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**Fathers and fatherhood in the European
Union**

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FATHERS AND FATHERHOOD IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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Brief Historical Overview and Theoretical Perspectives

Over the past two decades, issues related to fathers and fatherhood have attracted the attention of policymakers and researchers in both the United States and Europe, but in somewhat different ways. Public concerns about early and unmarried parenthood, increasing numbers of fathers living apart from their children, and the role of (biological) fathers in family life have been key issues in the United States (Eggebeen 2002; Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000; Pleck, 2004). On the other side of the Atlantic, new social and political challenges such as global economic competitiveness, low fertility, and the long-term financial sustainability of social programs raised questions about gendered policy logics concerning paid work and child care. Directly and indirectly, fathers were incorporated into European Union (EU) debates about how best to promote equal opportunities, to increase female labor market participation, and to improve child outcomes. Most notably, strong incentives to encourage greater father involvement, at least when their children are young, have been embraced as both legitimate and achievable policy goals. In what follows, we draw on theoretical perspectives of gendered welfare regimes to trace how shifting policy logics concerning work and care have incorporated new understandings and expectations of the role of fathers in Europe.

The Male Breadwinner as Basis for European Welfare Regimes

The decades following the Second World War were, in most western European countries (the countries that comprised the EU prior to the fifth enlargement which began in 2004), characterized by rapid economic growth and welfare state expansion. At that time, the male breadwinner was the ideal (if not always the norm,

especially in working class families), and good fathering was implicitly equated with being steadily employed and a good economic provider (Gillis, 2000). Against this backdrop, new and generous welfare state policies were developed which presumed, reinforced and rewarded a gendered division of labor in which men took responsibility for earning an income and women took responsibility for unpaid work and child care. Indeed, prior to the 1970s, all western European welfare states more or less subscribed to a strong “male breadwinning” ideology (Lewis, 1992). The welfare models that were built around this ideology relied, in most European countries, on the assumption of a generous supply of well-paid jobs, a growing working age population (to fund generous benefits for both workers and their dependent wives and children), and legally recognized and stable (if not permanent) marriages.

Sustainability of male breadwinner welfare systems challenged

From the 1970s, economic and social changes resulted in new risks, some of which directly challenged the underlying policy logics of strong male breadwinner welfare regimes. Existing policy approaches were not well equipped to deal with the challenges of a post-industrial economy with its insecure employment and downward pressure on wages (Fraser, 1994). Alongside these economic changes, the form and function of the European family changed as well. Although there was (and still is, especially when we consider the larger set of countries that now make up the EU) substantial variation in trends and rates, marriage was increasingly delayed, cohabitation gained in popularity and divorce rates increased in all countries of Europe. Fertility fell to replacement or below replacement levels, and population ageing emerged as a key policy concern (Sigle-Rushton & Kenney, 2004).

In the absence of full (male) employment and a growing working age population, questions were raised about how the funding for large and generous

welfare state programs could be sustained in the absence of a growing population. One strategy was to increase the percentage of the working age population who are engaged in paid work and contributing tax revenue (Esping-Andersen, 1999). At the EU level, women and mothers were identified as target groups for employment activation (Commission of the European Communities, 2004, 2005). Because poor male employment prospects and high rates of relationship breakdown make large families and a rigid gendered division of labor risky, particularly for women who have specialized in unpaid work and care in the private sphere (Oppenheimer, 1997; Sigle-Rushton, 2010), greater female labor force participation also offered a solution to some of the new risks that individuals were confronting as a consequence of social and family change. Although embracing this strategy required a rather dramatic ideological shift for some (particularly Continental European) countries, increased female employment resonated with a Scandinavian-inspired (Duncan, 2002) but somewhat instrumental approach to the promotion of gender equality (Lewis 2006; Lombardo & Meier, 2008).

