Every European country has experienced dramatic shifts in family dynamics over the past 50 years – delayed home-leaving and family formation, fertility declines below population replacement level, increasing cohabitation accompanied by declines in formal marriage, and increasing rates of union dissolution or divorce. These family changes are associated with tremendous social transformation, as the population age structure shifts upward, adults spend increasing amounts of time living alone and children are increasingly likely to experience a variety of family forms during their formative years.

The role of social policy in these changes has been a matter of considerable research and debate (e.g., Gauthier 1996; Hantrais 1997, 1999; Gauthier and Hatzius 1997). As Hantrais (2007) concludes, "effects of specific policies targeting families are difficult, if not impossible to isolate, because policy provision in the form of designated welfare benefits and services, tax relief and subsidies is only one of the many factors affecting decisions about family life. … No single, one-size-fits-all causes or solutions can be identified across the enlarged European Union." The last statement is most certainly true and may be the source of the difficulties in isolating effects of particular social policies on family dynamics.

Stockholm University's Linnaeus Center for Social Policy and Family Dynamics in Europe is designed not only to generate stronger evidence for or against effects of social policies on family dynamics but also to better understand the processes through which such effects occur. The Center brings together expertise in social policy analysis and demography from Stockholm University and several other European research centres. The core research group is comprised of scientists affiliated with the Demography Unit (SUDA) in the Department of Sociology, the Swedish Institute for Social Research (SOFI), and the Department of Human Geography. The Center also builds on a set of strong ties to international collaborators and research institutions, including at present collaborators from the Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research, Statistics Norway, the Warsaw School of Economics, the Hungarian Demographic Research Institute, the University of Liverpool, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Harvard University, University of Florence, and Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona.

## Theoretical Foundations

We draw from three perspectives in the analysis of policies influencing family life. The 'pragmatists' view family policy as "everything that government does to and for the family … such as day care, child welfare, family counseling, family planning, income maintenance, some tax benefits, and some housing policies" (Kamerman and Kahn 1978: 3). A more comprehensive view is provided by Bourdieu (1996, 24) who incorporates any state activities that aim "to favour a certain kind of family organization and to strengthen those who are in a position to conform to this form of organization". Bourdieu emphasizes the role of the state in producing and reproducing ideas of what a family *is*, the prevailing or ideal form in the minds of people. Feminist theories of the welfare state view policies with potential effects on family dynamics as part of the state's policies to structure society at large (e.g., Esping-Andersen 1990, 2002; Orloff 1993; Lewis 1992; Sainsbury 1994, 1999).

These theoretical views draw our attention not only to a broad range of policies that may influence family dynamics but also to methodological issues in identifying and understanding policy effects. The pragmatic approach puts on the table a wide variety of policies directed toward families in industrialized societies and the fact that policies do not exist in isolation but are part of a large range of specific provisions. Bourdieu's conceptualization makes

salient differences between policy development and extant family norms. If the gap between the family form assumed by social policies and that assumed by the majority of people is too large, the policy is unlikely to have much effect on individual behaviour (McDonald 2000a, 2000b; Billari 2004; DiPrete, Morgan, Engelhardt, Pacalova 2003). Bourdieu's conceptualization also points to the potentially different effects of such policies for different social groups, due to different habitus or to different group-specific norms. Feminist theories of the welfare state imply that policy effects may depend on the welfare-state regime in which they are implemented and that policies with potential implications for family behaviour may be directed at other than family outcomes (Gornick, Meyers, and Ross 1997; Anttonen and Sipilä 1996; Daly 2000; Korpi 2000).

The Centre's research agenda therefore goes beyond what might be termed 'family policy' but remains within policy domains that are of particular importance during early adulthood when individuals and couples are beginning their family life courses. We will continue research on parental benefits but also consider social policies that enhance or constrain young adults' access to education, employment and housing, critical resources for leaving the parental home, forming long-term partnerships and becoming parents.

