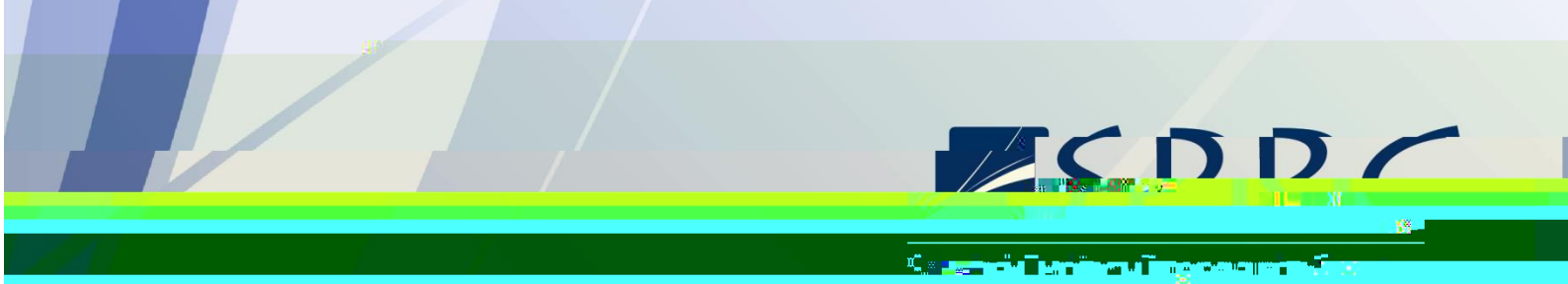

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Abbreviations

CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
CCCH	Centre for Community Child Health, Royal Hospital for Children
DHHS	Department of Health and Human Services
FaCS	Australian Government Department of Families and Community Services
FaHCSIA	Australian Government Department of Families, Housing and Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
NGO	Non-government organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
USA	United States of America

Tables and Figures

Vulnerable parents

This section outlines the particular needs of certain groups of parents. Fathers are important to virtually all children, whether they are resident biological parents, non resident parents or non biological fathers who take on a parenting role. Grandparents also play important roles in

A second distinguishing feature of countries' parenting policies relates to whether the policy philosophy is reactive or preventive in nature. The UK, Sweden, and Ireland, countries that have all taken steps toward coherency and coordination, have government policies that acknowledge the role the government can play in supporting and investing in parents. In contrast, the United States, Canada and New Zealand primarily implement targeted policies and programs, taking a reactive approach of intervening in or supporting parenting only in cases in which a safety net is deemed necessary. Australia is in the process of moving from a reactive towards a much more proactive and preventive policy.

There are very few examples of universal policies and programs targeting all parents. Rather, in most countries, parenting policies are limited to laws and programs that are targeted at specific subpopulations. The scope of these populations ranges from children with disability and parents with disability, to teenage parents and low-income parents. In all of these cases, the implicit goal of the policies is to support parents who may face particular constraints and challenges in meeting the needs of their children. However, the approach, structure and extent of the policies differs between individual countries for a variety of reasons due to need, available resources and the history of the policy approach in that country to the particular issue. The detailed approaches of the study countries to disabled parents, children with disability, teen parents and low income parents are explored in detail in Section 5.3.

Government structure of parenting

Results from our analysis indicated notable similarities in how the countries under study structure and implement their programs and policies relating to parenting. All countries have one lead government agency or department which contains the majority of their parenting related policies and supports. In all cases, the major focus in this lead department is not on parenting but rather encapsulates a broader portfolio. The policy portfolio of the lead department often covers families, children or education. Although countries all have one or more central government agency overseeing policies related to parenting, it is important to note that all countries also have varying amounts of their family policy agenda spread out over numerous other agencies and departments. Several countries also have an official or body outside of the lead department and separate from the government who is specifically focused on children and/or families.

Many policies relating to families and children are actually implemented at the state/province or even local level with great variety in how these policies are envisioned and legislated. Countries fall along a continuum between a federalist (or national government) system and an anti-federalist (local authority or state government) system. Sweden, New Zealand and Ireland are examples of countries where nearly all policy is created at the national government level. These countries do not have any coordinated system for policies to trickle down to the local level or to be legislated and implemented at the local level only.

In the middle of the continuum lie Australia, the US and the UK, all of which have a system where the majority of the legislation and funding originates at the national level, but where states and local governments (or NGOs) have the responsibility for implementing programs. This section looks in detail at the study countries' government structures. In the area of parenting policy Canada lies at the extreme of the continuum, with the vast majority of policies and programs being developed by the provinces rather than the federal government.

benefits, baby bonuses, child care subsidies etc. In this review, we treat parenting policies and children's policies as sub-categories of family policies.

