

A Policy Framework for Parenting

Ilan Katz and Rebekah Levine Coley
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Will cover

- Background and aims
- Methodology
- Findings
- Conclusions
- Way forward



Project Aims

- Review the current literature relating to parenting and children's wellbeing
- Describe the major policies and programs for parents in selected countries
- Identify the governmental structures which underpin these policies
- Study issues relating to the development of a comprehensive parenting policy framework



Methodology


- Literature review
 - Role of parenting in children's outcomes
 - Vulnerable parents
 - Parenting policy
- Questionnaire to key informants in 7 countries
 - National parenting policies
 - Policy context and philosophy
 - Governmental structures
 - Major programs
 - Tensions in policy




Study Countries

- Australia
- Canada
- Ireland
- New Zealand
- Sweden
- UK
- USA

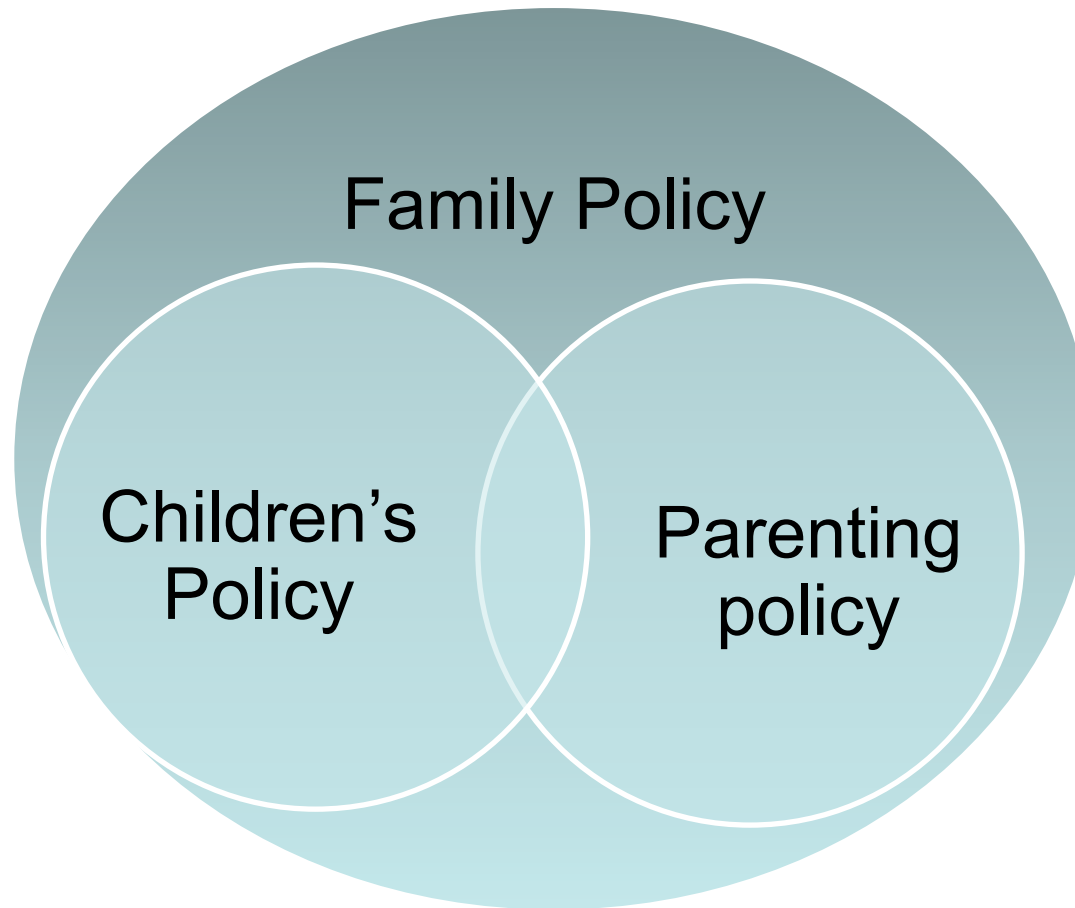
Focus on vulnerable parents

- Sole parent families
 - Teenage parents
 - Fathers
 - Grandparents as primary carers
 - Parents with disability
 - Parents of children with disability
 - Parents from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
 - Indigenous parents
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Parenting and social policy

- Increase in parenting policies and programs due to demographic and political issues.
 - Parents recognised as key to children's outcomes and important in their own right.
 - However little consensus about 'good' parenting; debates in academia and media
 - Debate around the role of the state in relation to parenting
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What is parenting policy?



