EU can do is to take measures on the social policy front: One of the most essential issues would most likely be to lower the gender pay gap and promote working conditions favorable for families.

What do you think should happen in your country in order to let family policies contribute to a society for people with equal life chances?

Sources: Luci-Greulich, A. & Thévenon, O. *Eur J Population* (2013) 29: 387. doi:10.1007/s10680-013-9295-4; Hans Bertram, Carolin Deuflhard, *Die überforderte Generation*. Verlag Barbara Budrich, Opladen 2015.

## 6.7 When are family policies effective?

It is not easy to say when family policy is effective. What first comes to mind is the question of fertility, meaning that family policy can be deemed effective when it is possible to have fertility rates at a level that comes sufficiently near to ensure the reproduction of society. A more flexible view would be to deem family policies effective when they allow a person to have as many children as he or she wishes to have.

However, there are other issues at stake: Mothers should have the possibility to go to work; equal distribution of household chores should be advanced; and fathers should be encouraged to participate in childcare.

Anne Gauthier introduced different models in welfare states already 1996, namely:

The pro-natalist model aims at higher fertility;

The pro-traditional model aims to ensure the survival of traditional family. Usually family has to be the supporting unit, and when family policy is rooted in this model we find little infrastructure and not sufficient childcare provisions;

The pro-egalitarian model aims to achieve the work – family balance: A lot of support is given by the state to enable flexible return to work and the receipt of cash benefits by the family be it that the parent is on parental leave or not; and

The pro-familial model that supports mainly the poorer families and has, as its goal, the solving of the problem of poverty. Apart from this, the pro-familial model leaves the rest of the responsibility to the traditional family.

Three areas are addressed in these models, namely economy, culture and society.

Nowadays economy has been granted priority: Central to this perspective is to make it possible for mothers to remain in employment and to offer the possibilities of combining work and family. Alongside this, measures are in place for the re-entry to the labor market and for the replacement of earnings. Addressing child poverty is more an indirect outcome of these kinds of policy measures because achieving an adequate income for the parents results in lowering the risk of child poverty.

Family policy also needs to address family values, the question of culture and of the role of mothers and fathers. Northern European countries are more individualistic, while southern

European countries emphasize family as a group and an entity. There are inevitably different views on the necessity of childcare institutions when, on the one hand, a child is embedded in family and, on the other, when focus is more on the realization of people's lifestyles even when they become parents. Value studies deliver the background to this perspective. The third field where family policy could be influential is the field of social norms that provide the rules and values on how to live. Social norms guide us on what we are to do if we wish to be a good mother or a good father: as a mother, we should stay at home at least for the first year, we should take care of finances as a good father in the breadwinner system. However, in other cultures you are a good mother when you give the child an early chance to socialize in childcare institutions such as kindergarten and to be responsible for the emotional well-being of children as a good father - and therefore stay at home.

Why does this differentiation between economy, society and culture make sense?

Working to ensure daily survival of the family (economy), staying in tune with societal rules and being integrated in community (society) and living and creating shared values (culture) are interdependent areas in life. Consequently, whenever we change the setting in one of these areas, it will have an impact on other areas. This is again due to the specific historical situation determining which of these systems gets priority. In our Western world, the economic system has priority. Following career plans, working full-time, gaining financial autonomy, etc. are all examples of the driving forces for family policy measures.

If we know that these systems are working together, we could also set other priorities and prioritise, for instance, the subjective well-being, which is not out of question: A former European project, the Family Platform (<http://www.familyplatform.eu>) raised this issue. Seeing as we have put a lot of effort in the economic perspective, future family policy in rich countries can and should focus on other issues.

Some questions that need to be discussed and answered should ask: How will family policy change if we prioritize the well-being in a society? How can family policies be made more effective? Finally, a fundamental question: What is a successful family policy? How would you answer?

Source: Gauthier, Anne Hélène (1996): *The State and the Family. A Comparative Analysis of Family Policies in Industrialized Countries*: Oxford.

## 6.8 Parental leave systems suggest specific behavior

Why do women in Sweden return to work soon after giving birth, while Austrian women stay at home at least one year after the birth, with some staying up to three years? Are women in Sweden more eager to return to work? Is this showing a more modern pattern, while staying at home shows a traditional one? Attempting to explain the differences in this way would mean to refer to values: Leaving it to values is tempting, it sounds plausible and because values are so vague they offer various possibilities for interpretation. The same is true for the very broad meaning of "traditional" or "modern". Values matter to a certain extent – they play a central role in the construction of the leave systems – but behavior of the parents is oriented towards the possibilities they have and on the opportunity structures. It is the structure of the parental leave system that really matters.

In its parental leave system, Sweden offers 480 days in total. This leave can be used in the first 18 months, though this is not strictly necessary as a certain part of it can also be used up later, namely 96 days of it can be used up after the child's fourth birthday (as regulated in 2014). Since most people know that school children often fall ill, and there are school

holidays lasting much longer than vacations offered by the employer in the economic world, it makes sense to save leave days for later. Consequently, mothers return to work rather early. In Austria (as far as 2016), parental leave had to be taken in one block after birth. It is generously long, paid (depending on the length), and with job security. It is up to three years if the partner also takes at least a fifth of the total of parental leave. Many families choose the three-year model. Austrian couples use as many months as they feel is adequate for them in one block since they have no other choice; days cannot be saved for school years, as it is possible in, for instance, Sweden. It therefore clearly follows that mothers in Austria return to work later than mothers in Sweden. And to explain this fact, we do not need to reflect on the value systems.