Parenting policy

The term parenting policy is used here to describe policies and programs that seek to support the quality of parenting or to alter parents' activities with their children in or outside of the home. These include such policies as:

Parenting information
Parenting orders
Income management
Child support

2 Methodology

"research which systematically investigates one or more phenomena in two or more countries or 'nations' as given contexts for actors and institutions" (Clasen, 1999, p. 2). In a very similar approach, Kennett defines comparative or cross national policy analysis as the "explicit, systematic and contextual analysis of one or more phenomena in more than one country" (Kennett 2001, 3).

Comparing and contrasting phenomena in a systematic manner increases understanding of

various policy problems" (Heidenheimer, et al., 1990, pp. 3-4). The 'why' can refer to reasons behind policymakers' decisions, reasons that can be historical, economic, political or social and which, in reality, interact in various ways to influence policymaking. For these authors, it is not enough to compare policies alone, rather, the analysis must situate policies within an "overall

Cowan, 2002; Fincham, 1998; Shaw, Owens, Giovannelli, & Winslow, 2001; Zahn-Waxler, Duggal, & Gruber, 2002). Parental stress has been shown to be a major risk factor for a range of negative child outcomes (Conger, Conger, Elder, Lorenz,

Interactive nature of parenting

Sole parents

The incidence of sole/lone parenthood has been increasing across developed nations over several decades and represents one of the biggest changes to the traditional nuclear family form (Goodger & Larose, 1998; Gregg & Harkness, 2003; Harding, Vu, Percival, & Beer, 2005; Rowlingson, 2001; Waldfogel, Danziger, Danziger, & Seefeldt, 2001). Intensified by social, economic and industrial changes, sole parenthood is a heavily gendered area of concern because a high proportion of sole parents are women (Rowlingson, 2001). Sole parents also tend to have lower levels of educational achievement and the physical, emotional, financial and geographical effects of divorce or separation affect their capacity to search for paid work (ACOSS, 2005; Goodger & Larose, 1998). Furthermore, their specific challenges and needs intersect with other vulnerable groups of parents. Teenage parents, for instance, are more likely to be sole parents and, in some countries, sole parents are more likely to belong to culturally or linguistically diverse communities (Goodger & Larose, 1998; Waldfogel, et al., 2001).

Despite the responsibility of being the main carer and breadwinner sole parents generally provide their children with similar amounts of care as coupled families (Craig, 2004). They also generally provide their children with a stable environment, passing on values that enable them to respond positively to adversity (Lindblad-Goldberg, 1989). This group is considered to be vulnerable, however, because they report a greater need for external support to assist them in responding consistently and positively to their children, particularly in the context of parental separation, divorce or death (Australian Department of Family and Community Services, 2004). Research also shows that sole parent households are at a higher risk of

fathers, studies have found that active and voluntary paternal involvement plays a crucial role in shaping positive emotional, behavioural and educational outcomes for children (Gottman, Katz, & Hooven, 1997; Nord, Brimhall, & West, 1997; Tamis-LeMonda & Bornstein, 1989).

Policy and research interest in fathers and fatherhood has increased considerably over the past decade, driven by a number of factors including, on the one hand, pressure by women's

Figure 1: Adolescent fertility rate (births per 1000 women aged 15-19)

Source: World Development Indicators (WDI) (2006). WDI Data Query. Accessed at http://devdata.worldbank.org/data-query/, October 2008.

A range of programs have been implemented to prevent teenage pregnancy; most are aimed at preventing young mothers from conceiving (Bunting & McAuley, 2004). In the United States, such programs aim to prevent early pregnancy through abstinence and, when pregnancy has already occurred, they aim to foster better educational achievements, reduced welfare dependency, improved parenting skills, stronger social support systems and better health outcomes for mother and child (Boonstra, 2002; Gestsdottir, 2005; Seitz & Apfel, 1999). The UK also has introduced early intervention and preventive measures such as the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy, which aims at reducing the rate of teenage pregnancy and, through the Care to Learn initiative, encouraging young mothers to remain in or re-enter education or training by helping with the costs of childcare.

