

Building a strong society requires effective family policy

Samantha Callan

Introduction: Families matter

Families and their 'practices' (what goes on inside them) are highly significant to local, national and supranational governments because, however constituted, they are the micro-ecology in which emotional and material needs are met for the majority of people. Families are essential for social cohesion, the socialisation of children and individual well-being; they are the base from which children and adults can learn, work, and contribute to society. They play an indispensable role in care, particularly for vulnerable members of society, such as the disabled and elderly.

Governments therefore have a vital interest in the welfare and practices of families under their purview and are concerned with how they are structured. For example, a consultation paper from the UK Government in 2010 states that 'Strong families give children love, identity, a personal history and a secure base from which to explore and enjoy life as they grow up. Strong families also help build strong communities, so they are crucial for a successful society' [1].

Research justifies treating families as both problem and solution to a range of social ills. For example, children being raised in dysfunctional family settings are at greater risk of engaging in criminal activity during adolescence and later in life, while a supportive family acts as a protective factor against such an outcome [2]. Widespread family breakdown is symptomatic, or even to a certain extent causal, of wider social breakdown, given its association with a wide range of social problems, whereas supportive families are the bedrock and foundation of a cohesive society [3]. Some level of government intervention is justifiable and necessary if only to create the conditions in which strong families can flourish.

This essay will look at why family policy is important and what should fall within its purview given its strong influence on the economic life of nations, and how an increasingly connected world can create new challenges to families that also require a policy response at supra-national level. It will conclude with a defence of intervention in terms of the end goal it is seeking – strong and stable families in which adults and children are able to flourish with far less assistance and interference from governments than current levels of family *breakdown* allow.

Significance of social cohesion and how it is linked to family cohesion

Social cohesion is important for national and local governments because its presence or lack strongly influences the ability of a country or community to collaborate to make progress [4] and determines the degree of trust that exists between people. According to Judith Maxwell, 'Social cohesion refers to the processes of building shared values and communities of interpretation, reducing disparities in wealth and income, and generally enabling people to have a sense that they are engaged in a common enterprise, facing shared challenges, and that they are members of the same community' [5].

Honorary Research Fellow,
Centre for Research in Families
and Relationships, University of
Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK
Associate Director for Families and
Mental Health, Centre for Social
Justice, London, UK
Samantha.Callan@
centreforsocialjustice.org.uk

[http://dx.doi.org/10.5339/
difi.2014.1](http://dx.doi.org/10.5339/difi.2014.1)

© 2014, Callan, licensee
Bloomsbury Qatar Foundation
Journals. This is an open access
article distributed under the
terms of the Creative Commons
Attribution license CC BY 4.0,
which permits unrestricted use,
distribution and reproduction in
any medium, provided the original
work is properly cited.

Social scientists with very different political philosophies agree that families matter greatly for social cohesion. Brenda Almond states that ‘The family is and always has been the foundation of communities in which the cherishing of each individual can flourish’ [6], while Anthony Giddens emphasizes that strong family ties, ‘part of the wider fabric of social life’, can be an effective source of civic cohesion [7]. *Family* cohesion, ‘the emotional bonding that family members have toward one another’ [8], can facilitate key processes contributing to wider social cohesion, such as the development of a moral disposition or ‘character’; the provision of mutual support and care; and the generation of a sense of personal and group identity.

- **Development of character**

Alexis de Tocqueville described the family as the first institution to teach ‘habits of the heart’ and discourage the worst excesses of individualism by emphasizing responsibilities to others [9]. Ideally, children develop a sense of how relationships, rights and duties function and acquire essential life skills by seeing how their parents react to them, to any siblings and to each other.

- **Provision of mutual support and care**

The family is one of the welfare ‘pillars’ of society [10] with family members providing informal support for each other based on two strong principles: a sense of moral responsibility – the feeling that it is right to help each other, and an awareness of reciprocity – the need for help to be given and received in a reasonably balanced way [11].

Such informal support – and the pooling of risks – usually extends beyond the nuclear household to the extended family. The sociologist Michael Young emphasised to British social planners in the 1950s that ‘many working class families operate continuously as agencies for mutual aid of all kinds’ [12] and such practices remain widespread today. It is important, however, not to assume that all extended family relationships are supportive, and to be aware that many family relationships are subject to negotiation as well as obligation [13].

Although similar support can also flow between friends and neighbours, some research indicates the difference specifically *family* support can make. For example, one study of elderly women found that low levels of family support were associated with poor psychological well-being regardless of support from friends and membership of a social network [14]. Such findings suggest that where family policy seeks to replicate the processes and benefits of actual family care (where it is unavailable) there is a limit to the extent to which it can successfully do that.

- **Sense of personal and group identity**

The sense of identity which individuals derive from belonging to a family helps to explain the association between psychological well-being and family support. Older members of the extended family educate children in ‘the language of the group’, [15] communicate distinctive aspects of wider group identity to children as new members and act as the repositories and transmitters of culture [16].

For example, in traditional Maori culture, family identity is implicit in notions of *whanaunatanga*: knowing one’s lineage and ancestors. Determining the place of each individual in wider Maori society requires understanding how someone is related to the other members of their *whanau* (family), *hapu* (subtribe) or *iwi* (tribe) [17]. Successful solutions to social problems rely on these principles: when Maori are in treatment for alcohol and drug misuse, programmes that draw in the extended family enhance addicts’ sense of belonging and relatedness and thereby contribute to recovery [18].

