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Policy Supports for Working Parents of Children with Disabilities: A Cross-national Comparison

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Work-Life Integration for Families with Children who have Emotional or Behavioral Disorders

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Employed Parents of Children with Disabilities

- ✎ UNICEF (2006) estimates that there are 150 million children with disabilities worldwide.
- ✎ Parents of children with disabilities can find work-life integration very difficult (Kagan, Lewis, & Heaton, 1998; Rosenzweig & Brennan, 2008), and require flexibility at work to meet their caregiving responsibilities.
- ✎ This paper examines supports for work flexibility through a cross-national comparison of policies and programs in Germany, the USA, and Sweden.

Cross-national Policy Comparisons

- ✎ Allow for the review, analysis and synthesis of formal flexibility policies supporting parents of children with disabilities.
- ✎ Permits comparison of supports across countries with different types of social policies (Esping-Andersen, 1999; and also Aspalter, 2006; Bamba, 2007).
- ✎ Three countries were selected for our comparison that exemplify differing approaches to family policy:
 - ✎ Conservative—maintain the traditional family and gendered division of labor (Germany).
 - ✎ Social democratic—support all individuals as part of their citizenship rights, supplying generous supports (Sweden).
 - ✎ Liberal—emphasize personal choice and responsibility, and the connection of the employee to the market (USA).

Prior Cross-national Comparisons of Work-Life Policies Did Not Address Exceptional Caregivers

- ✎ Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development conducted a series of major studies (OECD, 2002-2007) on work- family life policies in 30 member countries and found substantial differences in policy generosity and their success in:
 - ✎ Promoting child development
 - ✎ Increasing workforce participation
 - ✎ Attaining greater gender equity in employment and care of children.
- ✎ International Network on Leave Policy and Research compared 22 economically-developed countries, 17 from the EU (Moss & O'Brien, 2002), but no synthesis on leave to care for children who were ill or disabled was undertaken.

Recent Cross-national Studies Rated the Quality of Leave Policies or Flexible Work Statutes.

- ✎ Center for Economic and Policy Research (Ray, Gornick, & Schmitt, 2008) rated the generosity and gender-equality promotion of parental leave policies in 21 countries and formulated a gender-equality index.
- ✎ Building on the work of Kamerman (1991), Parry (2001) rated three countries on the quality of their leave policies on the basis of scope (coverage), remuneration (wage replacement), and duration (length of replacement or job protection).
- ✎ Institute for Women's Policy Research compared the flexible work statutes of 21 countries and found that 17 allowed parents flexibility, and 5 guaranteed all workers the right to ask for and obtain flexible work arrangements (Hegewisch & Gornick, 2008).

Method of the Current Study

- ✎ Drawing on existing cross-national comparisons, research specific to each country, and primary sources, this study:
 - ✎ Examined the historical and political context of universal and targeted work-life policies supporting families of children with disabilities,
 - ✎ Compared special supports for these families, and
 - ✎ Considered laws addressing flexible work arrangements.
- ✎ Using a cross-national analysis, the policies were examined for their generosity and capacity to promote work-life integration for employed parents of children with disabilities.

Cross-National Comparison of Characteristics

Country	Gross Domestic Product*	Human Development Index*	Gender Development Index*	Women 15-64 years who are employed**	Proportion of Children with Disabilities+
Germany	\$31,766	0.940	0.937	61.5%	1.0 (under 15 years)
Sweden	\$34,056	0.958	0.958	72.1%	1.7% (under 16 years)
United States	\$43,968	0.950	0.937	66.1%	8.8% (under 15 years).

Note. * UN (2008); **OECD (2008b); +National Records

Cross-national Comparisons of Definitions of Disability



Country	Definition of Disability
Germany	Deviation from typical physical functions, mental capacities or psychological health for more than 6 months, resulting in limited participation in social life (SGB IX, Koch, 2004). A “degree of disability” is assessed using a scale (scores range from 20 – 100, with 50 = high degree of impairment; die Grad der Behinderung; OECD, 2003).
Sweden	Functional or mental impairment that is major and causes considerable difficulties in daily life and requires an extensive need for support or services (LSS, 1993; Socialstyrelsen, 2006b).
United States	American with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) refers to disability as “a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities” or those ‘who have a record of’ or are ‘regarded as’ having such impairment” (29 USC 705(20)(B)).

Family Supports for the Care of Children who have Disabilities or have Special Health Care Needs

	Germany	Sweden	United States
Type of Leave Available	Maternity leave Parental leave Child sick leave	Parental leave Sick leave	Family medical leave
Persons Covered	Mothers for maternity leave Both mothers and father entitled to parental leave (with restrictions)	Both parents entitled to paid parental leave whether or not they are employed	Only workers employed full-time in past year with govt. agencies or by organizations >50 employees
Uptake of Leave	92% took leave (under previous policy) 5% uptake by fathers	87% leave days used (82.8% by mothers; 17.2% by fathers)	9% of workforce uses FMLA
Duration of Leave	365 days over 48 months	480 days (6 weeks prenatal to 8 years)	60 work days per year

Family Supports (Continued)

	Germany	Sweden	United States
Compensation During Leave	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maternal benefit • Childrearing benefit • Individual states may also pay means-tested benefit . • Sick leave is paid up to 80% of earnings (with no ceiling) through health insurer. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 80% of parent salary for the first 390 days • Lower compensation flat rate for an additional 90 days 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unpaid, although some states and some companies provide compensation during leave.
Flexible Work Arrangements (FWA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No law requires firms to grant FWA. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents can request flexible work arrangements including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a gradual return to work after a leave, • intermittent leave, • reduced hours to care for children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No law requires employers to grant FWA. • Family Responsibilities Discrimination litigation protects against retaliation or unfair treatment of employees with FWA.

Family Supports (Continued)

	Germany	Sweden	United States
Special Supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child rearing allowances • Family allowances with no time or age limitations for children with disabilities • Housing support • Preventive supports • Classroom integration supports • Specialized schools • Individual, family therapy, and parent support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heavily subsidized child care and early childhood education; • Particular child allowances for families of children with disabilities; • Counseling, therapy, and personal support; • Personal assistant; • Companion service; • Relief service and respite care; • Supervision • Guaranteed residence in a family home. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supplemental Security Income payments for children with disabilities. • Child care subsidies prioritized for children with special needs, as defined by each state. • In every Head Start program for low-income families, at least 10% of children enrolled must have a disability. • Special education services for those whose disability meets standard.

Conclusions from Cross-national Comparison



- ✎ *Leave Policies* (that make accommodation for parents whose children are ill or require special health care needs).
 - ✎ Even after recent increases in Germany, Sweden still the most generous in terms of scope, remuneration, and duration.
 - ✎ US stands alone with unpaid leave.
- ✎ *Flexible work arrangements (FWA)*
 - ✎ Swedish parents have statutory rights to request, not present in Germany or US; some litigation protection in US.
 - ✎ FWA in Germany and US often arranged informally.
- ✎ *Special supports for families*
 - ✎ Both Sweden and Germany have adopted a generous menu of supports; fewer supports in US.

Policy Conclusions

- ✎ Policymakers need to examine the results of cross-national comparisons of work-life policies, and listen to those affected by these policies in their own countries so that they can promote workforce participation and assist families to stay out of poverty.
- ✎ In the US, FMLA should cover all workers, and be paid, in order to increase its uptake by families who care for children with illness or disability, and help them stay engaged in the workforce (See Brennan & Marsh, 2008).



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