INTRODUCTION

Using the Intersectional Approach to Social Policy to Investigate the Adult Worker Model

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Abstract

In this thematic issue, the authors explore family policies in seven different countries: Hungary, Hong Kong, Lithuania, Romania, Taiwan, Turkey, and the UK. A common theme is that in analysing these policies, we need to take into account more than gender, but rather we need to also consider issues such as class, poverty, religion, and the use of migrant workers. Thus, these countries have all been moving away from the traditional male breadwinner model; however, the adult-worker model is also inadequate for describing the nuances of these countries' policies. Instead, an intersectional approach makes more sense, combining gender with the other important socioeconomic issues just mentioned.

It has been clear that since at least the 1970s the world has been moving away from the male-breadwinner model, and even those countries that have tried to maintain it have been forced to modify it somewhat to account for the growing educational level of women, who are increasingly less willing to be full-time housewives. One alternative description of the current situation has been the application of the adult-worker model (Lewis and Guillari, 2005). According to this model, policies encourage adults of all genders to work. However, there have been problems with this model, such as its being underspecified and not including criteria that show the variations across countries (e.g. Daly, 2011). In addition, it does not describe the division of unpaid labour in the home. Consequently, several gender-based alternatives have arisen, such as those based on degrees of defamilisation (e.g., Hantrais 2004; Lister 1994; McLaughlin and Glendinning 1994) or degenderisation (Saxonberg, 2013, Saxonberg and Szelewa, 2021) or those based on the capabilities approach (e.g., Hobbson *et al.*; 2011; Kurowska 2018). These approaches have mostly focussed on gender, although the capabilities approach allows one to take into account the child's perspective. None of these approaches, however, has emphasised intersectionality, although the capabilities approach is the one that could be most easily applied to such a view, because factors such as class, ethnicity, and religion influence one's capabilities.

The common thread of the five articles that comprise this special issue is that they combine a gender approach with other factors, which leads to an intersectional approach even if they do not always call it by name:

- 'Managing work and care: does employing a live-in migrant care worker fill the gap? The example of Taiwan' (by Li-Fang Liang)

- 'Informal care provision and the reduction of economic activity among mid-life carers in Great Britain: a mixed-method approach' (by Athina Vlachantoni, Ning Wang, Zhixin Feng and Jane Falkingham)
- 'Different, yet the same: Three decades of family policy change in Hungary, Lithuania and Romania' (by Borbala Kovacs)
- 'Business Structures, Stereotypes and Knowledge of Discrimination: Understanding Employers' Support to Paid Family Leave in Hong Kong' (by Haijing Dai, Nahri Jung and Nanxun Li)
- 'Caring Piously: New Institutionalization of Childcare Services in Turkey' (by Saniye Dedeoglu and Asli Sahankaya Adar)

Liang's article about Taiwan takes up the issue of employing migrant labour to help with the caring duties in a country where the majority of women work, but the government does not provide much services like daycare to lighten the double burden that working women face of having to work and still do most of the caring. The article shows that even when the migrant workers live with the family, females usually remain the ones responsible for the family as they have to manage the caring in giving instructions to the migrant workers, while also helping them with the caring duties. Thus, even if one could call the system an adult-worker model since most women work, in contrast to the Nordic countries, the state does little to make balancing work and family life easier, so women need to rely on migrant labour to be able to work. Class matters as well, as poorer women are less able to afford live-in helpers.

While Liang looks at the case of families employing migrant live-in workers, Vlachatoni *et al.* take an intergenerational approach in analysing how taking care of the elderly influences the careers of women. They find that because of gendered norms of caring, women are more likely than men to reduce their working hours to take care of family members. Women are also less more likely than men to abstain from marrying in order to have time to take care of family members. The study also points to the role of socioeconomic factors. For example, those facing financial pressures were less likely to reduce working hours than those without such pressures. This shows the importance of considering socioeconomic and intergenerational factors, which could be done through an intersectional approach, although the article does not specifically refer to this literature.

Kovacs' contribution shows the need to take a socio-economic insider-outsider perspective into account when looking at gender as family policies in Hungary, Lithuania, and Romania are moving in an increasing dualistic direction. Universal benefits in these countries that are available to everyone regardless of income have become increasingly less generous. Meanwhile, benefits that are related to income have become more difficult to access, but more generous. This institutional dualism favours well-paid professionals with higher incomes, who have long-term employment, which comes at the expense of those with more precarious jobs. Kovacs criticises historical institutionalists for often overlooking the fact that change can be gradual and even come about by not updating benefit levels to keep pace with inflation. Although the article uses the typology of Mahoney and Thelen (2010) and such terms as 'policy drift' this description of slowly worsening conditions also fits in well with the notion of 'neo-liberalism by decay' (Saxonberg and Sirovátka, 2009).

While the articles discussed so far have combined gender approaches with socio-economic, insider-outsider, intergenerational, and domestic-migrant approaches, using the example of Hong Kong, Dai *et al.* show the importance of combining gender with an analysis of employers' attitudes toward balancing work-life. It is difficult to create family-friendly workplaces. Since the local government pursues extremely laissez-faire policies, employers must pay for the maternity leave. To meet International Labour Organisation (ILO) standards, the Hong Kong government extended the maternity leave from ten to fourteen weeks in 2019, but the government only subsidises these extra four weeks, leaving employers to pay for the first four weeks. It is also the

employers' obligation to pay for the paternity leave, which is limited to merely three days. Small-and medium-sized businesses are especially critical of parental leaves because they feel more hurt by the added costs than do larger companies. This ungenerous policies make it more difficult for women to leave the male-breadwinner model and goes against the adult worker model, although the majority of women work. Nonetheless, there are differences among employers, as female employers were more supportive of paid parental leave than were male employers, while those in the export industry (who faced greater international competition) were also more critical of paid parental leaves than were domestic industries such as construction.

Dedeoglu and Adar take up another issue that is often ignored when it comes to gendering family policy, which is the religious aspect. Even though the conservative Justice and Development Party (AKP) government supports the male-breadwinner model and wants women to remain at home, it has started to support daycare when provide by the Presidency of Religious Affairs (PoRA) in the form of Qur'an courses. From a class perspective, the private daycare facilities are affordable only to the middle classes, while the state-supported Quran courses appeal to the working classes and low-income households. This is part of a class-based strategy in which the conservative, Islamic AKP tries to form an alliance with poor women. It has the added benefit of raising children to be religious Muslims, which contrasts Ataturk's vision of creating a secular Turkey. The fact that conservative/religious or nationalist groups which do not support gender equality might support daycare for ulterior reasons presents a somewhat similar case to the kindergarten movement in the former Austro-Hungarian empire. There the *Volkskindergärten* had the support of Czech, Polish, Hungarian, and Slovak nationalists because they taught in the national tongues rather than German, which contributed to the national awakenings of these folk groups who aspired to break loose from Austrian rule (Saxonberg, 2014).

In conclusion, the articles in this thematic issue show the need for an intersectional approach that takes into account such factors as class, religion, socio-economic background, intergenerational issues, the views of the employers, and labour market position (whether one is an insider or outsider) when analysing the gender aspect of family policies.

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