Policy debates: Bringing men into the private sphere

In a context where policymakers increasingly needed women to assume the roles of both worker and mother, and where a traditional gendered division of labor made meeting the demands of work and motherhood difficult, it is not surprising that men and fathers were drawn into policy debates. Because the time constraints of unpaid work increase with the transition to parenthood and because women might not want (additional) children if combining work and care is too difficult, EU documents evidenced a new and increasing preoccupation with men and fathers and their role in the private sphere. A strategy of shifting support from the male breadwinning family model to the dual earner/dual carer family model emerged, at least for a short time, as

a policy goal at the EU level. Although some have argued that the original aspiration of redistributing unpaid work and care responsibilities to men has been watered down or even abandoned (see, for example Lewis 2006 and Stratigaki, 2004), female employment and low fertility remain key policy concerns. Moreover, recent shifts towards the “social investment” function of social policy have led to an intensified focus on children and youth (Jenson, 2008). This agenda dovetails with concerns in the U.S. about how different types and varying extents of father involvement shape men’s (Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001) and especially children’s (Carlson, 2006; Hawkins, Amato, & King, 2007) life outcomes. Thus, although the emphasis and motivation has changed over the course of years, fatherhood is and will likely remain on the European policy agenda. This agenda requires a solid and comparable evidence base, both to inform policy design and to aid in the evaluation of new policies. The state of the current evidence based is the primary focus of our chapter. Our main aim is to identify gaps in knowledge on fathers and fatherhood in the countries of the European Union, and consider how these limitations affect evidence-based policy.

Outline of the chapter

In the sections that follow, we provide information about what existing data sources are able to tell us about the demography and practices of European fathers. Because the quality and availability of data differs across the countries of the EU, knowledge about fathers is far more detailed and complete in some European countries and regions than in others. While idiosyncratic data sources make valuable contributions to knowledge, they cannot be used to construct a portrait of and draw meaningful conclusions about fatherhood and the lives and fathers at the EU-level. For this reason, we turn our attention to three harmonized micro-data sources that are

available for the countries of the EU, and, with reference to the measurement and conceptualization of fathers and fatherhood, we discuss their strengths and limitations. Based on our evaluations of these data sources, we suggest that existing survey designs, which have allowed *good enough* statistics and analyses of motherhood, are unable to capture the nuances and complexities of fathers' family and parenting experiences. We then discuss whether the evidence provided by the existing literature and current data sources are adequate to inform the design of, and sufficient to evaluate social policies related to fathers and fatherhood at the EU level. Despite the valuable work carried out by Eurostat to harmonize data and statistical information, we argue that data limitations lead to important gaps in knowledge that are likely to have negative repercussions. Here we suggest ways that European data sources could be made more amenable to a descriptive and analytical study of the lives and life chances of European fathers. The remaining sections outline the broader academic relevance of our main arguments by mapping some of the most obvious bridges to other social science disciplines and review the implications of our findings. Our primary conclusion is that more information on fathers' union and fertility histories would go a long way towards improving our knowledge of European fatherhood and facilitating the development of evidence based policy both at the EU- and the Member State-level.

Current Research Focus

Taking the increased policy interest in fathers at the EU level as our point of departure, we describe the status of current information about the characteristics, circumstances, and practices of European fathers, with the overarching goal of assessing whether sufficient data exist to effectively inform the development and

evaluation of policies that concern these men and/or target their behaviors. Given that the value of evidence based policy is well-recognized and that substantial resources are invested in collecting and producing good harmonized economic and social indicators at the EU-level, it is important to know whether and with what effect data on the characteristics and circumstances of fathers is under-developed and limited.

To this end, we critically assess three of the most important EU-level micro data sources. First, we provide an overview of how concepts of fathers and fatherhood are defined and what aspects of fatherhood are prioritized in the development of survey instruments. Next, we analyze some of the practical implications of these data limitations with reference to two broad social policy areas in which fathers have figured prominently; work-family reconciliation and social exclusion and poverty.

Although a focus on EU-level policy and concomitantly EU countries, necessarily excludes a number of important European countries, we feel this level of analysis is appropriate for a number of reasons. First, the European Union has grown in both size and political strength over the past two decades. Since its origins in the late 1960s, it has grown from a community of 6 countries to a union of 27 Member States. The second reason relates to the EU's role in influencing public policy. Initially conceived as an economic union supporting freedom of trade and movement, it has always had a good deal of regulatory power over economic policy and competition issues to facilitate market integration. In other policy domains, the principle of subsidiarity – that policy issues should be addressed as locally as practicable – has meant that the EU's ability to intervene in other policy domains has been relatively restricted. Nonetheless, EU policy has, over time, moved beyond a narrow interpretation of economic policy and, by harnessing social issues to economic concerns, extended its range of influence to non-economic interventions (Walby,

2004). Importantly, both hard and soft law measures have been developed that directly relate to the circumstances and behaviors of fathers (“soft” law policy instruments are flexible and non-binding rather than “hard” law approaches which are characterized by some form of compulsion and carry penalties for non-compliance. See Marginson and Sisson (2006) for a discussion). For different reasons, both types of legal interventions require an evidence base of high quality, comparable indicators and data. Given its size, policy competencies, and institutional mechanisms, the EU provides a particularly relevant and rich legislative context in which to explore how fathers and fatherhood have been conceptualized across policies and data sources. This will allow us to identify some of the most important, policy relevant gaps in knowledge about fathers in Europe.

