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Topic: Trends and Factors of Childcare Policy Variations in an Era of Globalization

Abstract

There is no doubt that most matured welfare states have been successful in dealing with the traditional social risks, nonetheless, the risk structure has been altered. Major social changes creating new challenges that need to address include: changing and unstable family structures, low fertility rates, and an increase in female labor force participation. The major dissatisfaction with the contemporary welfare state, therefore, comes from the rising discrepancy between evolving and changing social needs and current social protection schemes. The controversy on the table concerns how to find a balance between family formation and female labor force participation. Thus, the attention has turned toward to the degree to which domestic caring responsibilities are relaxed via the welfare state or market provisions. This largely explains why young child policies, which have significant impact on families with young children, have caught more attention recently. On the other hand, in the 1980's economic growth slowed, fiscal resources were more constrained, and the political scene was dominated by the neo-liberal thinking as well as globalized market. All these factors combined to launch an assault on the welfare state. What retrenchment has actually resulted from these attacks is a subject that has been vigorously debated. Whether the attack on welfare states resulted in a trend towards

retrenchment or the rising needs actually give rise to a trend towards expansions in young child policies since the 1980s constitutes the core questions being addressed in this study.

In addition, this study also interested: What are the significant factors that shaped the variations in young childcare policies across nations? Explanations of the variation of welfare policies are not lacking, quite the opposite, various theories have been vigorously debated and constructed as competing models. Among them, convergence theory, power resource theory, and state-centered theory are the three leading approaches. Though these three theories proved successful in accounting for major welfare schemes, this study is curious whether they are also applicable in explaining young childcare policy variations?

Causal hypotheses derived from these three theories are tested by using multiple regression analyses on a set of pooled time-series cross-sectional data for each of the years between 1980 and 2000 among 18 OECD nations. In order to answer the research questions, this study draws on the OECD Social Expenditure Database (*SOCX*) as the major source for young child policies, For explanatory variables, the “Comparative Welfare State Data Set”, collected by Huber, Ragin, and Stephens, Brady, and Beckfield (2004), provides the most relevant and complete data on the political economy and institutional structure of the OECD countries. Results demonstrate that globalization does not systematically cause a substantial cutback in young child policies. Rather, it is countered by two significant demographic factors: fertility rates and female labor force participation. Results also support power resource theory and institutional theory in that corporatism, partisan effects, and institution structures all have a significant effect on young child policies.