Comparing the countries we see that behavior is oriented towards the possibilities offered. The leave systems provide opportunity structures, which more or less prompt people to return to work. Whether the parents return sooner or later depends on the kind of work offered by the economy of the country and on the financial needs of the couple.

Gender is also an aspect in the structure of parental leave systems, which can be demonstrated by referring to the Austrian system though other systems incorporate gender issues. As mentioned above, Austria's model (in 2016) offers the possibility to benefit from the full leave time only when partners share the leave between them. For instance, if parents choose twelve months of parental leave, one partner would need to take at least two months; if 24 months is chosen, the division would need to be 20 months + 4 months. The law does not specify which part of the leave should be taken by the mother and which by the father. In addition, couples are free to share parental leave equally between them. However, for most readers it is probably not surprising that the father usually takes shorter periods of leave, amounting, as a rule, to a fifth of the leave of the mother. Without making explicit references to gender, the structure is built on gender inequality.

Parental leave systems – as shown by a study carried out within FamiliesAndSocieties by Olivier Thevenon and Ann-Zofie Duvander – provide opportunity structures that can promote the return to full or part-time work, contribute to gender equality, or hinder it.

In conclusion, looking at structures in place might be much more effective than to discuss value systems.

What do you think?

Source: Olivier Thevenon, Ann-Zofie Duvander: Leave policies for parents with young children. Pp 20-41. In WP7 of FamiliesAndSocieties: Family policies and diversity in Europe: The state-of-the-art regarding fertility, work, care, leave, laws and self-sufficiency. Edited by Olivier Thévenon and Gerda Neyer . 2014.

## 6.9 Is father's leave effective?

The intention to integrate fathers in child care and encourage them to take parental leave is a goal in many countries. It is, however, realized in different ways: as a "family right" where parents can personally choose how best to divide the leave between the father and the mother; as an individual right, which can be transferred to the other parent; and as a non-transferable individual right where parental leave both parents need to take is specified in the program. In Germany, Spain and France, for instance, both parents are allowed to take leave at the same time. In Austria and Belgium, on the other hand, parents can reap the benefits of parental leave only then when it is taken in separate blocks. In contrast to these two systems, parental leave in Hungary and Estonia, two other countries of the European Union, can even be transferred to non-parents such as grandparents.

The duration of parental leave appears to be one of the key differences in the leave systems of the countries of the European Union generally. In Europe, the length of leave has been

extended on average from 49 weeks in 1990 to 61 weeks in 2014, with paid months being extended from 30 to 37 weeks over the same period.

The variation between the countries is, however, substantial. Some countries, for example, grant specific leave for fathers: Austria, Slovenia, and the Nordic countries (except Denmark) are those with the longest leave for fathers, namely up to six months. Though most fathers complain about the short duration of their leave, in reality they generally take less than they are entitled to. Most of the time, the deciding factor are the finances.

What is the effect of fathers staying at home?

Presently, only the short-term effects are known: stronger emotional bond to the child or children and more equality in sharing household chores. Long-term effects relating to the life course of the child cannot easily be related casually to the parental leave system.

In the same way, it is not yet clear whether father's entitlement raises fertility levels, but it is assumed that if policy measures promote equal sharing of domestic tasks there is a better chance for women to realize their intentions to expand the family.

It is frustrating that we cannot find any evidence of the effectiveness of family policies; however, there is a solution: to obtain more knowledge about the decision-making process taking place between the parents. This knowledge should address not only how parents decide to have a child (where a lot of research already exists), but much more how minor issues in everyone's life influence the decision-making process. For example, what is the role played by the family and friends of the parents or the couple and what is the role of even housing possibilities? And what about imitation—do friends, neighbors and peers at work have children?

To know figures such as the fertility rate or the value system does matter—but the more you use data at the aggregate level, meaning the more you generalize on national level, the less you know about how individuals are driven in their actions in everyday lives.

In consequence, we need to carry out more studies as regards actions and interactions in everyday lives and have a better understanding of the couples and their decision-making processes so that we can better see what really matters.

<http://www.familiesandsocieties.eu/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/WP7ThevenonNeyer2014.pdf>

## 6.10 Career or balance between family and work: Young people's priorities

In 2013-2014 a total of 2,383 students from the universities of Nairobi, Iceland and the Complutense University of Madrid were asked if they would rank childcare ahead of their career and sacrifice their career if by not doing so family conflict could be expected.

The findings of the study are as follows: When people attribute high importance to childcare, they are most likely to sacrifice career for the family. In an environment with traditional values mothers usually quit their careers. The situation is different for men: Those with traditional values prefer to remain in the job and realize their career plans, presupposing that the role of the mother is to stay with the child. In contrast, the "new" fathers who primarily value their own involvement with the child are also ready to sacrifice their career for family. Further on, for both sexes the potential family conflict that could be caused by prioritizing career over childcare plays an important role: If it is expected, both men and women would prefer striking a balance between family and work over pursuing their careers.