Research Measurement and Methodology

The increased focus on and reinterpretation of European fatherhood, along with debates about the role that policy can play in effecting change, emerged at a time when, with the exception of Denmark and Britain, there was no real evidence base to guide and inform policy on male fertility and fatherhood (Clarke, Cooksey, & Verropoulo, 1998). Scholarly work on European fathers has proliferated over the last decade, but the development of knowledge has been geographically and substantively uneven. Because the quality and availability of secondary survey and administrative data sources differs across the countries of the EU, knowledge is far more advanced in some countries than in others. Those studies on fathers and fatherhood which have adopted a comparative approach have done so only on few countries and have predominantly looked at narrowly defined policy issues while leaving unanswered other important questions concerning European fathers. For example, register data in Scandinavian countries have allowed researchers to examine a range of issues which

have to do with male fertility and fatherhood. Recent examples include an assessment of men's propensity to take up parental leave in Sweden (A. Duvander & Johansson, 2010) and an examination of multiple partner fertility in Norway (Lappegård, Rønsen, & Skrede, 2009). Because the same kinds of administrative data are collected across different Scandinavian countries, within Nordic-region comparisons are possible allowing for some cross-national comparison. As valuable as these country-level or intra-regional analyses can be, we still know very little about the social, demographic and economic characteristics of fathers from these sorts of analyses. Despite very complete data on fathers, most single or intra-regional studies of fertility pay more attention to the experiences of women than of men (see for example Duvander, Lappegård & Andersson 2010). This means register data have the potential to contribute to the development of a cross-nationally comparative descriptive portrait of fatherhood for a subset of EU countries in the Nordic region, but not, of course, for the EU as a whole.

Although a cross-national comparative description of European fathers has not been produced using country-level data sources, there is a cross-national comparative literature that investigates the extent to which differences in family policies across Europe are related to cross national differences in the incentives for fathers to make use of paternity and parental leave entitlements (Fatherhood Institute, 2010; O'Brien, 2004, 2009; O'Brien & Moss, 2010) or for increased father involvement (Smith & Williams, 2007). Even these more comprehensive and comparative policy studies tend to devote more attention to some parts of the European Union than others. Knowledge about the policies of Eastern European countries, and to a lesser extent Southern European countries, remains sparse (but see Robila, 2010). Although there is clearly some untapped potential in existing data

sources, when knowledge about fathers is required at the EU-level, the use of country-specific data sources or research findings will almost certainly mean limitations in terms of scope and/or geographic coverage. This underscores the need for developing and maintaining high quality, harmonized data sources at the EU-level.

Harmonized data sources

Given the large number of European countries and the varying availability and design of country-specific data sources, researchers wanting to construct a comprehensive cross-national portrait of European fathers or to evaluate policies that target fathers will almost certainly have to rely on harmonized data sources. For countries (and candidate countries) of the European Union (EU) and the EFTA, Eurostat has played an important role in providing researchers with harmonized secondary survey data (Burkhauser & Lillard, 2005). Although Eurostat is involved in both ex ante (at the point of survey design) and ex post (after the data are collected) harmonization efforts, it does not organize data collection centrally. National statistical offices or ministries must respond to requests for information from the Commission or Directorates, and Eurostat is charged with collecting, consolidating, and disseminating this information at the European level. As part of this process, Eurostat works to ensure comparability of data across countries, but, its ability to produce comparable data and statistics depends on the quality of data collected by the Member States.