The concept of drawing in as many family members as possible to help an individual has been extended to other areas of social policy in other countries through the Family Group Conferencing model [19]. Canadian, British and many other countries' child protection proceedings use it to explore family-based alternatives to taking children into local authority care [20].

The importance of family policy

Obviously families can fail to fulfil all the functions described above, because of internal and external pressures. Ensuring the vulnerable are sufficiently protected, (particularly children, those with disabilities and older people) is perceived to be a key responsibility of welfare states and socially responsible governments. This can require family policy measures which intervene directly in family life as indicated in the last example, or which reduce external stressors on family- and other care-givers, whether these are financial or more broadly circumstantial.

More detailed examples will be given at the end of this paper but typical policies such as taxation systems recognising economic interdependencies between related individuals and monetary assistance with childcare enabling both parents to work, can relieve financial pressures on families. Leave requirements backed by legal force make it incumbent upon employers to enable their staff to spend time with their families to fulfil domestic responsibilities.

It is important to be realistic that family policy is no different to any other type of policy in that its legitimacy is predicated on there being a problem needing government attention at some level for its alleviation. Writing about family policy in the Republic of Ireland, Julia Griggs concluded that 'families remain reluctant to accept interference in this very private realm. Intervention is only really considered valid in areas in which families cannot find their own solutions' [21]. A survey carried out by the European Research Centre at Loughborough University in 2002, as part of a much wider comparative study looking at family policy across the European Union (EU), found that people invoked their right to support from the government alongside their right to organise their lives in private [22].

Yet while agreeing that respect for family autonomy is of paramount importance, family policy tends to be too narrowly conceived in many jurisdictions and does not give sufficient attention to the vital priority of preventing family breakdown, despite the broader policy shift towards early intervention in problems to mitigate harm 'downstream'. Moreover, as, US policy theorist Karen Bogenschneider emphasises, family policy, by definition, has to be about the family and about relationships, usually those between parents themselves and between parents and their children.²³ When policies specifically concerned with children or women are equated with family policy this is incorrect and when family policy is exclusively concerned with the parent-child relationship and ignores the relationship between the adults in the family or non-resident parents this leaves a yawning gap. An exclusive focus on or excessive preoccupation with children ignores the importance to those children of the relationship between their parents. Moreover, *family* can be a code word for mother and child, with scant, if any, attention to the father [24].

Defining family policy

Family policy is the subcategory of social policy that is particularly focused on supporting or strengthening the functions that families carry out. According to the UN Programme on the Family these are: reproduction, care, emotional support and intergenerational solidarity (the close interpersonal ties seen across two or more generations within families, characterized by interdependence and mutual support) [25].

Definitions of family policy offered in academic literature differ markedly according to their intended scope. Some are provided here to draw out important and diverse perspectives on its legitimate remit. Moen and Schorr define family policy as 'a widely agreed-on set of objectives for families, toward the realization of which the state (and other major social institutions) deliberately shapes programmes and policies' [26], whereas Kamerman and Kahn include within family policy 'everything that government does to and for the family'[27].

Kamerman and Kahn also distinguish between *explicit* policies designed to achieve specific goals regarding families from the more *implicit* 'family perspective in policy making' [28]. Explicit policies focus on family creation, economic support, childrearing and family caregiving [29] while a 'family perspective in policy making' has an eye to the impact on family well-being (in terms of, for example, family stability, family relationships and the family's ability to carry out its responsibilities) of any policy or programme whether or not it was specifically or primarily designed to affect families.

In addition to the examples given earlier, family policy includes child maintenance after parental separation, the legal framework of divorce, domestic violence, underage crime, elder care, teenage pregnancy and tax and benefit reforms that remove disincentives for couples to live together openly. While policies concerning healthcare, housing, poverty, substance abuse, and unemployment may not be aimed specifically at families, very often a comprehensive treatment of the issues to be tackled requires a family perspective: understanding how families contribute to and are affected by problems, and whether they need to be involved in solutions [30].

Housing shortages for example, in countries like the United Kingdom with large populations relative to landmass, tend to take the fact of family breakdown and the pressures it creates on the housing stock as a given. Separating parents require two dwellings rather than one and this can mean two family-sized homes if they are sharing care of their children.

Health inequalities tend to be transmitted intergenerationally: parents who were inadequately nurtured themselves and who did not learn good health behaviours will struggle to raise their children in a way that will improve health outcomes for them. Income poverty plays a key role but wider family factors are highly influential. Many young people who struggle with addictions to drugs and alcohol cite the absence of fathers while they were growing up and the pain caused by inadequate social recognition of the loss this often entails, as important contributors to substance misused [31].

New territory for family policy

Family change across the world in response to both opportunities and challenges is not new [32]. Governments everywhere have to grapple with the implications of these far-reaching changes, which present different challenges within and between global regions and can threaten to undermine the social and economic well-being of wider society. In the world's poorer nations, family dynamics can alter drastically in contexts of high prevalence of disease and war, but many of the more advantaged Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries have also seen profound transitions in family life, especially over the last 40 years.

