



Scoping a Future Research Agenda on Family Life and the Changing World of Work

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Presentation Aims and Structure

- 1 Identify some key gaps in knowledge
- 2 Identify things that appear as stable knowledge
- 3 Craft research questions and a research agenda

Gaps in Existing Knowledge - What We Don't Know (1)

- **The kind of entity family is - which leaves us wondering about:**
- How decisions are made regarding family resources and key family-related processes (fertility, labour market participation, child care, elder care)?
- The internal differentiations in families
- The nature and extent of solidarity and links to wider kinship patterns

Gaps in Existing Knowledge - What We Don't Know (2)

- **Diversity and inequalities as family-related phenomena**
- Re diversity - we still rely too much on the 'conventional family' with the result that other types of family structures and practices remain under-explored as do variations by social class and other factors
- Re inequality -
- Structural and other variation in the 'capitals' and resources that people acquire or miss out on by virtue of family membership is also under-researched
- Polarisation among families is increasing, contributing to inequalities in society but we don't know how exactly

Gaps in Existing Knowledge - What We Don't Know (3)

- **The impact of policy and the wider environment**
- Families' reactions to different types of policy and the impact on family behaviours is still relatively obscure to us
- Some of the theoretical frameworks are relatively crude or under developed, for example the market, state and family nexus
- The existing welfare regime models or typologies are out-dated and rather one-sided

What We Do Know (1)

- **Trends in relevant policy prior to the pandemic**
- Family as having a relatively strong focus in social policy - parents especially but also children and old-age care
- Services especially have seen strong growth, attempting to move childcare outside of family
- Very vibrant field with a lot of innovation and experimentation (guarantees of services for children and families, incentives and penalties around parental leave, conditional cash transfers, parenting programmes, targets)
- Policies give mixed signals and viewed from a behavioural perspective can at time be contradictory

What We Do Know (2)

- There are intractable issues
- Inequality and gender asymmetry persist in the distribution of paid and unpaid work
- Although there is dynamism, there are enduring gender inequalities in labour markets - in job growth, in sectoral placement, in wage levels, in age and family background,
- Variations in family, work and gender-related values and aspirations but also considerable stability over time

What We May Know (3)

- **Measures taken to ‘protect’ families with children during the pandemic**
- A review of family- and child-related measures in 37 countries in the months from first lockdown to December 2020
- Research Question: What did countries do expressly/explicitly for children and their families during the pandemic - what resources were they able to mobilise?
- Looking at 6 domains: education/school, early childhood and education, parental leave, income support, food assistance, health (vaccine access for children of different ages and psycho-support services)

Number and Field of Policy Activity

Policy Area	Additional Support measures	No additional support or discontinuation
(Primary) Education	29	8
Early Childhood Education/Care	25	12
Parental leave	30	7
Income support	24	13
Food support	20	17

Relative Activity/intensiveness across Countries

Number of policy domains	Number of countries	Country
No policy field	1	Mexico
1 policy field	0	-
2 policy fields	2	Netherlands, Turkey
3 policy fields	5	Canada, Cyprus, Poland, Romania, Spain
4 policy fields	11	Croatia, Denmark, Hungary, Ireland, Japan, Lithuania, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Slovakia, UK, US
5 policy fields	15	Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Chile, Czechia, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Slovenia, South Korea
All policy fields	3	France, Latvia, Sweden

Overview of the Pandemic-related Measures

- Family policy vibrancy but mainly reactive rather than proactive
- Considerable diversity and innovation:
 - New income support measures: 12 countries
 - New COVID-19 parental leave measures: 21 countries
- Most countries utilised more than one channel
- Income support favoured over services
- Considerable variation- not that easy to identify a patterning in countries' responses - some evidence of path dependency

Main Research Questions Implied to Date

- What does it mean to be a member of (this) family?
- What principles govern resource distribution within and across families?
- What is the link between family structure(s) and inequalities in society?
- What kind of ‘capitals’ and resources do people acquire or miss out on by virtue of family membership and how is this related to family structure?
- How do social and family policies interact with and shape people’s family practices (and vice versa)?
- Why is the division of unpaid work so slow to change and is this a matter of policy (failure)?
- How do we exploit the many ‘natural experiments’ in family policy for research?
- To what extent do policies adopted during COVID-19 signify stability or change?

Research Agenda (1)

- Investigating/conceptualising family relationships, processes and outcomes
- Partly at least looking inside families to see the distribution of resources - relative power/authority might be a line of analysis here
- Concepts like resilience, risk and solidarity could be investigated as characteristics of units as well as of individuals - as in our new Europe 2020 project - *rEUsilience*

Research Agenda (2)

- **Conceptualising/investigating the links between family and employment**
- Rather than paid and unpaid work, assess the utility of the concept of:
 - Care
 - - and within that the ‘care economy’ concept and care ethics perspectives
- Critically scrutinise the use of care as a driver of policy reform at national and also EU levels (both rhetorically and in policy)
- Ask what problems it is seen to be addressing and how
- And identify the risks in seeing care in economic and market terms alone (care ethics perspectives)

Research Agenda (3)

- **Conceptualising/investigating the links between family, state and market**
- Concepts such as the following might help us to assess the relationship:
 - depletion and sustainability (Rai et al 2014),
 - ‘hollowing out’
 - familialisation/defamilialisation

Research Agenda (4)

- **How to understand and address complex inequality? and the role of policy?**
- What kind of equality do people want - sameness or choice? What is the balance between choice and constraint?
- How to bring in intersectional inequalities? Perhaps through recognising multiple stratification processes, seeing interdependence between them, and the distances between the group/sector studied and assumed norm
- Whether gender is to be conceived in its own right or as an interlinked structure