When young adults demonstrated leadership aspirations, they preferred to follow a career path and strive towards job promotion, thus disregarding a work-family balance. In some cases, the mother of the student asked served as an example: Those students whose mothers worked 40 hours or more per week were less inclined to sacrifice the careers.

The following are the differences between the countries: Students in Kenya and Iceland showed more willingness to sacrifice their career compared to Spanish students. Unexpectedly, female students in Kenya reported higher career aspirations than those in Iceland and Spain. The possibilities in the labor market matter; thus, 52 percent of women in Iceland said that they would look for a part-time job after having a child, whereas in Spain it was only 41 percent. It was difficult to evaluate the differences in opinion between men and women in Kenya as sex did not always predict the intention. But generally, women are more inclined to sacrifice their careers than men. The crucial variable is the value of being involved in childcare: The more the male respondents see childcare as their responsibility, the more they are inclined to sacrifice their career in favor of a better family-work balance. Rather than allocating childcare as a male or female obligation, and determining its degree, it would be more adequate to see this as a general human responsibility. Gender differences are made by man.

Source: José Andrés Fernández-Cornejo, Lorenzo Escot, Jane Kabubo-Mariara, Bethuel Kinyanjui Kinuthia, Guðný Björk Eydal & Tómas Bjarnason. Gender differences in young adults' inclination to sacrifice career opportunities in the future for family reasons: comparative study with university students from Nairobi, Madrid, and Reykjavik. *Journal of Youth Studies* 2015.

## 6.11 How policies influence work-life balance

Family structure changed in the European Union over the last decades bringing the issue of work-life balance to the forefront. Changes such as an increase in the number of families where both parents are working, part-time or full-time, an increase in single-parent families, job mobility resulting in a greater distance from caring relatives such as grandparents, all contributed to making the reconciliation of work and family a primary issue.

Can policies influence work-life balance, and if so, in which way? Is there a direct correlation between policy measures and satisfaction with the reconciliation of work and family life?

A study answers the question on what contributes to work-life balance using data from the fifth wave of the European Working Conditions Survey collected in 2010. Twenty-five member states of the European Union were in the sample.

When we attempt to balance out work and life (by the way, is work not part of life?) the organization of time and of spatial flexibility are of core importance. Policy regimes (the manner in which issues are approached) differ considerably in Europe and are distinguished mainly by the flexibility they allow in working hours, autonomy of the employee in structuring one's own tasks during working hours and the allowance paid for unsocial working hours.

People experience unsocial working hours in the industry when they feel to be working only to increase investor's capital as profitably as possible or when employees working in the service sector are asked to meet customer demands at various times, night and day.

In contrast, social working hours are represented by high working time autonomy and employee-friendly flexibility, even if these entail working additional hours from home, meaning no set working hours and possibly higher work pressure.

Autonomy contributes most of all to a feeling that working hours fit well with family life and other social commitments. By contrast, long or unsocial working hours, feeling the pressure at work or working in multiple locations have negative impact on the work-life balance for both men and women.

Working hours had more impact on the work-life balance than spatial flexibility.

The most people-friendly working environment best supporting the work-life balance can be found in the Northern European states, which allow high working hours autonomy and flexibility.

In contrast, the lowest level of autonomy can be found in Lithuania, Slovakia, Latvia, Poland, Portugal and the UK, together with Ireland, Italy and Spain. These countries have the most unsocial working hours and offer the least favorable working position.

Differences within the country clusters allowed researchers to conclude that characteristics on the individual level may be more important than policy regimes.

However, the type of work organization does not simply correlate with employees' life satisfaction: Employees in the UK and in the South are more than twice as satisfied with their work-life balance than employees in Eastern European countries. Less astonishingly, people from the Northern Europe are twice as satisfied as those in the Eastern European countries.

What does this mean?

Autonomy and flexible working hours are central to work-life balance, but they are not the only means to increase life satisfaction. Looking at similar political strategies in different countries, the outcomes are different for the individual. It is not only the social policy but also culture, expectations and values which contribute to satisfaction levels with work and life.

Spatial flexibility, meaning working in different locations (e.g. homeworking) does not necessarily contribute to a better work-life balance.

Additional to policy regimes, local traditions, culture and the way in which we are accustomed to organizing our lives all influence our satisfaction with the work-life balance. This does not mean that family policy is not important, but rather that each policy needs to be adapted to the values, expectations and traditions of the people it is intended for. European policy makers need to be aware that there is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach.

Source:

Anttila, Timo; Oinas, Tomi; Tammelin, Mia & Nätti, Jouko 2015. Working-Time Regimes and Work-Life Balance in Europe. *European Sociological Review*, Vol. 31, No. 6, 713 – 724.  
<http://esr.oxfordjournals.org/content/early/2015/07/29/esr.jcv070.abstract>

## 6.12 Which income models are preferred in European countries?

Who should earn money and who should take care of the housework? Mother, father or both? And in which way?