These include (but are not limited to) changes in family structure and the greater instability of the family unit; shifts and imbalances to male/female contributions to the domestic and industrial division of labour and changing obligations and responsibilities between generations. Similar changes have taken place at different times in different countries. For example, marriage breakdown in Spain increased by 290% between 1996 and 2006, before which the divorce rate was significantly lower than in many comparable European nations [33].

European social policy expert Professor Linda Hantrais states that 'the main question raised by changes in patterns of family formation and dissolution concerns their impact on the future of the family as a basic social institution and the role the state can and should play in shaping family structure through its economic and social policies' [34]. Almost 20 per cent of households across the 29 OECD countries are headed by lone parents, with outlier countries like Latvia experiencing double that figure [35].

Governments are particularly concerned with how changes in families' structure compromise their ability to care for their vulnerable members, most notably members who are very young, very old or chronically ill. Consequently, family policy often focuses on improving outcomes for children, but is becoming increasingly concerned with rising numbers of elderly people who are, or will be, lacking in family support with clear implications for state spending requirements.

The dominant family trends of the last forty years summarised above, that have affected all Western nations to a greater or lesser extent, are placing increasing pressure on the public purse, and therefore on governments, to do more to address the problem of different forms of family breakdown. Broadly this includes divorce and separation, father absence and extremely poor family functioning. Whereas previously the dominant perspective was that family breakdown was not something amenable to change, and even something that need not worry us unduly, it can be contended that we are in a time of uncertainty, a 'punctuation point'³⁶ when this dominant paradigm is facing a crisis, not least because the fiscal pressures on many welfare states are intensifying.

Times of crisis make radical change possible. Heffernan suggests 'if the paradigm "ain't broke", radical ideational suggestions to "fix it" will not find practical expression within the purview of the state. Only when a status quo is considered "broke" and economic needs and political demands require change, can ideas be advanced to dramatically "fix it"' [37]. We are arriving at a moment where prevention of family breakdown should be seen not only as a legitimate concern for governments but an essential one given the costs involved. These were last calculated at £46 bn per annum for the United Kingdom alone [38].

Family policy as the handmaiden to economic policy

Evans and Cerny describe the emergence of the 'competition state' out of the welfare state, in which governments are obliged to focus all their efforts on laying the conditions for economic success and using all tools of policy, including social policy, to that end [39].

The competition state successor to the welfare state, 'incorporates many of its features but reshaping them, sometimes quite drastically, to fit a globalising world' [40].

The opening up of national economies to global forces on a vast scale makes it even harder for governments to pursue social policy without very close alignment to economic policy [41]. For example, Hudson and Lowe describe how, in the United Kingdom, the emergence of the 'workfare' state, (which conceives of welfare and provides it primarily as an incentive to work) and the specific policies and programmes that were designed and driven by it, was a response to the way in which foreign investment was funnelled into the country [42]. Employment was siphoned away from the traditional industrial heartlands and conditions established in which the new service-based economy could flourish.

This radically changed the landscape of many communities in the United Kingdom (and in the United States), not least by sharply reducing the numbers of unskilled and semi-skilled jobs traditionally undertaken for men and thereby undermining their ability to take a breadwinning role within families. Rowthorn and Webster have shown how high numbers of women raising children on their own tend to be found in UK areas with high male unemployment, suggesting the existence of structural barriers to family formation [43] and there have been similar findings in US data [44]. Financial barriers have also emerged in the design of state support for families in both of these countries, with benefit payment systems militating against some low income couples living together and sharing parenting responsibilities on a daily basis, through what has come to be known as the couple penalty.

Researchers disagree as to whether couple formation materially penalises families on welfare, with lone parents and children typically better off than low-income couples when the financial requirements of a second adult in the household are taken into consideration, or is simply perceived to do so [45]. Whichever is the case, official figures reveal 'missing couples' or significantly few couples (and higher numbers of lone parents) at certain points in the income spectrum where welfare benefits are concentrated, indicating that behaviour is being driven by actual or perceived financial risk [46].

Better education, skills training and effective policies and programmes that help men and women access the labour market and earn a living wage (that does not require a significant financial 'top up' from the state in the form of tax credits and other welfare benefits), will be increasingly essential going forward. However, barriers to family formation and pressures on families to separate are not simply economic and structural they are also cultural.

Changing expectations

In countries and communities where there are high numbers of children being raised without both birth parents, the sense that the close involvement of both parents advances children's best interests, has been steadily eroded. A recent study of the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods in England and Wales found micro-communities (of just over 1600 households) where single parenthood was particularly concentrated, with three quarters of households headed by one parent, typically a mother, raising children on their own [47]. Yet, the UK Government is unequivocal about children's need for fathers: 'Fathers and mothers matter to children's development. Father-child relationships, be they positive, negative or lacking, have profound and wide ranging impacts on children that last a lifetime, particularly for children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds' [48].

Not only is the cost to the state of high levels of family breakdown increasingly unsustainable, as mentioned earlier, but its negative effects on children's outcomes do not seem to have diminished regardless of the far greater normalisation or social acceptance of divorce, separation and living in what used to be described as 'broken homes' [49]. Similarly research indicates the physical and mental health and wellbeing gains for older people with intact relationships.