Grandparents as primary carers

Grandparents often assume a range of different types of care for their grandchildren, from supporting and providing advice to family members to child minding several days a week. However, there is increasing awareness of grandparents assuming the role of primary caregiver when their children are temporarily or permanently unable to fulfil their caring responsibilities (Brennan, Cass, Hampshire, & Marchant, 2007). Research has found increases in primary caregiving by grandparents spanning across many countries (Edwards & Mumford, 2005; Orb & Davy, 2005; Worrall, 2005). This increase is related to the rising incidence of relationship breakdown, neglect and child abuse, drug and alcohol abuse, domestic violence, mental illness, teenage pregnancy, imprisonment, or death of a parent through illness or suicide (Adkins, 1999; Field & Blaiklock, 2005; Worrall, 2005). In Australia, the number of children being raised by grandparents is small, estimated to be about 1% of all families with children under 17, and it is unclear whether this number is increasing (Australian Government, 2003; Gray, Misson & Hayes, 2005). Many children for whom their grandparents assume primary responsibility are dealing with high levels of trauma and are in need of more intensive support services

tend to face difficulties with their emotional and physical wellbeing (Edwards & Mumford, 2005).

The literature shows that, across countries, grandparents providing primary care can experience a variety of legal, financial, physical and emotional difficulties. Many find the legal system confusing and expensive and they often have limited access to legal aid. Grandparents also experience frequent challenges to their custody and guardianship status (Council of the Ageing National Seniors, 2003; Worrall, 2005). Due to the fact that many have already retired and are living on reduced incomes, the acceptance of a parenting role also places significant financial strain on these grandparents and yet financial support is often limited and piecemeal. When financial assistance is available, many are not aware of their entitlements (Edwards & Mumford, 2005; Field & Blaiklock, 2005). Grandparents also face physical problems, with a significant proportion reporting a deterioration of their health status (Edwards & Mumford, 2005; Worrall, 2005) and a high level of emotional strain, with many

the family to adjust to the practical and emotional challenges which they will have to face (Case, 2000; Dowling & Dolan, 2001; Tudball, Fisher, Sands, & Dowse, 2002).

Parents from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Communities

Although difficult to define, minority communities encompass those who share a common cultural practice and history and who experience a less powerful position within society (Phoenix & Husain, 2007). They are not necessarily a minority in number but suffer various degrees of social discrimination in employment, housing and education. Linguistic, religious and ethnic differences exist within the minority populations in each country, and proportions of refugee and immigrant populations vary widely as well.

Minority issues, including questions around parenting and ethnicity, have been of concern for policy-makers in Western countries for some time. A number of research studies dating

2008). For parenting policies to adequately support CALD families, consultation with the communities is necessary, as is adapting programs to the cultural needs of particular groups.

Indigenous parents

Indigenous people in many western countries face a range of disadvantages due to historical, social and cultural differences and a history of colonisation and discrimination. Together, these experiences of economic and health disadvantage and social exclusion limit resources for parenting. According to the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision (2007), Aboriginal Australians in particular are worse off than the mainstream Australian population on a number of key indicators of disadvantage:

> Life expectancy is 17 years lower than in the general population
>
> Labour force participation rate is 25 per cent lower for Indigenous people and the unemployment rate is about three times greater than non-Indigenous people
>
> Indigenous children are four times as likely as other children to experience abuse or neglect
>
> Indigenous people are 13 times more likely than non Indigenous people to go to prison
>
> The fertility rate of teenage Aboriginal women is 4.5 times higher than non-Aboriginal counterparts (Kinfu & Taylor, 2002)

Disadvantage is also experienced by Australian Aboriginal children. Those under four years of age are more likely to be hospitalised for preventable diseases (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2007). Aboriginal children have much lower rates of school attendance than non-Aboriginal children and the rate of school attendance in rural areas is even lower than that in urban areas (Bourke & Rigby, 2000).

Some of these trends are similar among Indigenous people in other countries. In Canada, First Nation people have experienced a higher rate of substantiated child abuse cases, a higher incidence of substance abuse and experience poorer socioeconomic outcomes than the general population

emphasis on spirituality (Penman, 2006). Some similar patterns are found in other first nation peoples, for example in Canada (Neckowaya, Brownleea, & Castellana, 2007). Of course

in recent decades have been the dramatic rises in single parent families and the substantial increases in mothers' participation in the labour force. These are relevant to parenting and child development because, as stated earlier, there is increasing recognition that early environments provided for children are crucial for promoting positive child development (Bornstein, 2002; J. J. Heckman, 2006; Shaw, et al., 2001; Zahn-Waxler, et al., 2002).