Researchers followed the opinion on the desirable division of housework in five European countries: Denmark, Finland, Germany, Poland and Sweden, drawing on data from the International Social Survey Programme 2012 testing the opinion on parental leave and work division.

All over Europe, perhaps all over the world, women carry out the majority of unpaid work. However, in some countries the division between the sexes is less unequal than in others.

Not surprisingly and confirming knowledge, Swedes have the most positive attitude towards equal sharing of housework and care: 70 percent of those questioned expressed the opinion that fathers and mothers should share parental leave equally, in Poland about a third and in the other countries about a half.

Gender and age differences do not appear in all countries: in Denmark, Finland and Sweden we find that the young are more for equal work division than the elderly, whereas gender differences (women being more for equality) are significant in Finland and the west of Germany.

Education is also an influencing factor: higher educated people are more for equal sharing than the lower educated ones; however, significant differences supporting this opinion could be found only in the west of Germany and Sweden.

This has consequences on the division of paid work as well. The authors describe four models: Cluster 1: One-and-a-half earner model; Cluster 2: Male breadwinner/female homemaker model; Cluster 3: Full-time model; Cluster 4: Dual-earner/dual-carer model. Eighty percent of the Polish people favor the male breadwinner/female homemaker model. In the west of Germany, the most popular model is the one-and-a-half earner model, favored by 77 percent, whereas in Denmark, Finland and the east of Germany, the full-time model is the favored one.

Most support for the dual-earner/dual-career model can be found in Sweden (favored by 43 percent), followed by the one-and-a-half earner model.

Sweden has definitely the most equal division of gender concerning paid and unpaid work. Nevertheless, researchers identified two groups. One group favors the idea of equal work and care sharing and the other supports women to remain in paid work and continue providing care which is still her main task, whilst man should have economic responsibility and provide income for the family.

The west of Germany and Finland, both favoring the one-and-a-half earner model, still had groups which favored either the male breadwinner and female homemaker model or the dual earner and dual carer model. The society is thus divided on this point.

The most progressive alternative to the breadwinner model in Poland is the one-and-a-half earner model.

The results in the Nordic countries are quite heterogeneous: while people in Sweden find that both fathers and mothers should reduce work in favor of equal caring, in Denmark and Finland the opinion that both should work full-time prevails.

What does this mean for future policy relevance?

The results mean different things for different countries: For Germany, especially the west, and for Finland the one-and-a-half earner model seems to be very stable and a future choice; In Denmark and Sweden, people are mostly in favor of both father and mother working and caring and perhaps reducing their working hours; Research in Denmark demonstrated a slight preference for both working full-time compared to Sweden.

Poland and eastern Germany the large majority favors the male breadwinner and female homemaker model with the difference that in eastern Germany the question is not whether

women should be in paid employment but whether they should work full-time or part-time. This may, therefore, mean that the one-and-a-half earner model is likely to be realized in future in Germany and Poland.

Policies can certainly encourage men and women to take up economic and care responsibilities. The more policies are open to this dual function of parents, the more these work in favor of equality. Nevertheless, for overall family policy, values still matter. As long as the male breadwinner and female homemaker model is substantially embedded in the value system as it is in Poland, it is very unlikely that policies will be implemented promoting gender equality.

We conclude once again that for policies there is no ‘one size fits all’ approach and that values do vary. But should there not be a European vision on equal sharing?

Source: Edlund, Jonas & Öun, Ida 2016. Who should work and who should care? Attitudes towards the desirable division of labour between mothers and fathers in five European countries. *Acta Sociologica*, Vol. 59(2), 151 – 169. <http://asj.sagepub.com/content/59/2/151.abstract>

### 6.13 Why employers should fight for parental leave

In Europe, most of the countries offer well over twelve months of parental leave, often fully or partly paid. As this sounds attractive for the parent, it has consequences for the life course. For mothers it leads to a “motherhood penalty”: the life-long income drops significantly. Men are less affected, mainly because they take parental leave for a few weeks or not at all. Negative consequences in the economic field for the parents need not be necessarily so. Parental leave can be seen as training for the job and therefor an advantage for the working place. I am thinking of the managerial skills that are trained. Parents have suddenly to be able to re-organize their lives.

They have to learn to be flexible, orient their needs to the needs of the newborn. Being a parent means permanent changing situations as children grow up, consequently a permanent adoption to change. As mothers are –it seems to me: worldwide – the main providers of care, they are especially trained.

It starts from the very beginning: parents will be occupied by identifying and fulfilling the needs of the newborn. They also have to set limits. Toddlers have to be looked at when starting to crawl and walk. Later on, parents will take their children to the kindergarten and to school, accompany them to a football match or to gymnastics and music classes. When their children feel nearly grown up—but are not— parents might receive a phone call in the early hours of the morning to fetch them from a disco.

The distance between the family home and the school or the playground, between work and the post office or supermarket and their opening hours, drop off and pick up times, all of these, structure the day, requiring parents to develop strategies for overcoming such space and time constraints.