As stated earlier, there has been much scepticism over the ability of family policy to arrest these social trends – and the desirability of it doing so. Many assume that the high levels of family breakdown currently being experienced by many Western nations are inevitable. While it is sobering that there are as yet no clear examples of countries which have seen a reversal of breakdown rates, there have always been significant barriers to the development of a national or supranational strategy to tackle family breakdown which need to be addressed. These include, but are not restricted to, how family change is perceived.

How politics shapes, enables and constrains policy formation

McKie and Cunningham Burley have noted that 'Family research and policy work reflect a range of political, moral and academic positions and as such are often hotly contested. Thus the potential to debate and develop evidence-informed policies could be difficult' [50]. This seems particularly apposite when describing the problematic treatment of family breakdown by social policy. The dramatic variations in family living arrangements as a result of a declining fertility rate and increases in cohabitation, single-parenthood, parental separation and divorce, step-families, same-sex unions and people choosing to live alone are interpreted in highly contrasting ways.

Putting it simply, the formation of two polarised perspectives on modern relationships has been observed, one of which is largely negative and the other primarily positive [51]. The more pessimistic view of family change sees it as decline with the growth of individualism regarded as threatening to family stability of the family and children's well-being. The breakdown of family ties is part of the bigger picture of societal demoralisation, alienation and fragmentation.

In contrast, the more liberal and optimistic perspective sees family change as positive, with breakdown freeing adults and children from oppressive and conflictive situations. Family diversity and choice are considered to facilitate greater democracy in personal relations. Rather than children's vulnerability, their resilience and adaptability are emphasised when parents separate. The policy response promoted by this perspective urges greater support and information for parents and children to enable them to exercise their rights and avail themselves of choices as circumstances change.

There are serious limitations to both of these perspectives [52]. The more pessimistic view of the family, at its most extreme, effectively argues for 'turning the clock back' to a halcyon era of marriage and family. Such harking back not only ignores the disadvantages of less flexible role expectations of family members which may have 'boxed in' both men and women to societal expectations, but also the vastly altered social and economic landscape in many countries. Women's educational qualifications frequently exceed those of their male counterparts, causing sweeping changes in the labour market and profoundly challenging stereotypical views of the male breadwinner and the at-home mother. The more optimistic view is criticised for ignoring

enduring inequalities in today's couple relations as evinced in the domestic division of labour and persistence of domestic violence [53] which, according to the Home Office, one in four women will experience at some point in their lives [54].

Rarely acknowledged, however, is the profound pessimism of the supposedly optimistic view of family change, as it assumes nothing can be done to reduce the rate of family breakdown. In policy terms its main focus is on helping parents and children cope with the aftermath of breakdown. It elides the difficulties for all parties in blended- or step-families and rarely makes their fragility clear. Children often feel out-of-place, supplanted or unwelcome. Obviously many do adjust and do so very well, but in doing so they may lose contact with their non-resident parent and one set of biological grandparents. Moreover, if the stepfamily subsequently breaks down, they often lose step-siblings and step-parents to whom they have become attached. US studies show that between 30 and 40 percent of stepchildren see their parent and step-parent divorce [55] and in Canada, parents of children born into stepfamilies are three times more likely to separate before they reached ten years old than those born into intact two-parent families [56].

Given the harms associated with family instability, a better starting point for family policy would be to treat the trend towards greater fragility as something that is not inevitable. This requires heeding the optimists' call for better information: greater public awareness of the effects of relationship breakdown on adults, children and ultimately on society, might, in many cases, act as a deterrent. Qualitative research shows that many who initiated family breakdown proceedings would have found it helpful to have been warned about the harsh realities of family life post-separation [57].

While many governments support the challenging job of parenting in a range of ways, sustained and widely available support for couple relationships has been far less forthcoming. Yet one of the most pernicious drivers of poverty and of poor mental and physical health and well-being, is the breakdown of adult relationships. Children's welfare is tightly bound up with how well their parents relate together and they tend to be the most vulnerable when families break down. Penny Mansfield CBE, Director of the relationship research organisation One Plus One states that:

***'The evidence is compelling that stable, harmonious relationships improve the quality of life for adults and children but how do we - or indeed can we - create the conditions in which such relationships are nurtured? Whilst there is ample evidence that the quality of parental relationships is a critical social factor for children, politicians, policy makers and practitioners are wary of adult relationships. Current policy mainly addresses families as individuals, ignoring the defining feature of adult life, for good and ill, interdependence.'* [58]**

Scant acknowledgement of the importance of relationship breakdown in political language and preventive policy response is partly explained by the fact that in this area, perhaps more than in any other, politicians, policy-makers, academics and social commentators, are painfully aware of their own frailty [59]. Their own extended or nuclear families will typically be complicated and may have broken down, either because their own parents parted or because their own marriages and partnerships have faltered. Many are fearful of appearing to moralise. However, given the human, social and financial costs of this issue, governments cannot afford to neglect it or allow it to go undebated. Policy actors will increasingly have to bracket out their personal experiences and consider how to meet the challenge of family breakdown.