Strengths of the three data sources. For researchers who are interested in European fatherhood, the three most important harmonized data sources that Eurostat is currently responsible for harmonizing are the Harmonized European Time Use data (HETUS), the Survey of Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) (and its predecessor, the European Community Household Panel Survey (ECHP), and the

European Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS). Each data source has its own particular strengths. The HETUS data, which is available for 14 EU countries as well as Norway, provides detailed information on how men and women allocate their time. The data, mostly collected at the turn of the century, are collected using time diaries and in most cases individuals are asked to provide time use information for both one week day and one weekend day. Although the HETUS data are highly comparable, the harmonization guidelines, first issued in 2000 (Eurostat, 2000) and most recently updated in 2008 (Eurostat 2009), did not stipulate that time use information be collected from all individuals living in the same household. Nonetheless, all countries have made an effort to collect diary information from respondents and their partners (most also ask older children to fill in diaries) which makes an intra-household analysis of time use possible. Although this particular strength of the European time use data has been somewhat underutilized and most studies continue to use individuals as the unit of analysis, measures of time allocation using matched couples (see, for example, Craig & Mullan, 2010) or members of the same household are possible. The data have recently been incorporated into the larger Multinational Time Use Study making it possible to compare a larger number of countries (see for example, Gauthier, Smeeding, & Furstenberg, 2004) and to examine change over time in the time use patterns of mothers and fathers in same country (see, for example, (Dribe & Stanfors, 2009) for Sweden and (Sullivan, Coltrane, Mcannally, & Altintas, 2009) for a cross-country comparison of change over time). However, MTUS efforts to harmonize data from a larger number of surveys comes at the cost of even more limited information on the presence and age of children in European households relative to the HETUS (Sullivan, et al., 2009).

The EU-SILC data aim to collect detailed comparative measures of income and deprivation. The data cover all member states plus Norway and Iceland and comprise both a cross-sectional and a longitudinal component. The longitudinal component is a key strength of these data because it allows researchers to follow households over time. Transitions and their consequences can be well measured, at least within the four years the households are followed. Measures of income and deprivation are particularly detailed and carefully measured. In some ways, the EU-SILC is less ambitious than its predecessor, the European Community Household Panel (ECHP) Survey, which began with a sample of about 65,000 households and 130,000 individuals in 1994 with annual follow-ups until 2001 when the survey was discontinued. The ECHP followed the same households for a longer period of time and collected a wider range and breadth of information than the EU-SILC. For example, it contains information on time spent caring for children, and so provides some information on parental time investments in child care (Smith, 2004; Smith & Williams, 2007). However, the ex-ante harmonization process ran into a range of problems such as attrition and a failure to incorporate country-level expertise (Burkhauser & Lillard, 2005). Moreover the ECHP was discontinued before the 2004 accession and so lacks information on the new Member States.

The EU-LFS follows a random sample of respondents aged 15 and older in all EU, three candidate, and three EFTA (Iceland, Norway, and Switzerland) countries for five calendar quarters. Although data have been collected for much longer, EU-LFS micro-data is available extending back to 1983. It provides an excellent source of information for describing employment status, work choices, aspirations and constraints over five calendar quarters. A primary advantage of the EU-LFS is its large sample size which allows researchers to examine small population sub-groups,

such as ethnic minorities or immigrants (The 2010 quarterly data contain approximately 1,500,000 observations in total), and it also has an excellent response rate. Respondents who are currently unemployed or working part-time hours are asked to provide reasons for that choice. Options include caring commitments and lack of adequate childcare. For those who are currently employed, there is also information on satisfaction with working hours. This information, when combined with information on household structure, can shed light on the work-life balance strategies parents choose as well as unmet demand for better work-life balance or working hours (Thévenon, 2008).

Limitations of the three data sources. Despite a range of strengths and complementarities, the three data sources (and the discontinued ECHP) also share important limitations, not least for the study of European fathers. In some sense, this is to be expected given the central role that Eurostat has assumed in the development and harmonization of the three. For example, the EU-LFS has influenced the design and approach to the EU-SILC. In none of the three data sources are fertility histories or family formation histories collected. At most, we know a respondent's marital and cohabitation status at the time (s)he was first interviewed. We know whether (s)he was ever married, but we do not know when changes occurred. For several northern European countries, information on household composition is not collected in their national labor force survey and so this is missing for those countries in the harmonized EU-LFS. The lack of fertility histories means that mothers and fathers are only identified when they are observed living with their children. Because children tend to live with their mothers throughout childhood, researchers have developed techniques that allow them to infer fertility histories by using information on co-resident children (Cho, Retherford, & Choe, 1986). This method has been used