Family Policy

- Work/life balance
 - Cash transfers
 - Income management
 - Parental leave
 - Fertility
 - Child care
 - Divorce and child support
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Children's Policy

- Child protection
- ECEC
- Youth policy
- Child health



Parenting Policy

- Family support
- Parenting
- Income Management
- Family law
- Domestic violence
- Information
- Specific groups of parents



Brief findings by country

- Canada
 - Anti-federalist: little federal government response
 - Policy, program development at provincial/local level
 - Lack of reporting between federal/provincial governments lead to little evaluation
- USA
 - Some federal legislation and funding, but little coherence
 - State legislation and funding as well
 - Marriage promotion & fathering are federal foci
 - Policies and program developed locally through multiple arenas



Brief findings by country

- New Zealand
 - Main central government department; independent Children Commission and Families Commission
 - Comprehensive early childhood interventions
 - Little explicit focus on parenting; little coordination
- Australia
 - Many federal and state programs
 - No overarching philosophy or policy
 - Parenting not located in any one department
 - Moving towards more preventive than reactive



Country findings

- Ireland
 - Historically little policy – left to the church
 - Recent focus on overall parenting philosophy - Children Act 2001, National Children’s Strategy
 - Government policy development- universal focus
- Sweden
 - Long standing policies; universal and preventive
 - Children and early years
 - Gender equality
 - No explicit focus on parenting

Country findings

- United Kingdom
 - Coherent parenting philosophy
 - Enacted through legislation-- Children Act 2004; financially supported by government
 - Coordinated local implementation
 - National organisations for evaluation and dissemination



Levels of development

Level	Policies	Structures	Countries
None	No coherent parenting policies – some local short term programs	No parenting policy in national government	
Low	Some central/federal policies e.g. parental leave, baby bonus and funding for local programs but no overall policy. Mostly targeted and reactive policies.	Policy fragmented and blurred boundaries between national and local/state government	USA, Canada
Moderate	Some centrally funded policies and programs. Initiatives for universal approaches, pilot projects. No coherent, independent parenting policy agenda.	One government agency takes the lead and begins to engage other relevant departments.	Australia, NZ, Ireland, Sweden
High	Overarching parenting policy agenda articulated by government. Delivered through specific policies and programs, both universal and targeted. Preventive rather than reactive.	Whole of government approach sanctioned by central agencies, led by one department. Formal agreements between national government and states /provinces.	UK
Comprehensive	Policy brings together not only explicit 'family' and 'parenting' policies but includes consideration of impact on families of all public policy. Families have direct input into new policy development.	National and local governments actively collaborate to implement family friendly policies. There is a family /parents advocate outside of government.	

Overall findings

- Every country has instituted a number of policies and programs aimed at supporting and improving parenting
- Few countries have a clear overarching policy framework for parenting--UK and Ireland are most coherent
- Most countries have one lead government agency, yet policies often fragmented across various federal and state/provincial systems and departments

Overall findings 2

- Most policies are reactive rather than preventive; many aimed at vulnerable parents
- Many programs are short-term and fragmented rather than strategic
- Still many unresolved tensions, in particular
 - Whether government should 'tell' parents how to parent
 - Universal vs targeted approach
 - Extent of support vs sanction
 - Use of evidence-based approaches
 - Lack of adequate funding
 - Tensions re value of caregiving vs female labour supply vs gender equality



Conclusions

- Parenting policy still developing in all countries
- No research yet as to the optimal range of policies/programs at a community level, or how they should be targeted
- Relationship between parenting policy, child and family policy still evolving – however parenting is becoming more prominent
- Opportunity for Australia to lead the world in this area

Ilan Katz
Social Policy Research Centre

Ilan.katz@unsw.edu.au

www.sprc.unsw.edu.au

Research Funded by FaHCSIA



G2 Western Campus
University of New South Wales
Kensington 2052
NSW, Australia
+61 2 9385 7810