Family policy that looks across the whole family

Family policy which is fit for purpose has to avoid the limitations of what might be termed the lifeboat approach: 'women and children first'. This can easily lead to the conclusion that fathers are of residual value to families, regardless of the significant boost to outcomes they can bring in children's lives.

In some areas it is clear that policy will have to focus on meeting needs previously undertaken by families, such as where there are significant child protection or domestic abuse concerns, or where older people are very lonely or isolated and alternatives to family support are the only option. However, where families – and particularly absent fathers – are an untapped but available resource, it is vital that they remain the first port of call wherever appropriate.

As stated earlier, relationships between adults have to move from their current position at the periphery (if they feature at all) to become a central concern of family policy. Policy makers need to investigate how to construct truly family-centred policies which will aim, among other things, to deliver greater relationship stability. This final section will consider a range of measures to address the pressures on families, for example from work and the media which can also compromise their ability to function beneficially, in which the prevailing culture can play a significant part. Given the importance of families to the welfare of the nation, it makes enormous sense for governments to go beyond simply aspiring to being 'family-friendly'. Ultimately they need to play their part in creating an environment that builds resilience in all citizens of a nation, adults and children, by actively strengthening the family.

Prevention of family breakdown

Avoid couple penalties in benefits systems

Some countries' (notably the United States and United Kingdom) welfare systems, which offer protection for those who are unemployed or on low incomes, inadvertently penalise couple formation by giving more generous benefits to parents raising children on their own, than to two-parent families. Although the aim is to decrease child poverty, these measures can ignore the large numbers of children living in couple families and have the effect of disincentivising couples from raising children together. Designing benefits in a way that avoids such 'couple penalties' is vital.

Recognise marriage

Research from the UK, the US and other OECD countries highlights the greater instability of more informal relationships such as cohabitation. Explicit recognition of marriage in the taxation system is a key way for governments to send a signal that commitment within families is important and valued. Many OECD countries, such as Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland and the USA already treat the family as an economic unit for taxation purposes in a range of ways, including spousal allowances, credits, joint filing and income splitting. However this is not the case in Finland, Greece, Hungary, Mexico, New Zealand, Sweden, Turkey and the United Kingdom, where there is individual taxation and no recognition of spousal obligation. Countries recognising spousal interdependencies should continue to do so and those which do not need to consider acknowledging the social benefits of marriage through fiscal means.

Community-based support for families, not just for mothers and children

Australia and Norway statutorily provide relationship support for couples and parenting programmes through their networks of family relationship centres. Their prevalence across

both nations helps to guarantee a high level of awareness that there are trusted services easily available. The aim in these and other countries is to normalise seeking help with close relationships and reduce cultural resistance to it, in much the same way as it has become commonplace to register with primary care services when expecting a baby and attend ante- and post-natal programmes.

These centres are important both for the prevention of relationship breakdown and for mitigating the effects of breakdown by offering post-separation support, therapy and programmes to help with challenging parenting and other issues and signposting where necessary, for example to effective domestic abuse services. Enabling people to manage family breakdown better must also be a policy priority as 'picking up the pieces of fragmented lives is no easy task' [60].

Also, acknowledging the role of grandparents and the difficulties they can face in seeing their grandchildren when their children's relationships breakdown is essential, as research shows they tend to help their grandchildren in many ways. They often provide emotional comfort for children experiencing difficulties as teenagers or conflict with their parents whether families are intact or not. They can also help them to cope with the fallout when family breakdown occurs. Ensuring grandparents are adequately represented in family law and able to access assistance where necessary to navigate difficult relationships with in-laws post-separation, could make a significant difference to the children they are often well-placed to support.

It is vital that community-based services and related policies recognise the importance of fathers (especially young fathers) to children's development. Family centres that only cater for mothers can reinforce men's sense that they are of secondary or no importance to their children. It has been estimated in the UK that a million children have negligible or no contact with their fathers [61].

Going beyond government action – the role of the welfare society

Non-governmental and private sector organisations have a vital role to play in building strong communities where families are mutually supportive, children feel safe and older people are valued and respected. Schools-based parenting support that brings families together can help to build social capital and strengthen relationships between adults in different families so that people become a resource to each other in other aspects of life. A wide range of agencies working in effective partnership together can ensure older people who might otherwise be lonely or isolated have plenty of social and other activities. Where these involve children and young people this can help to build strong intergenerational links [62].

Some commercial firms provide services for their employees to help them with parenting and there is significant potential to expand the capacity of the parenting and relationship education sector (largely delivered through non-governmental or 'third' sector organisations) through this means [63]. It is in employers' interests to enable their staff to have easy access to such assistance as parenting and relationship difficulties are leading causes of absenteeism.

Facilitating sustainable work-life integration and acknowledging global care chains

Similarly, employers' and governmental policies which enable individuals to manage both their work and domestic responsibilities will help to relieve pressures on families. It is not only parents who need flexibility in work schedules or work locations: it is becoming increasingly common for people to manage a range of caring roles alongside work, looking after older relatives, disabled adults or grandchildren.

Moreover, some parents work in different countries or even continents from their children and send financial remittances home to extended family members, often grandparents, who have daily care and responsibility for them. The term, 'global care chains' has been used to describe migrants' movement from poor to rich countries to look after other people's children or elderly relatives while leaving their own behind [64].