**Designs and Data**

To design studies that provide strong evidence for policy effects on family dynamics, we focus on time, space and eligibility or usage (Neyer & Andersson 2008). *Time* is an especially useful feature when it can be expressed in terms of 'critical junctures' (Thelen 1999) or 'boundaries' (Pierson 2004). What critical junctures have in common is that they are relatively large in scope and occur relatively rapidly. Examples are points at which a new policy is introduced (Andersson, Hoem, Duvander 2006) or a benefit is significantly increased (Ma, Li 2009), changed or re-directed to different social groups (Aassve, Billari, Spéder 2006), or a rapid and significant change in context such as economic crisis (Andersson 2000) or the collapse of state-socialism (Billingsley 2010). Critical junctures are most valuable when all other potential determinants of family change remain largely invariant or are easily observed. Because critical junctures often create 'natural experiments' they provide better evidence for causality than is found in many other research designs (Björklund 2007).

*Space* is another dimension of policy variation that can be exploited to estimate policy effects. State-specific or regional variation in official policy or in policy implementation may provide adequate variation in the policy measure (Rindfuss et al. 2007) while retaining similarity in the larger social, economic, political and cultural contexts that could influence family dynamics. In a broader sense even labour-market sectors or branches of occupations could be viewed as units of 'spatial' variation (Brandén 2009), where working conditions, employment contracts or employee benefits particularly supportive of young workers, cohabiting or married couples, or families with children can be compared to sectors or branches of occupation without such benefits. If we can identify the policies in place where individuals live or work and combine that information with individual-level life histories, we are able to study whether such policies influence family decisions.

Of course, countries occupy different spaces but each country incorporates so many other 'variables' than a social policy in question that it is difficult to attribute country differences in family dynamics to particular policies or policy configurations. One may, however, identify countries that constitute 'most similar cases' (Przeworski and Teune 1970) in terms of

institutional arrangements, economic well-being and cultural assumptions. Within common conditions, one can identify cross-national variations in policy likely to influence family life (Andersson 2004). Comparative research can also be conducted with countries that are dissimilar on such contextual variables, provided the selection of countries and their examination is guided by theoretical considerations regarding the research question and by the availability of similar data (King, Keohane and Verba 1994; Andersson, Kreyenfeld, Mika 2009; Matysiak and Vignole 2010; Neyer and Hoem 2008).

A third dimension of policy variation that is useful for estimating policy effects is *usage*. Policies influencing family behaviour may not apply to everyone in a country or region or locale or may not be implemented in the same way for all social groups. Many if not most policies have eligibility requirements for receiving social benefits (e.g., employment requirements for parental leave); benefits vary in large degree by particular circumstances (e.g., marital status, number of children); implementation often varies by locality or region (e.g., child care); and benefits may be provided on an optional basis, i.e., one must 'take up' the benefit in order to receive it. The overall effect of a policy on family behaviour will depend on the details of eligibility (Andersson, Hoem, Duvander 2006), implementation (Rindfuss et al. 2007) and uptake (Duvander and Andersson 2006). Methodologically, usage can produce problems of selectivity and endogeneity, as people actively pursue different modes of behaviour and thought that must be controlled in the research design and empirical analysis.

Designing studies of social policy effects on family dynamics in terms of time, space and usage does not mean that we are able to do so only under a limited number of perfect conditions. What such designs offer is a mechanism for identifying the components of policy that make a difference in the time and space of individual lives. The approach we take explicitly rejects the idea that any social policy, no matter how skilfully designed or implemented, can have a universal effect independent of time and space. Only when we contextualize social policies in these terms are we able to assess their effects on family dynamics and the policy potential for influencing demographic change.

To assess with a reasonable degree of confidence the likely effects of social policies on family dynamics we ideally want individual-level data with life-course histories that can be linked to change and variation in social policies or relevant social contexts. Life histories enable the first condition for drawing inferences about policy effects, i.e., the relevant timing of policy changes and individual life-course events. Histories that cover not only family events but also employment and occupation, educational enrolment and attainment, and residential location and housing offer possibilities for examining effects of policies beyond those focused primarily on family life. Prospective data from panel surveys may enable analyses of policy or other macro-level changes on the beliefs, attitudes and values that are intertwined with changes in family behaviour. Micro-level biographies have become increasingly available for European countries over the last several decades; the corresponding increase in detailed macro-level databases is just beginning.