The proportion of children being raised by sole parents, most often sole mothers, has grown dramatically as a result of transformations of the traditional family form. The rising divorce rate has been the primary driving force behind the increase in sole parenthood (Harding, et al., 2005; Rowlingson, 2001), alongside the growing numbers of children born to unmarried parents (McHugh & Millar, 1996; Rowlingson, 2001). Sole parents are likely to have lower educational attainment than coupled parents and they also are more likely to receive government benefits and support (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007). As noted above, sole parents face increased caregiving demands and are much more likely than married or

characteristics of poor people (Katz, et al., 2007; Welshman, 2007). Nevertheless, both political positions now acknowledge that children born into poor households are much more likely to remain poor than children from more affluent backgrounds. Research has shown that a central mediating factor between family SES and children's outcomes is parenting (see Katz & Redmond, 2008 for a more detailed explanation of this relationship). Thus, one of the key strategies aimed at combating child poverty and social inequality (from the left) and reducing the 'underclass' (from the right) focuses on improving parenting practices and parents' provision of resources – both economic and social – to children in low SES families. The linking of social inclusion with parenting and family support has had some effects on the development of policies and programs in this area. For example many of the more recent area

Many of the policies and programs which have been developed over the past two decades have been based

UN itself, which has criticised countries who have not removed the right of corporal punishment from parents.

On the whole, Anglo Saxon countries have resisted the international pressures to make corporal punishment an offence, the exception being New Zealand which effectively banned corporal punishment in 2007 under the *Crimes (Substituted Section 59) Amendment Act (2007)("The Crimes (Substituted Section 59) Amendment Act ")("The Crimes (Substituted Section 59) Amendment Act ")("The Crimes (Substituted Section 59) Amendment Act ")("The Crimes (Substituted Section 59) Amendment Act ")("The Crimes (Substituted Section 59) Amendment Act ")("The Crimes (Substituted Section 59) Amendment Act ")("The Crimes (Substituted Section 59) Amendment Act ")("The Crimes (Substituted Section 59) Amendment Act ")("The Crimes (Substituted Section 59) Amendment Act ")("The Crimes (Substituted Section 59) Amendment Act ")("The Crimes (Substituted Section 59) Amendment Act ")("The Crimes (Substituted Section 59) Amendment Act ")("The Crimes (Substituted Section 59) Amendment Act ")("The Crimes (Substituted Section 59) Amendment Act ")("The Crimes (Substituted Section 59) Amendment Act ").* This area of family policy has been contentious in Australia and many other countries for a number of years (Cashmore and de Haas, 1995). Australia's reports to the UN regarding the UNCRC have rejected the UN's concerns about the failure to prohibit corporal punishment (Attorney-General's Department, 2003), although the report points out that many states and territories have established a legislative standard of reasonableness, which was recommended by the *Model Criminal Code Officers Committee* (Attorney-General's Department, 1998). These countries have tended to take the view that although corporal punishment is not desirable, it is an invasion of family privacy to legislate against all forms of corporal punishment. This stance by governments tends to be upheld by the majority of the population (Gershoff, 2008) but NGOs and children's rights groups advocate strongly for a 'ban on smacking' (e.g. in the Australian context, Early Childhood Australia[1], Australian College of Paediatricians,[2] The National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (NAPCAN[3])).

This policy area graphically illustrates the tensions which surround the vexed issue of the degree to which governments should become involved in parenting practices. It also shows that policies which are uncontroversial in some countries have resulted in ongoing contentious disagreements in others.

3.5 Conclusion

This section has outlined the particular needs of certain groups of parents. Both fathers and grandparents play important roles in caring for many children, but their needs are often not adequately supported by policies which assume the primary caregiver to be the mother of the child. Although the special needs of parents caring for children with disability have been widely recognised, they are often not met by current policies and practices. The needs of

[1] http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/childrens_rights/croc_implementation/physical_punishment_and_children.html

[2] http://www.racp.edu.au/download.cfm?DownloadFile=A936CE93-2A57-5487

[3] http://www.resources.napcan.org.au/p/559188/alternatives-to-smacking-children.html

shared support for children (e.g. Sweden); and (4) a pro-family/non-interventionist model which is based on an idea of the self-sufficiency of families with targeted supports for families in need (e.g. the US). However these are ideal types and most countries have various elements of the different categories. Moreover, this work indicated that parenting policy, as a newly emerging arena, does not fit neatly into such categorizations.

The most important finding of the review of the comparative literature was that no research has yet been conducted to compare parenting policies across countries. As can be seen in Appendix 1, these studies examined elements of family policies, but none included parenting policy per se. Although parenting has become important to social policy in many countries, it appears that it is seldom explicitly recognised as an area of policy in and of itself. Rather, parenting policies are often spread amongst a number of different government departments and are usually a secondary component of policy areas focused on other priorities, particularly child health and education and parental labour force participation, but also criminal justice and other areas of social policy. Because of this dispersion of parenting policies amongst other social objectives and also due to the fact that some aspects of parenting are contested in contemporary society, policies towards parenting and the family can be in tension with each other. In fact few countries have explicitly mapped out what they expect from parents and what supports they will provide for parenting (Commission on Families and the Wellbeing of Children, 2005). Below we briefly review existing literature on broader family policy, denoting primary subcomponents of parenting policy and briefly comparing trends across our countries of interest.