Certain countries such as Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines have particularly high numbers of citizens working and living abroad. The Philippines sends labour migrants to over 100

countries and more than 10 per cent of its population work or live abroad. There may be positive economic benefits for the family although financial remittances may be inadequate make a significant improvement to the lives of the families left behind.

The Government of the Philippines has a range of policies and services to help overseas workers and their families, for example insurance and healthcare benefits, education and training, social and family welfare services as well as assistance for workers. Non- governmental and community organisations in the country also provide services and programmes for migrants and their children.

At a supranational level, there is also a United Nations International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families [65]. In signing up to its 93 Articles, nations commit to uphold a range of rights and duties towards migrants and their families, and to protect them against adverse treatment from governments in the countries where they work. However, implementation of this UN convention is patchy and needs to be a higher policy priority of governments both sending and receiving migrants.

Tackling the commercialisation and sexualisation of children

Parents in many countries are concerned about the pressures their children are under to grow up too quickly, whether from the sexualisation of many aspects of life which impinge upon them before they are ready and able to cope with this kind of influence or from a commercialised society's relentless urge to consume. A comprehensive range of policies to adequately address these legitimate and widespread concerns need to call businesses, the media and internet service providers to account. An independent review commissioned by the UK Government identified four key areas for policy attention [66].

- the sexualised imagery that has become a 'wallpaper' to children's lives;
- clothing, products and services for children;
- children as consumers;
- making parents' voices heard.

The recommendations this review made in each area have a high degree of relevance to any other country trying to make progress on this important agenda.

Conclusion

This description of comprehensive family policy that takes into account a wide range of relationships and influences might seem to be a call for greater and unwarranted state intrusion into family life. However, it is necessary to acknowledge that public and private spheres are in no way insulated from each other. As Bourdieu states 'The public vision...is deeply involved in our vision of domestic things and our most private behaviours themselves depend on public actions, such as housing policy or, more directly family policy. The public/private boundary does not suggest two isolated spheres but a permeable interface, which shapes and is shaped by our personal lives' [67]. At the same time, anthropologist Geoff Dench makes the important point that we must relearn the lesson that a sound polity has to be built around respect for the autonomy and privacy of the private realm [68].

These two contrasting perspectives can be held in tension by realising that strong families based on committed and supportive relationships that are sustained and nurtured by a culture that values sufficient time and income, will require less, not more involvement from governmental and other organisations. Welfare states' intervention is significantly ramped up when families break down. Most notably, example parents raising children on their own often need to apply for public assistance if they are to avoid extreme financial poverty. When parenting becomes inadequate, neglectful or abusive, social workers and other statutory services have to step in to help remedy that situation. The children involved may ultimately need to be removed from their parents' care and looked after by the state.

A family-friendly culture in business will help to ensure employees take full advantage

of organisational policies designed to help them achieve and maintain effective work-family integration. Employers of lower-income staff are also coming under increasing pressure to pay them a living wage that can sustain family life, without the need for incomes to be topped up through government-funded subsidies such as tax credits.

Recognising that the behaviours and attitudes that tend to be associated with marriage are protective factors against relationship instability, governments which help to foster a pro-marriage culture through their policies will help to challenge what has been described as a 'culture of relationship breakdown' [69]. The great English writer D H Lawrence made the crucial point that 'it is marriage, perhaps, which had given man the best of his freedom, given him a little kingdom of his own within the big kingdom of the state.' He goes on to ask 'Do we then want to break marriage? If we do break it, it means that we fall to a far greater extent under the direct sway of the state' [70].

Given the current high rates of relationship breakdown in many countries, the significant pressures that are on family life and the trend towards more informal and less durable partnership forms, governments and key agents of civil society cannot afford any longer to take a laissez-faire approach. Framing a range of family policies around the intention to strengthen rather than supplant this vital institution is indispensable for individual, community and societal resilience and, paradoxically, for ensuring that in the future many more families will be less reliant on governments, exercising a greater degree of self-determination and in the best possible position for all members to achieve their potential.

Disclaimer

The views expressed herein are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Doha International Family Institute.

References

1. Department for Children, Schools and Families (2010) Support for All: The Families and Relationships Green Paper, London: The Stationery Office, p4.
2. Farrington, D.P. and Welsh, B.C. (2007) Saving Children from a Life of Crime: Early Risk Factors and Effective Interventions, New York: Oxford University Press.
3. Centre for Social Justice (2007) Breakthrough Britain: Ending the costs of social breakdown, London: Centre for Social Justice. Social cohesion – its significance and how it is linked to family cohesion
4. Ritzen, J. (2000) 'Social Cohesion, Public Policy and Economic Growth: Implications for OECD Countries', paper presented to OECD/HRDC International Symposium on the Contribution of Human and Social Capital to Sustained Economic Growth and Well-Being, Quebec City, available at www.oecd.org/dataoecd/25/2/1825690.pdf (accessed 6 July 2013).
5. Maxwell, J. (1996) 'Social dimensions of economic growth', Eric John Hanson Memorial Lecture Series, Vol. 8. Alberta: University of Alberta, p13.
6. Almond, B. (2006) The Fragmenting Family, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p1.
7. Giddens, A. (1992) The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies, Cambridge: Polity Press, p98
8. Olson, D.H., Russell, C.S. and Sprenkle, D.H. (1984) 'Circumplex model of marital and family systems: VI theoretical update', in: D.H. Olson and P.M. Miller (eds), Family Studies Review Yearbook, Vol 2, New Delhi: Sage, p60.
9. de Tocqueville, A. (1945) Democracy in America, Vol. 2. New York, NY: Vintage Books.
10. Esping-Andersen, G. (ed.) (2002) Why We Need a New Welfare State, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
11. Quinton, D. (2004) Supporting Parents: Messages from Research, London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
12. Young, M. (1954) 'The planners and the planned: the family', Journal of Town Planning Institute, 60, 134-42, p136.