To balance school requirements with leisure activities and family life asks for coordinating fathers, mothers, and siblings, not to speak of relatives and friends, considering their personal interests. Going out for dinner, attending a performance in the theater, just meeting friends and sit together – all of this needs management.

Parental leave should be considered by the employer as an investment in further education. The return can hardly be overestimated. Parental leave trains management skills. Parents increase their social competence. They also contribute to stability within the job, as parents might be less inclined to change the firm.

Just calculate: what would the costs for the employer to train employees in those skills be, parents gain quite naturally through caring for the family and the children? What would one-



year leave for further education in social competencies and management tasks cost if it has to be paid by the firm?

There cannot be a rationale to oppose parental leave, for mothers and fathers, from the economic side.

#### 6.14 Effects of employment breaks on women's career

A study carried out in the '90s compared data on the impact of discontinuous work histories of young women (up to the age of 36) in Germany, Sweden and the US asking the following question: Does a disruption in work history, be it for family reasons (parental leave or homemaking), reasons of unemployment or any other reason except education lead to a downward mobility in the labor market?

Since leave in general is considered to lead to a decrease in skills, one should expect no differences in the type of leave, but rather an influence of legislation on parental leave, employment protection and unemployment insurance. Sweden is known for its very generous legislation on parental leave promoting equality between men and women and paying generously, even up to 80 percent for the first ninety days of parental leave. West Germany has a different system, but also a generous one, which has been affording employment protection during parental leave since 1992 for up to three years and providing partial payment during this period. The United States introduced parental leave policy only in 1993 entailing three months unpaid leave for family care, including care of newborn children.

Women in different countries have faced different legislation policies and have felt their effects. How do these policies affect the re-entry of women into the working force?

The impact of parental leave on women's career is as follows:

For Swedish women, a longer duration of family leave might make upward mobility less likely but it certainly does not contribute to downward mobility. In Germany, no correlation with up- or downward mobility was found, while in the US downward mobility was more likely.

The impact of unemployment on women's career is as follows:

The longer the period of unemployment in Germany and in the US, the more likely the downward mobility, while in Sweden no effects were shown. In the US, for some women an upward mobility effect could also be observed.

Other tested reasons showed no effect.

What does this mean?

One might think that employment interruption might lead to a decrease in work skills and that any kind of leave might therefore lead to downward mobility. But differences can be observed: Parental leave and unemployment make upward mobility unlikely, and can create risks of downward mobility, though these risks are different in the countries studied due to the legislation system. This should, however, create optimism because legislation influencing the labor market can create better chances for women. Politics can produce valuable outcomes for the people.

Source: Evertsson, Marie; Grunow, Daniela & Aisenbrey, Silke 2016. Work interruptions and young women's career prospects in Germany, Sweden and the US. *Work, employment and society*, Vol. 30(2), 291 – 308. <http://wes.sagepub.com/content/early/2015/11/25/0950017015598283>

## 6.15 Job stability and getting children

Job stability prior to motherhood raises childbearing intentions.

Becoming a parent is closely related to the housing situation, care possibilities, networks and neighborhoods as well as, and perhaps predominantly, to the economic situation, to the household income and to job stability. Can we prove this assertion by data?

Researchers in Switzerland looked at job stability and its impact on men and women regarding their intention of becoming parents within the next two years after interviews. The study used data from the Swiss household panel 2002 to 2011.

Looking at the results one should bear in mind that Switzerland's family policy provides no paternal leave and that maternal leave is limited to 98 days following birth.

The results of the study were as follows:

More fathers than childless men reported to have an unstable job, the same being true for mothers.

Additionally, significantly more mothers than fathers reported to have an unstable job.

In a gender unequal society job quality impacts differently upon men than it does upon women. A stable job for women is conducive to planning a first child, but not afterwards since the father is supposed to be the breadwinner meaning, that, for him, a stable job is necessary before and after childbirth.

Besides job quality, life stages influence childbearing as well. Training for a job should be completed by then, for both potential mothers and fathers. Prospective mothers should have a stable job before the birth of the first child, but not necessarily before a second child. If considering a second child, the difference between the ages of the children should preferably not be more than three years.

Interestingly, gender attitudes, and especially for women, do not starkly influence the decision to have a child, that is, both women who are of the opinion that a child suffers if its mother works, as well as women who disagree with this proposition, have the same childbearing intention.

What does this mean?

Gender inequality is shown by the fact that job stability before and after the birth of the child seems to be necessary for men, whereas this is not the case for women. The age of the parents is also a good predictor for becoming parents for the first time.

Childbearing intentions are closely related to the job situation. Therefore, family policies should concentrate on the situation for parents on the labor market.

It is not easy to influence people from the policy side in their intentions to become parents. What politics can and should do is provide a comfortable economic situation rather than attempt to directly promote higher fertility.

Source: Hanappi, Doris; Ryser, Valérie-Anne & Bernardi, Laura 2016. The role of attitudes towards maternal employment in the relationship between job quality and fertility intentions. *Journal of Research in Gender Studies* (2016), 6 (1): 192-219

## 6.16 Is the level of education the encouraging factor in female employment?

Is it the level of education or rather the presence of a child which leads women to full-time, part-time or no employment at all? And do policies encouraging both male and female employment matter?