4.2 Components of family policy

As stated previously, family policy is a broad term used to describe a range of policies that aim to support families. These policies can:

Support parents to provide economically for their children

Help parents to balance the demands of economic productivity and care for children

Provide basic resources for essential child services such as early child care and education

Provide a safety net for economically disadvantaged children and families

Though the particular categorisation of family policies varies across countries and scholars, most governments provide: some combination of transfer and tax policies that offer income support to families with children; labour market measures designed to help parents balance work and family demands; and services for children and families. Some family policies include two additional components: legislation, such as divorce and marriage laws, which have clear implications for parents' roles and family environments; and services targeting specific vulnerable populations, such as those directed at victims of child abuse and neglect. The following sections will discuss the policy areas that are most commonly classified as family policy: transfer and tax policies, labour market policies and the provision of services.

Transfer and tax policies

Nearly all industrialised countries have federal level transfer and/or tax policies that provide economic support to families with children. Overall, such income policies generally have a basic goal of providing economic resources to help parents meet the costs of raising children.

Tax policies can include regressive family tax credits, meaning that low-income families who do not pay taxes are not eligible for the payments. More universal and progressive payments are provided to families in countries such as Sweden, which aims to decrease the financial

employment for a specified length of time while still retaining the right to return to their position. It is notable that only Australia and the United States do not provide federal funding for parental leave. While Australia has until recently had a one year unpaid leave policy (Australian Government, 2005), but the 2009-2010 Budget announced an 18 week paid parental leave policy to be introduced in January 2011 (Australian Government, 2009). The policy in the United States is more limited, providing only 12 weeks of unpaid leave. In addition, restrictions prohibit access even to this limited leave for approximately 50 per cent of American workers (Clearinghouse on International Developments in Child and Youth and Family Policies, 2007). On the other hand, Sweden has a parental leave scheme of up to 18 months, with the first year paid at 80 per cent of wages; the United Kingdom's parental leave is for 18 weeks, with the first six weeks paid at 90 per cent and the later 12 at a flat rate. More than half of the comparison countries have flexible work policies, allowing parents to take paid or unpaid leave for reasons such as child illness (Clearinghouse on International Developments in Child and Youth and Family Policies, 2007).

As noted, many countries' parental leave policies include wage replacement and hence can be seen to be economic support policies. However, the principal goal of such policies is to encourage continued labour market attachment while at the same time allowing parents adequate amounts of time to spend with their children. While such policies encourage parents to devote time to the care of their children, they do not address the quality of care provided by parents to children. Moreover, while they may provide individuals with the time or money to facilitate parenting, they are not concerned with the nature of parenting itself.

Service provision and support

Provision of support services for families and children includes a broad spectrum of policies such as educational services, housing, health care and more targeted services for specific family needs. In the realm of family policy, the most commonly discussed services in this arena are early childhood education and care. Such policies either provide universal or means tested tax benefits or payments to parents to help pay for child care, or directly fund child care/early education services which are then provided free or at reduced cost to children (OECD, 2006; Vail, 2002). The goals of early childhood care and education policies overlap with the goals of the policies discussed previously; they aim to help parents meet the economic costs of caring for children and to support parental employment. These programs also have more direct impact on child development by supporting children's psychosocial and cognitive development and helping to prepare them for formal education (Waldfogel, 2007).

Child care benefits are highly diverse across countries. Some policies target children from birth and continue until early adolescence; others focus explicitly on the preschool years, targeting readiness for formal schooling. Many policies require the use of services in order to access benefits; others are universally provided to parents regardless of parental employment or use of child care services (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2006b; Vail, 2002). For example, Sweden offers public full day child care centres at a nominal cost or for free (Clearinghouse on International Developments in Child and Youth and Family Policies, 2007). Canada has a rather limited direct payment which is offered to families of all children under six regardless of whether they attend child care (although the province of Quebec recently instituted a direct subsidy system

5 Parenting policy in different countries

5.1 Parenting policy philosophy

The first question

integrated into the Department for Children, Families and Schools, every local authority was required to have a parenting commissioner and parenting support strategy in place by March 2007 to implement the strategy on the local level. In addition, Sure Start Children's Centres, which house many of the parenting support services, have been expanding rapidly to every community. Sure Start Children's Centres are funded through local authorities.