13. Finch, J. and Mason, J. (1993) *Negotiating Family Responsibilities*, London and New York: Tavistock/Routledge.
14. Thompson, M.G. and Heller, K. (1990) 'Facets of support related to well-being: Quantitative social isolation and perceived family support in a sample of elderly women', *Psychology and Aging*, 5 (4) 535-44.
15. Bloch, M. (1953) *The Historian's Craft*, New York: Vintage, p41
16. Dench, G. (2000) *Grandmothers of the Revolution*, London: Hera Trust.
17. Munro, A., Manthei, B. and Small, J. (1989) *Counselling: the Skills of Problem-solving*, London: Routledge.
18. Huriwai, T., Robertson, P.J., Armstrong, D., Kingi, T.P. and Huata, P. (2001) 'Whanaungatanga – a process in the treatment of Maori with alcohol- and drug-use related problems', *Substance Use and Misuse*, 36 (8) 1033-51.
19. Love, C. (1999) 'Family group conferencing: cultural origins, sharing, and appropriation: a Maori reflection', in G. Burford and J. Hudson (eds), *Family Group Conferencing: New Directions in Community-centred Child and Family Practice*, New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
20. Nixon, P., Burford, G. and Quinn, A. with Edelbaum, J. (2005) *A Survey of International Practices, Policy and Research on Family Group Conferencing and Related Practices*, Englewood: American Humane Association.
21. Griggs, J. (2003) 'Reluctant family change in Ireland' in L. Appleton and L. Hantrais, *Sixth Series IPROSEC (Improving Policy Responses and Outcomes to Socio-Economic Challenges), Paper 6: European Case Studies in Family Change, Policy and Practice*, European Research Centre, Loughborough University, p38.
22. Monaghan, E., Such, E. and Ackers, M. (2003) 'Hands-On Family Policy in the UK' in L. Appleton and L. Hantrais op cit.
23. Bogenschneider, K. (2000) 'Has family policy come of age? A decade review of the state of US Family Policy in the 1990s', *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 62 (4) 1136-59.
24. Blum, R. (1993) 'Critical issues for the family research agenda and their use in policy formulation' in G. E. Hendershot and F. B. LeClere (Eds.), *Family health: From data to policy*, Minneapolis, MN: National Council on Family Relations.
25. United Nations Programme on the Family, (2009) *Family Policy in a Changing World: Promoting Social Protection and Intergenerational Solidarity*, Report of the Expert Group Meeting, Doha, Qatar 14-16 April 2009, available at www.un.org/esa/socdev/family/meetings/egmreportdoha09.pdf (accessed 6 July 2013).
26. Moen, P. and Schorr, A.L. (1987) 'Families and social policy', in M.B. Sussman and S.K. Steinmetz (eds), *Handbook of Marriage and the Family*, New York: Plenum, p795.
27. Kamerman, S.B. and Kahn, A.J. (1978) 'Families and the idea of family policy', in S.B. Kamerman and A.J. Kahn (eds), *Family Policy: Government and Families in Fourteen Countries*, New York: Columbia University Press, p3.
28. Ibid.
29. Consortium of Family Organizations (1990) 'What is a family policy perspective and why is it needed? Family Policy Report, 1, 1-6; Ooms, T. (1990) 'Families and government: Implementing a family perspective in public policy', *Social Thought*, 16 (2) 61-78.
30. Ooms, 1990, op cit.
31. Glynn, M. (2011) *Father deficit, young people and substance misuse*, London: Addaction
32. Hareven, T. (1994) 'Recent research on the history of the family', in M. Drake (ed.), *Time, Family and Community: Perspectives on Family and Community History*, Buckingham: Open University Press.
33. Institute for Family Policies (2008) *Report on the Evolution of the Family in Europe 2008*, Madrid: IPF.
34. Hantrais, L. (2004) *Family Policy Matters: Responding to Family Change in Europe*, Bristol: The Policy Press, p67.