successfully when mothers are the unit of analysis. Usually, the age range is restricted to women below either age 40 or 45 in order to avoid misclassifying respondents, whose children have already left home. Although there is some potential for measurement error, the own child method has allowed researchers to examine the fertility of women in the absence of detailed fertility histories. However, this sort of method cannot be meaningfully applied to men because many will have children who are not residing with them at the time of interview. We do not know if men have children living in another household, and as a consequence cannot use the data to calculate even rough estimates of men's fertility histories or family size. In addition, there is insufficient information in any of the data sources to distinguish biological from social/step father relationships. The panel element of EU-SILC and the EU-LFS allows researchers to observe births that take place over the course of the panel (four years in the EU-SILC but only over the course of five calendar quarters in the EU-LFS), but for children born before their families entered the study, information on relationships between adults and children is limited and inadequate. In the EU-SILC there is no household grid, although information is collected so that the presence of (married or cohabiting) partners, parents or children living in the same household as the respondent can be identified. Unfortunately, these data do not clearly distinguish biological parents from step-parents (Iacovou & Skew, 2010). In the EU-LFS or the HETUS data, there are variables that record the relationship between each household member and the household reference person (EU-LFS) or all other household members (HETUS). In both surveys, the "child" code refers both to biological children of the respondent or of the respondent's cohabiting partner/spouse. Similarly to the EU-SILC, there are additional variables that contain the sequence number of the

father and mother, but the distinction between biological and social parents is not clearly made (Eurostat 2000; 2009; 2010).

Because men are more likely to assume a step-parent role and women most often remain the custodial parent, the inability to distinguish social and biological parents has far more important implications for the description and analysis of fatherhood than of motherhood. Without union histories to identify the start of a relationship it is difficult to make inferences about biological paternity. Moreover, because the guidelines of the HETUS only require that information be collected about whether activities were carried out with or in the presence of "other household members" or an unspecified "other person that you know", information on the time non-resident fathers spend with their children is not well captured in these data. The ECHP data contained some additional information on the presence of step-, fostered or adopted children in the family which researchers have used (Koslowski, forthcoming), but the exact relationship between the father and each child is not well recorded. In a context where family structures have become increasingly unstable and complex and where the roles and responsibilities of biological and social parents are likely to differ, this is a substantial limitation.

Empirical Findings

In the previous section we provided information on the strengths and limitations of three harmonized data sources which contain information about families and which are likely to provide the best aggregate and cross-national comparative information on fathers and fatherhood in the EU. Most importantly, current guidelines are not sufficiently attentive to distinctions between biological and social parenthood. As a consequence, researchers who wish to use any of these harmonized data sources to document and analyze the demography of fatherhood in Europe have to be content

with measures of fatherhood that are rather crudely specified and poorly measured. In this section, we discuss the practical implications of this and some other limitations of the three data sources. To do this, we explore the issues through the lens of two broad areas where a strong evidence base could usefully inform the development, design, and evaluation of EU policy. We first consider the area of work life reconciliation. Paying particular attention to the Parental Leave Directive, a hard law measure first introduced in the mid-1990s which resulted in a floor of provision but a good deal of cross-national policy variation across EU countries, particularly in their attempts to create incentives for greater father involvement, we identify gaps between what information is needed to evaluate effectively the success and impact of different policy specifications and what information is currently available at the EU-level. Next we consider the implications of limitations in the harmonized data sources for the development of measures to combat poverty and social inclusion which take into account the circumstances of fathers or the role they play in addressing child poverty and promoting child well-being.

Work-family reconciliation: parental leave policy and the redistribution of care

Parental leave has a long history on the EU social policy agenda and has figured prominently in debates surrounding gender equality and work-family reconciliation. A (hard law) Directive on Parental Leave was first proposed by the EU-Commission in 1983, but despite widespread support, its adoption was thwarted, in part, by strong opposition from the UK Government. Parental leave is also mentioned in the 1989 Community Charter of the Fundamental Social Rights of Workers (Commission of the European Communities, 1990), which states that "measures should ... be developed enabling men and women to reconcile their occupational and family obligations.". Progress in obtaining a binding agreement at

the EU-level was slow, although the agenda was taken forward with independent and often creative innovations by several Member States. For example, policies with strong incentives for men to take parental leave – in the form of "use it or lose it", non-transferable entitlements -- were implemented by several Scandinavian countries in the 1990s. Individual entitlements with high levels of wage replacement were believed to offer the greatest incentive for men to take more (or any) parental leave and to redistribute some of the costs and benefits of caring for children from women to men (Bruning & Plantenga, 1999). Although not going as far as many Scandinavian countries, the 1996 Parental Leave Directive (96/34/EC) stipulated individual entitlements of three months job protected leave be available to each parent to care for a child up until age 8. Many details concerning the design and implementation, for example whether the leave was paid or whether it could be taken part-time, were left to the discretion of Member States, however (Council of the European Union, 1996). The result is a good deal of variation in the design and generosity of parental leave policies in the EU and EFTA, particularly in the strength of the incentives they provide for fathers to take leave (Moss, 2010).