Thirdly, the UK policies have been rolled out with financial support. In 2005, grants for child and parent programs were combined into the Children, Young People, and Families Grant program and funding was provided for a national child index. The national child index is a government database that holds education, social service, healthcare, and contact information for all children under 18. In 2006, funding was provided for a pilot scheme of parenting courses in 15 local authorities, Parent Support Advisors were introduced in 20 local authorities and 600 schools, and a pilot intensive home visiting program for families during pregnancy through age two was started, with funding for 77 parenting experts and 1,000 frontline family workers. In 2007, funding was provided to every local authority to establish a parenting support strategy.

The fourth critical strategy for the success of the UK program is that the parenting supports have been rolled out in conjunction with related economic supports for parents that seek to decrease economic inequality and child poverty. Together, these notable policies, including extensive service and economic supports for parents, have underscored an exemplar system in the UK to support parents' efforts to successfully parent their children. Since 2004, the government has allowed parents of older children to request flexible working arrangements, paid maternity leave was extended to nine months, extended school days were made available to nearly all parents, the number of Children's Centres, which provide childcare, has increased dramatically and there was an increase in the Working Tax Credit.

The policy framework for parents is not only oriented towards support and financial assistance. The UK has also enacted a number of provisions which provide sanctions for parents who do not display adequate parenting capacity. Foremost of these is the *Parenting Order* which was originally introduced in *The Crime and Disorder Act* 1998 and has since been supplemented by further legislation. A parenting order is a civil court order which compels a parent to attend parenting classes or counselling and to fulfil other requirements as determined necessary by the court. Parenting Orders are given in two main contexts: school attendance and juvenile offending. In the school context parenting orders are intended to improve a child's attendance or behaviour, e.g. by ensuring that the child arrives for school on time or that the parent attends regular meetings with the school. Orders usualle for

the only country which has attempted to bring these together explicitly and to implement structural changes to the machinery of government to ensure a cohesive policy approach.

Despite the relative comprehensiveness and coordination of parenting policy in the UK, there has been a great deal of criticism of the policy on the grounds that it is still contradictory and also rather punitive (Morris & Featherstone, 2010). Perhaps this indicates that these tensions are complex and not easily resolvable. For example it is very difficult to separate parents who require support and assistance from those who are abusive and/or neglectful, and these families are therefore likely to be subject to conflicting and contradictory policies.

5.3 Family Policy Agenda

While most countries lack a formal policy definition or philosophy which structures policies specifically targeting parenting, all countries have policies aimed at children and families. These policies range in the degree to which they are combined or separate, universal or targeted and preventive versus reactive.

Preventive versus reactive policies

A second distinguishing dimension of parenting policies relates to the extent to which the philosophy of policy making is reactive or preventive in nature. The UK, Sweden, and Ireland, countries that have all taken steps toward coherency and coordination, have government policies that acknowledge the role the government can play in supporting and investing in parents. Policies in these countries have a more universal and preventive focus, arguing for the provision of information, services and programs for all parents, with a view to enhancing the wellbeing of parents and children supporting stable families and decreasing inequality. In contrast, the United States, Canada and New Zealand primarily implement targeted policies and programs, taking a reactive approach of intervening in or supporting parenting only in cases in which a safety net is deemed necessary. Australia is in the process of moving from a reactive towards a much more proactive and preventive policy. There are a number of early intervention initiatives which have developed over the past decade. As in many countries, Australia has a universal nurse home visiting system. However other interventions such as child care and family support vary by state. South Australia, for example, has a universal comprehensive home visitation program and New South Wales has a universal program *Families New South Wales* which contains a number of components, including a roll out of Triple P as a universal program.

Targeted policies

In addition to diversity in the arena of policy coherence and focus, there is also significant diversity in to which policies addressing parenting and broader child and family issues are targeted or universal. All countries have universal or near-universal policies designed to support parents financially (e.g. tax credits) and most have universal policies supporting the balance of employment and childrearing (e.g. paid parental leave, subsidized or free child care). Yet, with the exception of the UK, there is a notable dearth of universal policies designed to support parenting. Ireland has laid out universal goals regarding parenting, yet at this time has limited policies and universal services underlying these new goals.

In short, there are very few examples of universal policies and programs targeting all parents. Rather, in most countries, parenting policies are limited to laws and programs that are targeted at specific subpopulations. The scope of these populations ranges from children with disability and disabled parents, to teenage parents and low-income parents. In all of these cases, the implicit goal of the policies is to support parents who may face particular constraints and challenges in meeting the needs of their children. However, the approach, structure and extent of the policies differs between individual countries for a variety of reasons due to need, available resources and the history of the policy approach in that country to the particular issue.