These questions have been answered in a recent study comparing five European countries, namely Austria, France, Germany, Hungary, and Norway, using data from the Gender and Generations survey for these countries. Couples where both partners have the same educational level and where the woman's age is between 20–45 were selected.

First of all, independently of their educational level, childless women are usually employed. The presence of children, however, creates changes: The higher the educational level, the higher the likelihood of mothers being employed. There are, however, differences across the countries:

In Austria and Germany, for instance, regardless of their educational level, mothers with a child below the age of three tend not to be in employment, and if they are, it is mostly part-time. The intensity of employment raise gradually as children become older.

In Hungary, on the other hand, mothers tend to work full-time rather than part-time.

In France and Norway, the authors found that the effect the child has on mother's employment is less visible throughout the life course, and that the level of education matters more. In these two countries dual-earner arrangements dominate even in the presence of small children.

Overall, even if a country is supportive for women's employment, education matters. In such countries, higher educational levels tend to lead towards higher employment levels. However in the least it can be said that if family policies encourage both male and female employment, the effect of the level of education is reduced.

What does this mean?

It is a tightly knit network of values, educational levels, having a child and the age of the child, as well as gender-oriented employment policies, that combined either encourage or discourage female employment. Opportunities in the labor market seem to matter although they may also be a reflection of the culture. If the society's value system favors mothers staying at home at least while their children are very young, then the presence of the child below the age of three eclipses the effect of education, meaning that, when possible, women will stay at home or work part-time regardless of their educational level. On the other hand, in less traditional value systems, the effects of education on mother's employment are more pronounced.

There is no doubt that education has an effect on human behavior, and that it has an equalizing effect on gender issues – if supported by a family policy encouraging dual-earner arrangements and not hindered by a gender-specific value system.

Source: Steiber, Nadia; Berghammer, Caroline & Haas Barbara. 2016. Contextualizing the Education Effect on Women's Employment: A Cross-National Comparative Analysis, *Journal of Marriage and Family* 78, 246 – 261.

## 7 Scientific perspectives: the way we analyze family

There are different traditions in analyzing families, representative studies probably being the most recognized. Nevertheless, science knows different approaches to analyzing. In this part I do deal more with less known qualitative approaches. The reader just gets a short glimpse on selected issues.

You will learn:

- about fundamental sociological perspectives

- on qualitative approaches in constructing families
- about the importance of definitions.

## 7.1 Perspectives of looking at families.

Like photographers, who may use a wide angle or close up and may take the same object from different standpoints and the individual photographer might be known for his style, social scientists usually are committed to specific paradigms. Paradigms are very specific perspectives to look on societies, they can consist of numerous theories.

We can distinguish three principal paradigms within social sciences: the paradigm of social order, of social action and of distributions.

A) *The paradigm of social order.* Talcott Parsons, one of the giants of sociology, took this label from Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*. In his pre-sociological book from the 17th century, Hobbes deals with the question, how society was set into being. He postulated that people entered a contract where they gave the power to an almighty Leviathan, the state, which guarantees safety and security in return. Since then social researchers have dealt with the problem of social order. They have dealt with the question how society works and keeps together. In modern diction, the endeavor was to analyze the structure of society (consisting of social norms and social roles) and the functions of societal systems like the family. Today modern system theories are committed contributing to the solution of the problem of social order.

This paradigm was most influential in family research. No wonder, I would say. Family can be seen as an entity, members have strong bindings, they form a social group, they frequently meet each other face to face, live together, have strong emotional bondings and well-defined social roles (mother, father, and child for instance). For answering questions like: what holds the family together, as well as what destroys them, looking at structures and functions was - and still is - most attractive. So, whenever you hear of family roles, norms or values most of the time the research is placed within this paradigm.

B) *The paradigm of social action* focusses on the individual, be it as a rational actor (in so-called rational choice theories) or seen more entirely as an actor with emotions, ideas, full of meanings and interpretations of reality and acting according to them. Researchers in this paradigm study how actors construct societies, how they interact, establish or change social reality. It is not a question what different definitions of roles for mother or father exist, it is more a question how these roles are performed and thus constructed and lived. Concepts and theories of doing family, family practices, biographical studies, case studies as well as models of rational choice actions characterize this paradigm.

C) The third paradigm I call the *paradigm of distributions*. Frankly, I have no better idea to name it, as it is not an established label. Some might understand it better when speaking of an empirical approach, but this would be too exclusive a name as empirical research is done in all paradigms. In family studies this paradigm deals with the plurality of families, thus it might also be called paradigm of plurality.

No matter how you call it, the main intention of this paradigm is to describe the social reality. The distribution of and the correlation between variables characterizes the studies. The focus is on statistics. This paradigm has as underlying questions: „how many?“ and „What?“. How many family forms are there? What family forms exist? How many people form a family? How many generations are living together? How much do family members support each

other? How many people out of which family forms perform better in live? How many divorces, marriages, births occur in a society? How much do people earn? How many persons contribute to the income in a family? In what way? And so on, and so on. Numerous questions are asked, numerous correlations are found. It shows how the variables under research are connected with each other from two variables connections to multiple systemic networks in multivariate analysis. Thoroughly defined variables and especially representativeness are core quality criteria in this approach.