To assess whether developments and innovations in parental leave have had their intended consequences, one of which is the redistribution of child care work from women to men (O'Brien, 2009), we need to examine the extent to which men take leave (including the share of leave days) as well as any changes in behavior that might be attributed to increased leave taking. Unfortunately, except for a few recent studies, there is little empirical evidence on the extent to which taking parental leave increases father involvement either in the shorter- or longer-term. Studies by Haas & Hwang (2008) and Rege & Solli (2010), draw on Swedish and Norwegian data, respectively, and show that the introduction of individual, non-transferable

entitlements is positively associated with father involvement. This is an important result as it suggests that paternity and parental leave policies could have implications for child well-being (Rege & Solli, 2010). Nonetheless, the analyses are confined to the Nordic region, which raises issues of generalizability to other institutional contexts. As a consequence, there is only weak evidence available to guide policymakers who are interested designing leave policies which foster greater father involvement.

Cross-national comparisons of leave taking amongst men are far more common than studies that examine the consequences of leave taking. For example, research shows that in those countries where there is no remuneration for men, they are less likely to take parental leave (Plantenga & Remery, 2005). While it is useful to establish which designs increase fathers' propensity to make use of parental leave arrangements, if leave taking is a means to better child outcomes, increased fertility or some other policy target, many important questions remain unanswered. Several of these questions remain unanswered because existing data sources are inadequate to address them. There are surprisingly few studies, either single country or cross-national, that document how parents who are on leave – mothers or fathers – spend their time, much less whether early experiences of one-to-one care by fathers, incentivized by innovations in parental leave policies, translates into greater involvement in subsequent years. Similarly, there is limited information on whether a more equal distribution of the leave entitlement results in a redistribution of responsibilities so that the other partner spends less time caring. In other words, does a father's care substitute for the mother's time or simply increase the total amount of care provided? To answer these kinds of questions, we require information on current and retrospective use of parental leave, preferably with samples both before and after

a policy innovation was implemented, as well as good quality information on current time use patterns, for both resident and non-resident parents. Unfortunately, existing micro-data for EU countries do not contain this level of detail. Researchers can assess whether the time use of fathers across countries with different parental leave policies differs. This kind of study design is possible using data drawn from the ECHP (Smith & Williams, 2007) or by making use of MTUS/HETUS data (Craig & Mullan, 2010; Sullivan, et al., 2009). The development by Sullivan and colleagues (2009) of a new database which links institutional-level macro-policy indicators to existing time use studies, will facilitate and greatly enhance research of this kind. However, this kind of research design produces tentative results, because it is difficult to disentangle cause and effect (Craig & Mullan, 2010; Sigle-Rushton, 2009). The design and implementation of parental leave policies, which involve a degree of discretion from the Member States, is endogenous to the institutional context and social norms of each country. Countries with generous and inclusive leave policies may have them because the population preferred shared care and policies responded to those preferences (Pfau-Effinger, 2004) or because policy changes resulted in a change of attitudes and behavior (Himmelweit & Sigala, 2004). Policies, preferences and behavior are mutually constitutive at any level and make causal interpretations suspect, but data which allows a closer links between policy parameters and individual behavior both before and after policy changes would be a move in the right direction. There are also issues of omitted variable bias to consider. If countries with higher fertility also have more generous parental leave, it could be that fathers spend more time on child care in countries with generous parental leave because the average number of children per adult is larger in those countries. If countries with generous parental leave are also countries where dissolution rates are higher, it is important to control not just for the

presence of children in the household but for non-resident children who may nonetheless visit with and be cared for by their biological father. Retrospective questions on men's fertility and partnership histories and on the use of parental leave in the HETUS would add substantially to knowledge about the extent and nature of father involvement across the diversity of countries that comprise the EU and would provide a stronger evidence base for policymakers. Moreover, it would allow researchers to construct better measures of the "demand" for child care and in that way better control for confounding factors that might bias estimated relationships between parental leave and desired outcomes – either father involvement or child well-being. This kind of information would have been particularly useful when amendments to the Parental Leave Directive were recently debated and approved (2010/18/EU). These changes, which will increase the minimum amount of parental leave that EU countries have to offer from six to eight months but at the same time make it possible for countries to allow all but one month (rather than the three previously required) to be transferable between parents, will likely increase the share of leave taken by women in those countries which choose to weaken incentives for shared leave. The impact of the change on parents and children can only be speculated, and unless new information becomes available, the effects of the policy amendment cannot be effectively evaluated.