Parents with disability

While all countries have policies designed to assist disabled people in various realms of their lives (e.g. economic support, employment support, educational access), these policies do not address the role that some people with disability play as a parent.

In the United States, 15 per cent of all families include a parent with a disability (Through the Looking Glass, 2008). Disability policies, including income supports, workforce assistance,

productive members of society. Support programs for teen parents aim to combine services for the teen parent with parenting support for the child.

In Ireland, the Teen Parents Support Programme (TPSP), run by the Department of Health and Children, supports teen parents until their children are two years of age. Social service providers assist parents on a one-on-one basis and also refer them to other services. The goal is to help the teen parent to combine their responsibilities as a parent with completing their own development as a teenager. Paternal involvement is encouraged, although a specific effort is not made. Currently, there are eight TPSPs in Ireland (Ireland Interview, 2008).

New Zealand has a similar program for teen parents run through the Ministry of Social Development. The Teenage Parent Service Co-ordinator initiative is designed to coordinate and facilitate access to social services for teen parents. Rather than receiving one-on-one support, teen parents can take part in parent support groups which are focused on developing parenting knowledge and skills (Ministry of Social Development, 2009b; New Zealand Interview, 2009).

The UK published a strategy paper, *Teenage parentsô next steps*

Canada, for example uses financial benefits as its primary support for parents. The National Child Benefit Supplement (NCBS) and the Working Income Tax Benefit provide monetary benefits to working parents in an amount that varies depending on their annual income and the number of children in the family (Canada Interview, 2009). For example, a family with an annual income below $20,435 receives $162.08 a month from NCBS and $83 a month from the Working Income Tax Benefit (Canada Revenue Agency, 2009).

Low-income parents in Canada also receive monetary assistance through the Employment Insurance (EI) system. The EI system is primarily known for delivering up t

authority is required to create, and ensuring that appropriate services are put in place to meet the needs of all parents and provide them with information (UK Department of Education and Skills, 2006). In practice, the quality of services offered to parents varies on the local efforts. There are currently efforts to give parents more of a voice in the development of policy (UK Interview, 2008).

The UK evaluates programs by measuring key outcomes on a set of national indicators. The indicators relating to children and families include: the prevalence of breastfeeding at six to eight weeks from birth; children becoming the subject of a child protection plan for a second or subsequent time; obesity among primary school age children in Year 6; and the emotional health of children. These indicators are then used to assess the performance of local authorities.

As part of the Children's Act, the UK government established a non-governmental organization to ensure that parenting support policies and programs were evidence-based. The Family and Parenting Institute is designed to be a centre of expertise on family and parenting issues and to influence the policy-making process (The Children's Act, 2004). Also outside of the government, the National Academy for Parenting Practitioners seeks to improve the quality of parenting-related services by raising the standard and consistency of practice and disseminating the evidence from research (UK Interview, 2008).

United States

Policy in the United States is developed through multiple streams, including federal and state legislation and state-level courts. Federal legislation often influences policy primarily through funding. That is, legislation may set goals or priorities, but the real mechanism for reaching such goals are funding streams which are provided to states or locales with requirements or guidelines as to the use of the funds. State courts play a role in influencing policy in that decisions on cases often define the role and rights of parents. There is variation in the

the differences in parenting policies between the countries. These obstacles can shift with demographic changes, changes in public opinion, exchanges of the political party in power, variations in the economic climate and singular events which grab the attention of the public and, therefore, policymakers.

Several countries cited the ideological tension between children being a public good versus a private good as a hindrance to the development of parenting policy. The role of parents may be perceived as important and programs themselves may be seen as effective, but government intervention into parenting and the implementation of related programs are viewed as interference in private life and a threat to personal freedom. Parents are seen as having an inherent right to raise their children and to be deserving of the freedom to parent as they see fit, unless they prove unable to do so. In the US in particular there is philosophical resistance to government involvement in family life unless something has gone "wrong" in a family. The general presumption is that parents have both the right and the responsibility to raise their children. If parents show they cannot raise their children, they generally have to give up all their parenting rights (United States Interview, 2009).

Philosophical resistance to parenting policy also comes in the form of tension between labour supply objectives, gender equality and what is perceived to be a 'good' childhood. Rising female employment rates call for policies targeted at young children, however in some cases the best care for young children is perceived to be the care of their mother. In Canada, philosophical resistance to government involvement in family life is strongest in relation to policies targeting children under the age of six. While Canada's policy makers rhetorically understand the importance of the early years from an epidemiological standpoint, programming for children under the age of six meant to support families while parents work appears 'institutional' in the eyes of many Canadians. Child care policies, while needed, are viewed as less adequate for children whose parents work than mother-care, although there is no other obvious alternative (Canadian Interview, 2009).