Most studies using statistics are placed in the last paradigm, but not all. Rational Choice models work with quantitative data but belong to the second paradigm as do a lot of in-depth qualitative studies. Finally, studies which test hypothesis stemming from a systemic view on society might be classified as belonging to the first paradigm.

Here are exemplary research questions for these paradigms:

How have family roles changed? This question could be best answered and explained referring to the structural-functional approach, the first paradigm.

How do women and men interact as fathers and mothers? This would be an excellent question for the second paradigm.

How many children do parents get at what age? This is a typical question for the third paradigm.

As the paradigms have different goals: a) show order, b) show action or c) show distribution they use specific approaches to reach those results: quantification, in-depth analysis, multivariate models, theoretical systematization as creating typologies.

This should help to categorize the studies I presented here and to understand the different standpoints of the researchers.

## 7.2 Why 'doing family' is at stake

Today we experience a shift from the family as a group with well-defined roles to a more or less close network of individuals: mother, father and child, grandparents, stepfathers and stepmothers, siblings and even very close friends all form the network. They are all part of the network that is continually established and re-established in such a way that it best symbolizes their specific family.

This is where the approach 'doing family' comes in. How to be a father or a mother is no longer self-evident: What is a caring father? Is he alone responsible for family income or is he sharing this responsibility with mother? Should a mother work? At what age of the child or children? Should she work full time or part time? How best to answer the needs of the child? How much time should be spent with the family? There are many questions and no standardized answers.

Doing family follows from the experience that it is not unambiguous to act as a family: you have to give it active and serious thought, you have to consider, plan and organize. In former times there were commonly accepted rules and norms which gave orientation and value consensus about what people in the family should do: children should listen to their parents, fathers should care for the financial and mothers for the emotional well-being.

The doing family approach focusses on the organization of common meals, leisure activities and holidays, buying a car, furnishing rooms, playing games, organizing time spent together

as a family or visiting other relatives as well as organizing time spent apart. It deals with the question of how family members present themselves as a family. What was traditionally done almost naturally, nowadays has to be intentionally planned.

Doing family is necessary because the daily trajectories of the individuals have to be coordinated. However, tight schedule of the modern person often makes this difficult to achieve. This is not true only for the working father and the mother but for the child too: the child not only attends school, but learns music in the music school, participates in sport activities, meets friends in other parts of town or in other cities, goes swimming, practices yoga, attends creative classes and goes to children's theater. One of the parents, usually the mother, will need to take the child from one place to another, from one activity to another all of which is to be done in addition to her household chores, meeting her own friends, going to the gym, caring for the neighbor's garden in case they are away, going to the library, cooking and baking, not least for children's parties, and going to work. As regards the fathers, it is a known fact that they start working even more when children arrive and therefore have an even tighter working schedule. Becoming a father often takes place simultaneously with the endeavors to improve the career, creating extraordinary challenges for the father. Nevertheless, it is expected that he contributes to the household chores equally and looks after the children, which is what the modern father also wishes to do.

Integrating the fragmented and segregated schedule is a matter of planning and organizing. This literally means 'doing family'.

How to support families in such a situation?

Creating and maintaining strong family networks requires organizational skills, and mothers and fathers usually need to develop these in their everyday lives (see our blog on managerial skills). What helps in the process is the knowledge about professionally organizing. In the Internet age, one aspect of this is the knowledge about how to use the Internet to organize family gatherings and events by using specific apps such as Doodle, Google Calendar or social media. Another aspect is public transport making it easier for children to go from one place to another and even travel on their own if they are of a certain age. We should also not forget affordable housing that allows family members to stay within reasonable distance from each other, whilst flexible working arrangements further contribute to the family as a whole.

Doing family is all about organizing. Family members, fathers and mothers especially, develop organizing skills and knowledge that is highly useable in their working lives as well.

Do you have ideas on how family organization can be supported and how best to motivate organizations to respect such valuable organizational skills of parents?

### 7.3 Family practices

Nowadays it is not easy to define 'family' and what it stands for. Let us take the following example: Two persons meet and talk about the family weekend. Although this seems quite straightforward, that what they call family may be quite different indeed. One may be talking about a weekend with her new boyfriend and his son visiting her parents, and the other may have spent the weekend with his wife and children at home.

Even though they both use the word family, these are essentially two different kinds of family. Furthermore, despite pretending, they may not necessarily know what the other one is talking about.

Let us take as an example a patchwork family: How does the child from our example above that is living with his mother and stepfather belong to the new family of the father? What about the relatives, for example the aunt that cares for the children of her brother?

What makes a family? And can we speak of 'the family' at all?

The concept of family practices introduced by David Morgan, sees family as a quality rather than a thing. There is no such thing as the family, says Morgan, but there are practices which form the family.

The focus is laid not on abstract concepts such as roles, norms, visions, images and values, but rather on everyday practices which could be integrated into the term "family": cooking, taking children to school, gardening, even rituals such as repeating the same story about how Aunt Augusta holds the tea pot, how Uncle Paul is a good football player, how grandfather had a car accident are all examples of such practices.