Poverty and Social Exclusion

Social policies to combat social exclusion and poverty, although regulated through soft rather than hard law measures, and with a less marked historical tradition than policies related to work-life reconciliation, have been identified by the EU policy agenda as key areas for action. The new EU Youth Strategy (2010-2018) (Commission of the European Communities, 2009) has defined social inclusion as one

of the 'fields of action' and the European Commission and the Member States have made combating child poverty a priority under the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) on Social Protection and Social Inclusion. Since 2000, the European Union has used the OMC as a way of guiding national strategy development on issues related to social policies. As part of the process, Member States are called upon to produce periodic national action plans which detail the way in which OMC priorities are or will be addressed at the national level. The aim is to identify and share the best practice of high performers and to inspire innovation and reform where performance could be improved. Both the inherently comparative nature of the OMC, and its reliance on harmonized indicators to monitor progress, underscore the importance of high quality and comparable data. Although the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion identifies the promotion of “evidence based social innovation” (European Commission, 2010: pp. 5) as an area for action and although this is a policy area where fathers and fatherhood, the empirical evidence base remains under-developed.

A good deal of attention has been devoted to the measurement of poverty and social exclusion in the EU-SILC data, but there are several policy areas involving fathers where more complete data could add to knowledge, and inform policy dialogue and development. The Recommendation on Child Poverty, planned for 2012 (European Commission, 2010), provides an obvious example. Poverty rates differ substantially across countries, but children living with lone mothers are, on average, more likely to be poor than children living in two-parent families in the same country (Rainwater & Smeeding, 2004). This explains, at least in part, why lone mothers or one-parent families more generally, are frequently identified by the European Commission and in many European countries' National Action Plans as vulnerable to

poverty and social exclusion. Since the design of child support policies differs substantially across EU and EFTA countries (Skinner, Bradshaw, & Davidson, 2007), the evaluation of best practice in child support policy and its contribution to the economic well-being of children requires information on the role that child maintenance plays in the income packages of one-parent or, to a lesser extent, step-families. Although the EU-SILC collects information on the payment and receipt of child maintenance, the lack of information on non-resident fathers and their children makes it impossible to measure how many men are non-resident fathers and are paying, or indeed not paying, regular maintenance. Moreover, because in reconstituted families, it is not clear whether the children in the household are living with both biological parents or whether they are living with a stepfather, the amount of maintenance per eligible child cannot be (well) measured either. In this area of policy as well, fertility and union histories are needed to put the income data to good use (i.e. by enabling data users to identify “biological” relationships as opposed to “social” relationships) and to provide good cross-national comparative information on the design of effective child maintenance policies that work to reduce child poverty.

The new EU Youth Strategy (2010-2018) (Commission of the European Communities, 2009) has also defined social inclusion as one of the 'fields of action'. According to the new Strategy, social inclusion will be promoted by the European Commission and the Member States in a number of ways, one of which is the “promotion of specific support for young families”. Although teenage and young parenthood is not a source of general anxiety, the need for support is motivated more by the recognition that early parenthood may curtail investments in education. In a context where the 2000 Lisbon Strategy aims to make the EU “the most competitive knowledge-based economy in the world”, young families may be less able to compete

in a post-industrial labor market. Conversely, prolonged investments in education may contribute to even lower fertility, a competing EU policy concern. Designing policies that encourage investments in education while at the same time helping families to have the number of children they want, requires a better understanding of obstacles to family formation and how they change at different points in the transition to adulthood. However, most of the European research on the consequences of the timing of first birth has focused on women. There is very little evidence on the effects of early parenthood on men. This is a particularly salient issue in the enlarged EU where in some countries the entry to parenthood, at least among mothers, has not been delayed to the same extent across socio-economic groups, raising further questions about the economic capabilities of young parents (McLanahan 2004). More detailed information on the fertility and union histories of both women and men in the EU-SILC would add substantially to knowledge about the longer-term risks and challenges facing young parents and their children.