Philosophical objections to parenting policy often result in targeted reactive policies focused on high-risk groups of parents, rather than broad universal prevention programs. While universal parenting policies may be seen as an encroachment on parents' rights, targeted interventions to help parents and children who face greater challenges are viewed as a more appropriate government role. These challenges include financial struggles, teenage pregnancies, disabilities affecting both children and parents and issues affecting ethnic minority and migrant families. Ireland cited that the majority of parenting policies were interventions that only targeted parents after there was a problem instead of intervening earlier when the problem could be avoided (Ireland Interview, 2008).

Even when there is no philosophical resistance, implementing a vast array of targeted policies can create an obstacle to implementing more universal policies because of limited res

overlapping or even contradictory. NGOs are also put in the position of having to apply to multiple funding sources with different requirements and reporting mechanisms to finance their programs. In recognition of this issue several countries, including the UK and Australia, have created mechanisms at the local and central government level to 'join up' family support programs, and also to vastly reduce the number of hypothecated funding streams.

Separate from the philosophy of a country, the government structure and typical legislative process can help or hinder the development of a parenting policy. Countries that have a more centralist government structure appear to have an easier route to enacting parenting policy. For example, in the UK, the *Every Child Matters* legislation was developed, supported and expanded on the national level. Implementation occurred on the local level, but the overarching policy was country-wide. Countries like Canada, Australia and the United States which have a federal structure give states and provinces great flexibility in how they choose to implement national policies. Furthermore, states and provinces often develop and implement policies and programs on their own to meet the needs and requests of their particular population. This creates a dynamic where there is great resistance to broad universal federal policies meant to target the entire population.

A further conceptual challenge to parenting policy is the relationship between parenting, families and children's policies. In most countries, parenting policies are spread across children's policy, family policy and policies aimed at gender equality. Children's policy is aimed at improving the wellbeing of children, enhancing their rights as citizens or controlling their behaviour while family policy is aimed at increasing fertility, improving labour market participation and (in the USA) strengthening marriage. In many countries parents are not seen as a separate group with their own needs and policy structures. It is not clear whether there could or even should be a separate 'parents' commissioner' like the children's commissioners in most states, whether children's commissioners should widen their priorities to include parenting or whether a completely different structure would be appropriate. The relationship between parenting, family and children's policy is still

contact with social services that had failed to intervene, which provoked public outrage and drew attention to the need for significant policy change. Soon after this tragedy, a policy to combine services for families and address issues facing all parents was signed into law. It met with little opposition. While the policy addressed all parents, the focus was on preventing extreme cases and, in this way, the policy was perceived as both targeted and universal. The UK provides an example of how a singular event can grab the attention of the public and allow for policy change despite ever-present barriers.

easily translate into other contexts. This is especially the case where there are different tiers of government. In addition, policy is easier to coordinate in the UK than Australia, for example. The UK has a department of Children, Families and Schools which incorporates all children and families' policies other than health and benefits, whereas in Australia these policies are spread amongst at least three federal government departments. Thus it is important that each country should develop policies and structures which are coherent with their particular circumstances. The literature and the interviews conducted for this research

Appendix 1: Summary of recent comparative reviews

Author(s)	Year	Countries	Policies/Issues	Aims/Conclusions
Kamerman and Kahn	1997	Great Britain, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States.	Family policy including laws, regulations, benefits and programs.	

Author(s)	Year	Countries	Policies/Issues	Aims/Conclusions
Bradshaw and Hatland	2006	European Unio	6	

Teenage parents

If so, what are these policies and programs? Can you please send us documentation on them?

What are the major debates around parenting or family policy in your country at present?

Parenting Programs

Has your national government implemented parenting programs in support of its policies? If so, what are they?

Are they universal (i.e. available or potentially available to all parents) or are they targeted at specific groups of parents?

If so which groups?

Were these programs developed in your country or were they adapted from programs in other countries?

What sectors of the community are parties to the policies or programs?

Do the policies or programs incorporate reporting and evaluation mechanisms?

What are the difficulties in the development and implementation of a parenting policy or program?

Overall

Do you believe that these policies/programs adequately support parenting?

Are there areas of parenting that you believe are not adequately supported by current policies/programs? If so, what are these areas and how could they be better supported?

In your view are parenting/family policies coherent or are there significant contradictions/tensions in current policies?

How do you think the policies or programs in your country compare to those in other countries(if known)?

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