35. OECD (2012) OECD Family Database, SF1.1: Family size and household composition, Table SF1.1.B: Households with children, Paris: OECD, available at: <http://www.oecd.org/els/soc/42293876.xls> (accessed 10 April 2013).
36. Hudson, J. and Lowe, S. (2009) *Understanding the Policy Process: Analysing welfare policy and practice* (2nd edn), Bristol: Policy Press.
37. Heffernan, R. (2002) 'The possible as the art of politics: understanding consensus politics', *Political Studies* 50, 742-60, p750.
38. Relationships Foundation (2013) *Counting the Cost of Family Failure 2013 Update* (Research Note), Cambridge: Relationships Foundation.
39. Evans, M and Cerny, P. (2003) 'Globalisation and Social Policy' in N. Ellison and C. Pierson (eds) *Developments in British Social Policy 2*, Basingstoke: Palgrave
40. *Ibid*, p21.
41. Jessop, B. (2000) 'From the KWNS to the SWPR', in G. Lewis, S. Gewirtz and J. Clarke (eds) *Rethinking Social Policy*, London: Sage, p182.
42. Hudson and Lowe, *op cit*.
43. Rowthorn, R. and Webster, D. (2006) 'Male Worklessness and the Rise of Lone Parenthood in Britain', Oxford Centre for Population Research, Working Paper No. 31.
44. Wilson, W.J. (1987) *The Truly Disadvantaged: the inner city, the underclass and public policy*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
45. Hirsch, D. (2012) *Does the Tax and Benefit System create a 'Couple Penalty'?* University of Loughborough /Joseph Rowntree Foundation; Francesconi, M., Rainer, H. and van der Klaauw, W. (2009) 'The Effects of In- Work Benefit Reform in Britain on Couples: Theory and Evidence', *The Economic Journal* 119 (535) 66-100.
46. Centre for Social Justice (2009) *Dynamic Benefits: Towards welfare that works*, London: Centre for Social Justice
47. Office of National Statistics (2013) *Nomis: 2011 Census, ks105ew Household Composition*, London: Office of National Statistics, available at: <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/> (17/05/13).
48. Department for Work and Pensions, (2007) *Joint birth registration: promoting parental responsibility*, CM7160, p5, available at: <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/publications/dwp/2007/joint-registration-of-births-gp.pdf8>.
49. Elliott, J and Vaitilingham, R (2008) *Now we are 50: Key findings from the Child Development Study*, Centre for Longitudinal Studies, Institute of Education, London, 2008.
50. Cunningham-Burley, S. and McKie, L. (eds) (2005) *Families in Society: Boundaries and Relationships*, Bristol, Policy Press, p5.
51. Walker, J. (2006) 'Supporting Families in Democratic Societies: Public Concerns and Private Realities', keynote paper at 53rd ICCFR International Conference Families and Democracy: Compatibility, Incompatibility, Opportunity or Challenge? Lyon, France
52. Walker, *op cit* and Williams, F. (2004) *Rethinking Families*, London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.
53. Williams, *op cit*.
54. Chaplin R, Flatley J and Smith K, (2011) *Home Office Statistical Bulletin: Crime in England and Wales 2010/11*, London: Home Office, available at: www.homeoffice.gov.uk (04/07/12).
55. Wilson, B. and Clarke, S. (1992) 'Remarriages: A demographic profile', *Journal of Family Issues*, 13, 123-141.
56. Juby, H., Le Bourdais, C. and Marcil-Gratton, N. (2001) *A step further: Parenthood in blended families*, Montréal: Centre interuniversitaire d'études démographiques.
57. Walker, J. (ed) (2001) *Information Meetings an Associated Provisions within the Family Law Act 1996: Final Evaluation Report*, London: Lord Chancellor's Department; Walker, J. et al (2004) *Picking up the Pieces: Marriage and Divorce Two Years after Information Provision*, London: Department for Constitutional Affairs.
58. Mansfield, P. (2004) 'The Missing Link in Parenting Education and Support' in *One Plus One: The Bulletin*, 8 (2) 10-11.

59. Callan, S. et al (2006) 'Fractured Families – the State of the Nation Report', Vol 2 of Breakdown Britain, Interim Report from the Social Justice Policy Group, London: Centre for Social Justice.
60. Walker (2006) op cit.
61. Centre for Social Justice (2013) Fractured Families: why stability matters, London: Centre for Social Justice.
62. LinkAge Bristol provides an excellent city-wide example of this in the UK details for which are available at <http://www.linkagebristol.org.uk> (accessed 6 July 2013).
63. Pricewaterhouse Coopers (2006) DfES Children's Services Review of Capacity in the Parenting Support Market, London: PwC.
64. Hochschild, A. (2003) *The Commercialization of Intimate Life: Notes from Home and Work*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press; Lan, P.C. (2006) *Global Cinderellas: Migrant Domesticity and Newly Rich Employers in Taiwan*, Durham: Duke University Press.
65. United Nations (1990) International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, available at www2.ohchr.org/english/law/cmw.htm (accessed 27 June 2010).
66. Bailey, R. (2011) *Letting Children be Children: Report of an Independent Review of the Commercialisation and Sexualisation of Childhood*, Department for Education, Cmnd 8078, London: Department for Education.
67. Bourdieu, P. (1996) 'On the Family as a Realised Category', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 13, (3) 19-26.
68. Dench, G. (2003) *Rediscovering Family*, Hera Trust.
69. Centre for Social Justice (2009) *Every Family Matters: an in-depth review of family law in Britain*, London: Centre for Social Justice.
70. Squires, M. (2002) *The Cambridge Edition of the works of DH Lawrence, Lady Chatterley's lover and Apropos of 'Lady Chatterley's lover'*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p321.