## Center Research Plans

Our long-term goal is to cover as much terrain as possible in the intersection of research designs based on time, space and usage; intersections of micro- and macro-level data; and the four domains of policy that are likely to influence family dynamics – parental benefits, educational systems, labour markets and conditions of work, and housing. A significant part

of our work will be to improve the quality and scope of data required for strong evidence of policy effects. And in all of our studies, gender is an over-arching theme.

Much of our initial research focuses on three policy 'laboratories'. The Nordic countries provide a laboratory of quite similar economic, social and cultural conditions and, overall, similar social policies. As noted in examples above, by 'controlling' for variability in the larger macro-level conditions, we are better able to attribute causality to associations between family dynamics and the structure and usage of parental benefits (Duvander and Jans 2009; Eriksson 2010; Evertsson and Duvander 2009), educational systems (Hoem, Neyer, Andersson 2006; Thalberg 2009), labour markets and conditions of work (Andersson and Scott 2007; Brandén 2009; Sjöberg 2009), and/or housing (Ström 2010). Having data on the entire population of each country enables studies that rely on differential usage, especially by minority groups, to identify and understand policy effects.

German reunification provides a natural experiment within which to study policy effects on family dynamics, made even more useful by Germany's recent adoption of the Nordic model of parental leave and childcare. In cross-national studies, West Germany was regularly classified as a conservative and familial welfare regime where the tax and transfer system supports the traditional breadwinner family model. East Germany did not really enter the classification system but is now viewed as one of the formerly socialist states. German reunification produced a unique opportunity to observe the continuing force of the previous socialist regime after the rapid transformation of almost all of its institutions (Kreyenfeld 2003). In 2007, a second critical juncture occurred as the German government introduced parental leave benefits similar to those long provided in Sweden and other Nordic countries (Spiess and Wrohlich 2008). What is particularly interesting about the most recent German policy innovations is that they not only shift toward the Nordic model but also toward the model of the former East Germany.

We will also take advantage of the dramatic shift from a socialist to market economy in several central and eastern European countries. Although these countries differ significantly in terms of the economic, social and cultural contexts before and after the transition, the combination of macro-level policy and economic data with micro-level life histories provides the best opportunity for inferring family effects of such differentials (Billingsley 2010; Kantorová 2004). As opportunities arise, of course, we expect to broaden the Centre's agenda by considering policy variations and changes in other western and southern European countries, especially those participating in the international Generations and Gender Programme.

Quite considerable data resources are already available for our analyses of social policy and family dynamics. Some of the necessary data do not, however, exist. And other data require synchronization in order to enable analyses of policy effects. An ongoing activity for the Center is therefore to create new data infrastructures useful for our own and for others' research. First, we are engaged in developing datasets based on Nordic population registers (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden). Due to variability in national requirements for use of such data, we work in parallel with international collaborators to produce the same analyses in each country (Andersson et al. 2009; Duvander, Lappegård, Andersson 2010; Andersson and Noack 2010). Eventually, we hope to contribute to the movement toward more accessible and comparable data from Nordic registers. Second, we participate in the international Generations and Gender Programme (GGP; Vikat et al. 2007). The GGP includes a three-wave panel survey (GGS) and a contextual database for studying links

between macro- and micro-level circumstances in their effects on family life. Our goal for Sweden is to produce a 'hybrid' GGS using survey and register data.

Third, we contribute to the expansion, maintenance and distribution of contextual and policy databases (Neyer 2003). The Social Citizenship Indicator Program (SCIP) has developed comparable measures of old age pensions, sickness insurance, work accident insurance, unemployment insurance, and family benefits from the 1930s to the present in a large number of European countries. If we are able to generate a Swedish GGS, we will also produce the associated contextual database consisting of both national- and regional-level indicators of economic, demographic, cultural and policy contexts from the 1970s to the present.

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