

Title: How does family policy impact on grandparental care of children? A comparative study of Italy, the UK and the Netherlands.

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The role of grandparents and grandparenting is growing in importance. Improvements in mortality and declines in fertility have led to increases in families with three if not four living generations (Post, Van Poppel, Van Imhoff, & Kruse, 1997; Watkins, Menken, & Bongaarts, 1987). Thus, family ties among extended family members are likely to become more important, such as those between grandparents and grandchildren (Bengtson, 2001; Hagestad, 2006).

In addition to these demographic changes, there have also been significant changes in family behaviour across many European societies, for example, rises in divorce and in one parent families (Haskey, 1994, 2002; Kiernan, 2003). Studies have shown the importance of grandparental involvement at times of family breakdown (Dench & Ogg, 2002; Dench, Ogg, & Thomson, 1999). Moreover, working patterns are changing just as partnership and parenthood behaviour is changing; atypical hours or flexible working times have become more common, and stability of employment has greatly diminished (European Commission, 2009). Most significantly for grandparents, we have much higher rates of female participation in the labour force, especially by those with dependent children, which creates a regular need for child care (Gardiner, 2000; Le Bihan & Martin, 2004; OECD, 2007). Grandparents are particularly important where they become the primary carers for their grandchildren, but equally as informal providers of childcare enabling mothers to enter the paid labour force – a specific policy aim across the European Union. In the UK around one in three working mothers relies on grandparents for childcare (Summerfield & Babb, 2004). The austerity measures and cuts to public services being implemented in many countries in response to the current international financial crisis are likely to lead to a greater expectation that grandparents will step in to fill the care gap.

Grandparents have always provided financial, emotional and practical care and support to their children and grandchildren, and this support has generally been taken for granted by families, communities and governments alike, although it may substantially disadvantage grandparents who have reduced engagement with paid labour and related long term financial benefits as a result. As default and state retirement ages are extended, older people are expected to participate in paid work for longer, but at the same time undertake critical roles in caring for children and adults. The role and contribution of grandparents is currently little acknowledged in policy, and the law accords grandparents few rights. Understanding the role of grandparents in supporting and maintaining families is an important element of the evidence base, not only for family and labour market policies, but also for pension and retirement policies, and for understanding inequalities across the lifecourse.

Study Aim

Our aim is to consider the family policy environments of contrasting European countries to determine the extent to which these environments support, encourage or assume grandparental care. In addressing these questions, we suggest that family policies cannot be considered in isolation but must be embedded both in wider policy frameworks affecting family life and in the

social and cultural context of the organisation of work, family, retirement and care in each country. We look not only at the individual and social rights conferred by policies, but also at how they operate in practice across generations.

Theoretical Framework

Comparative welfare states research has been characterised by intense debates on the origins and development of public policies that help explain different welfare arrangements in different countries by either exploring the impacts of a single or multiple policies on one or more spheres of social life (e.g. labour market or family) or focussing on the overall expenditure of one particular policy (Bonoli, 1997; O'Connor, Orloff, & Shaver, 1999). These analytical perspectives have contributed to understanding the relationship between social institutions and policy outcomes (O'Connor, et al., 1999). The seminal work of Esping-Andersen (1990) greatly contributed to reducing the complexity of welfare regime analysis by clustering countries according to the roles that state, market and family played in outcomes, but failed substantively to observe the role of family in the provision of welfare and, especially, women's caring roles (Lewis, 1992; Orloff, 1993). The surge of feminist approaches in the field of welfare analysis shifted academic attention towards the study of relationships within the family and comprehension of the unequal distribution of responsibilities in the family and women's participation in the labour market in distinct institutional settings according to gender.

Further studies on gender analysis and policy regimes focused their attention on how the gender division of labour promotes distinct gender ideologies (Leira, 1992) and others on the cultural meanings embedded into social policy (O'Connor, et al., 1999). These works stressed that the existence of variance between welfare states requires understanding the role of ideology in the construction of social policies. Similarly, cultural and ideational approaches have emphasized the importance and influence of ideas in shaping and modelling social policies (Pfau-Effinger, 2005) and the interplay of culture and expectations between the institutions and the social organisation of care (Haberken, 2010). This theoretical conceptualisation of welfare cultures has allowed a breaking with the rather ontological perspective that social policies are the unique unit of analysis of welfare institutional arrangements.

Comparative care regime studies have tended to limit the scope of analysis of social policies to maternity/paternity and childcare provision. However, recent research on intergenerational relations has included social care provision for older adults in the analysis of welfare variation (Anttonen, Baldock, & Sipilä, 2003). The combination of the two sets of family provision (childcare and care for older people) has resulted in a family care continuum based on the degree of '*familialisation*' and '*defamilialisation*' that allows clustering different countries into family regimes (Lietner, 2003; Saraceno, 2008). The intergenerational perspective of family care regimes, despite its contribution to mapping regimes of social care, has a series of limitations. In existing research, studies of intergenerational relations have been restricted to two-generation pairs. The middle generation is seen as having the pivotal role in intergenerational relationships either upwards (to their parents) or downwards (to their children). The dyadic approach has made the role played by grandparents in a three-generation family invisible. Further, family care policy analysis generally emphasises the extent of social policy coverage and its normative provision. As a result, these

studies often ignore the importance of accounting for service usage and policy take-up in defining and constructing welfare cultures and policy regimes.

The role of grandparents within family life and the structuration of grandparenting in various types of welfare regimes is therefore still a body of research that has largely been unexplored. While social and economic changes have been linked to profound transformations of family trends and patterns, the conceptualisation of family has rather tended to explore and analyse the consequences and impacts of care policies on the middle generation only, ignoring the crucial role of grandparents within family life and how social policies impact on the availability of grandparents to free mothers from children responsibilities. Altogether, policies and family relations shape and have impacts on the opportunities and availabilities of parents *and grandparents* for organising social care of infants and youngsters.

We therefore conceptualise grandparenting as taking place within complex policy environments. Both parents and grandparents are living within culturally specific labour markets and families, and these may impact differently on people of different ages and generations.

Data Analysis and Results

Using the exemplars of Italy, the Netherlands and the UK, we tabulate a range of policies in each country, critically assess the policy logics in terms of (1) intergenerational gender, family and care relations, and (2) engagement with the labour market, and then (3) integrate this analysis with a raft of indicators that measure country specific cultural and structural factors. Finally, we relate this analysis to the demography of grandparental care in each country.

We investigate policies in the following fields: maternity, paternity and parental leave, wider family and grandparental leave, public/private childcare provision, kindergarten and school policies, child payments (benefits, transfers and taxes), and policies relating to retirement and adult care. We consider national level attitudinal data across generations encompassing attitudes to childcare, paid work, adult care, gender roles and attitudes. We then look at a host of structural indicators including fertility rates, poverty rates across age groups and families, use of child and adult care, take up of care related leave, employment rates and status for men and women at varying ages and according to family structure, childcare costs and use of childcare, gendered wages and pay gaps, effective retirement ages, replacement rates of pension income and disability rates in the over 50 population.

We find a complex set of limitations and conditions interact with cultural imperatives, values and norms. We test how gendered policy logics and care logics and structures may force, interact with and set limits to mothers' and grandmothers' participation in the labour force, thereby constructing and shaping intergenerational support.

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