Bridges to other Disciplines

In this chapter we have drawn on the theoretical perspectives of social policy and used examples from social policy to illustrate the pressing need for new or improved data on the characteristics and behaviors of European fathers. However, many academics have argued that social policy is more precisely defined as a subject area than a discipline because it draws on a wide range of social science disciplines, including for example, demography, sociology, economics, and psychology, to advance knowledge in the area of policy (Blakemore & Griggs 2007). To the extent that this is true, our use of a social policy perspective to motivate and evaluate the state of knowledge on the demography of fatherhood in Europe implicitly

incorporates the interests and concerns of a wide range of disciplines. In this sense, other disciplines are already well integrated in our perspective and approach.

Nonetheless, it is clear that the benefits of more detailed, comparable, and high quality data on fatherhood, would serve the interests in researchers working on more broadly defined issues related to fatherhood. As Goldscheider and Kaufman (1996) argue, many of the practical justifications demographers gave for neglecting men's fertility (for example that women are more likely to be home and available for interview) are no longer very convincing or valid. They discuss several important blind spots that they attribute to a (nearly) exclusive focus on women in studies of fertility, many of which resonate with the issues we discuss in this chapter.

Sociologists, economists, and psychologists who are interested in studying the relationship between family structure and child well-being would put forward equally convincing arguments about the limitations of data that do not clearly distinguish biological fatherhood from social fatherhood. Sociologists and psychologists who are interested in assessing the importance of family ties that connect individuals across households (see, for example, Smock & Rose Greenland, 2010) would similarly take issue with survey designs that pay so little attention to non-resident fathers.

Summary

In recent years, European policymakers have increasingly seen fathers as both workers and carers. Although the “rise and fall” of the male breadwinner is something of an overstatement, it is clear that the male breadwinner (perhaps to a lesser extent than the female homemaker) no longer reflects preferences or reality in much of Europe. And the potential benefits of policies that support the dual earner/dual carer family model – including higher fertility, greater economic security for families, a higher tax base for social security, and improved child well-being --

have not escaped the attention of EU policy makers. As our analyses in the previous sections have demonstrated, existing EU data sources will not provide the solid evidence base that is needed to reform existing policies and to develop new policy instruments that reflect both social change and new policy priorities. A good deal of effort has gone into the conceptualization, measurement and harmonization of employment and income indicators. However, support for the dual earner/dual carer family means more than moving women into work. It also means a more equal distribution of unpaid work and care, particularly in families with children where demands for unpaid work and care are high and often unevenly distributed. With high rates of union dissolution, it means that parenting responsibilities, which include both earning and caring, will often be allocated to social fathers as well as extend across household boundaries. The current evidence base is inadequate to support the development and evaluation of policies that address these latter issues. There is a clear need for better and more detailed information on the circumstances, needs and practices of European fathers and which is representative of the wide diversity of member states which are now (and will in the future be) part of the EU.

Future Directions

Social and demographic change will always create new data demands. Two decades ago, survey data started to change in ways that made it easier to document the prevalence of cohabiting unions and to examine the characteristics and circumstances of individuals who chose to cohabit (at least temporarily) rather than marry. As fathers are expected to contribute more to the care of their children, and as policy makers seek to reinforce this behavior, we need data that allow us to measure and understand the extent and consequences of behavioral change. Because fathers,

after separating from the mother of their children, still tend to live away from their biological children, this means we need more information on men's non-resident children and more retrospective information on men's previous partnerships. Family life is increasingly complex and home life increasingly involves multiple locations. Attempts to collect new data of this kind will be expensive. In addition, survey designs will need to be developed with great care, not least because research suggests that men often fail to provide complete fertility histories (Rendall, Clarke, Peters, Ranjit, & Verropoulou, 1999). However, there is a growing body of evidence on best practice, largely from U.S. studies, that could be used to guide any new efforts at data collection (Joyner et al., forthcoming). And there are cross-national comparative projects which have sought to collect male fertility histories, such as the Generations and Gender Study, from which additional lessons could be drawn. Although a risky endeavor, we have to consider the risks that accompany the status quo. Data that fails to capture the complexity of modern family life will be partial and limited, and its ability to inform policy and practice will be severely compromised.

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