This concept allows diversity to come into the picture. There are a whole lot of tiny habits and practices, exchange of words and looks, which an outsider might not understand, but which 'belong' to the family. The question raised is not what a family is composed of and whether family members adequately perform their roles as if on stage showing that they are a family, but rather which practices people use and understand as an essential part of their family.

What follows from this concept of family practices?

First of all and most essentially, there is not one ideal model of family but instead many ways to live the family life. Thus, it would be inappropriate to call one the best model or the only one that everybody should cling on to. We learn that family is not naturally given; it is dependent on the historical situation and on the specific cultural background. Within this frame people define a specific family form. For instance, certain family forms are nowadays more acceptable than others.

Secondly, the concept allows us to show what actions are taken to define the family. These actions need not be practices which are directly connected to the family: commuting from family home to work can also be seen as a practice of 'work' and a practice of 'family'.

Thirdly, this has consequences for dealing with family issues: these issues are not only those which we directly connect with family but are everything people use to give it a meaning for their family. Commuting, as already mentioned, the conversation with work colleagues about the last family holiday, the payment of nursery school fees and discussing what might impact on the quality of care offered are all examples of such family issues and encompass even those minute details such as the type of pavement on the street along which the buggy is pushed or considering how products are placed on supermarket shelves. Family policy therefore needs to deal not only with the so-called family issues; it is rather much more cross-sectional.

To look at family practices opens our mind to different forms of living, showing at the same time the restrictions made by values and norms and by our cultural heritage as some of us find certain forms of family more appropriate than others. We understand our opinion not as

naturally given but as historically made. We therefore need to learn to observe rather than to judge prematurely.

#### 7.4 The importance of looking at definitions used by the authors

Many of the studies I presented in this blog aim at nothing else than at reporting on the reality. They do not explain, for example, why people live in special family forms, why the fertility rate went down or why the majority in a country share an opinion. Nor do they suggest that the mother should stay at home during the first year of her baby's life. These studies simply wish to describe the reality as it is. Therefore, we can label them as empirical descriptive approaches.

The biggest issue empirical approaches need to solve is to define concepts in a measurable way. This is often not an easy task to perform and readers should always look at the definitions used when reading a study.

Take, for example, as clear a term as 'fertility rate': How should it be measured? By the number of births given by women between 15 and 45 years of age during a certain period, for instance, one year? Or by the cohort fertility, meaning by looking at a number of births by a cohort? Or should we be looking at the number of births a woman gave in her life?

All the rates make different sense and if we read studies on this we should carefully look at the definition given by the authors as to the indicators they measured.

If fertility is not easy to measure, family forms are a lot more complicated to operationalize, meaning that it is difficult to make it measurable and to transfer the concept into a questionnaire. It is easy to count the number of people married, yet it is not so easy to count the number of people cohabiting: When do we consider a couple is cohabiting? Do they have to live together for a few months, half a year, or longer? Shall we accept a person's answer or shall we only count cohabitation if both are registered as resident at the same address and in the same household? And what would we make of a situation when, in contrast, partners live in different households and therefore apart but are thinking of themselves as a couple? 'Living Apart Together' is a term social scientists use. Originally, this implied couples living very far away from each other, for instance, one in New York and the other in Los Angeles, mainly for business reasons. Today, some sociologists apply it also to couples where the partners live narrow it down to only living in different households even if they are in the same block.

Empirical studies mostly rely on the intentions of the researchers, on conventions arising from previous research and on common sense, which is all right because as long as it is clear what is understood by family forms, by living apart together and by the fertility rate, the reader can then comprehend what is being measured. It offers much-needed clarity because we know what we are addressing and measuring.

The first quality criteria for those studies is a clear definition of what is being measured, whether the researchers defined the criteria specifically for their current research or whether they - most suitably - refer to the conventional definitions applied by large bodies such as statistical offices or were they looking at publications of the World Bank, United Nations or the OECD. The quality of a study is also shown when researchers interpret their findings, often in the concluding section of a research paper. Are they referring to the definitions and are they aware of the limitations every data have ?

It is important to consider carefully if we know from the report what the study really measured.

Have you had experiences with unclear measurement? Do you have some favorite sources for looking at data?



## 8 The Author

The Author: Rudolf Richter, Professor at the University of Vienna, is teaching and doing research on Family for more than two decades, always focusing on the societal use of sociological research. The most experience he got as member and Chair of the European Observatory on the Social Situation, Demography and the Family between 2000 and 2004. This Observatory reported Family issues to the European Union. From 2006 to 2014 he served as president of the RC06-Family Research Committee of the International Sociological Association. In the project FamiliesAndSocieties he chaired the project “The gendered transition to parenthood at the University of Vienna (<http://familiesandsocieties.univie.ac.at>) and was co-leader (with Irena Kotowska from the Warsaw School of Economics) of WP3: The new roles of men and women and implications for families and societies ([http://www.familiesandsocieties.eu/?page\\_id=477](http://www.familiesandsocieties.eu/?page_id=477)).

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