

**Child Well-Being and the Welfare State: A Comparative Analysis of Poverty, Child Care,
and Child Protection across Welfare Regimes**

by

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Abstract

Welfare states are designed to promote and protect the economic and social wellbeing of citizens through principles of equal opportunity and a more equitable distribution of wealth. While the objective goal of the welfare state is to ensure the security and well-being of its citizens, the extent to which this goal is prioritized, and in turn achieved, depends on the character and impact of the particular welfare state. Variation among welfare states has been commonly examined and analysed in social research, however, children have too often been excluded from cross-national comparison particularly from research on the impact of social policy and welfare states on child well-being. The present study examines child poverty, child care and corporal punishment bans across three nations representing three welfare regimes – France (Conservative), New Zealand (Liberal), and Denmark (Social Democratic). An examination of child poverty revealed that Denmark does best in protecting children from poverty, followed by France and lastly New Zealand – with small variation from their ideal welfare regime type. Child care policies revealed that France and Denmark have generous and comprehensive policies in place for children of all ages, while New Zealand offers only 20 hours of ‘ECE’ for children over the age of three. Analyzing child care policies across welfare regimes demonstrates that although focusing on children does not dramatically change the ordering of nations within their welfare regimes, some nations are less securely placed, in this case France, when children are brought to the forefront. Lastly, all three nations have taken legislative steps in recognizing children’s rights and eliminating physical punishment. The case of New Zealand is a unique one, as it does not neatly or completely correspond with what we might expect based on the ‘welfare regime’ typology.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Social inequality is a familiar and pervasive phenomenon of social life with multiple dimensions and causes beyond the asymmetrical distribution of income and wealth. Research on social patterns and social inequality has been at the heart of sociology from the time of its establishment. Sociologists have long recognized that there is an unequal distribution of resources, rewards, and positions across society. Scholars around the world have highlighted a wide range of *material indicators of inequalities* such as poverty, income, wealth and life chances, and *non-material indicators of inequalities* such as rights, status and entitlement along various fault lines or axes, such as socio-economic status, sex/gender, racial or ethnic origin and, more recently, sexual orientation and physical mobility (Olsen, 2011). Age is another important axis that determines not only a wide range of civil and political rights, but also the distribution of well-being and power within the social structure. Research on social policy related to the elderly and children has garnered greater attention in recent decades. But child well-being remains a relatively underexplored area in research on inequality and social policy today, especially from a comparative cross-national perspective.

Children are often celebrated as ‘our future’ in songs, literature, and government statements. Yet, in many nations, they are often among the least well-off. According to the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF, 2019), children (people under the age of 18) comprise approximately a quarter of the world’s population. Although the United Nations (UN) has declared that every child has the right to health, education, and an adequate standard of living

(UN, 1989), the situation faced by millions of children is still desperate, as they are often denied their basic human rights and are deprived of what they need to grow up healthy and strong, even in the some of the richest, most economically developed countries. Globally, children are twice as likely as adults to live in poverty and represent half of those who are living in extreme poverty (UNICEF, 2021). The consequences of impoverishment are grave, and children are more vulnerable to its effects, as they lack the food, sanitation, shelter, healthcare, and education they require to survive and thrive. Contrary to common belief, an estimated 20 percent of poor children live in developed countries, confirming that child poverty affects children worldwide and is a global problem (Pickett and Wilkinson, 2007).

In addition, approximately 264 million children worldwide are denied access to education, producing deep inequalities from the outset in terms of intellectual and social development and opportunities throughout life (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) 2018). As of 2018, 45 percent of countries do not have access to education enshrined in their legal code or constitution (UNESCO, 2018). Today, nearly 1 in 10 children are subjected to child labour worldwide, with many being forced into hazardous work through trafficking (UNICEF, 2021). The daily lives of millions of children, including those in the world's richest countries, fall severely short of what may be considered a healthy childhood. Poverty, lack of access to education, exploitation and violence are daily threats to their physical and psychological health and well-being (Pickett and Wilkinson 2007; UNICEF, 2013).

Although children experience inequality virtually everywhere, the character and magnitude of inequality can vary markedly across nations. On average, 13.1 percent of children live in relative poverty across the thirty-eight nations of the Organisation for Economic Co-

operation and Development (OECD). The *relative* poverty rate refers to household income that is 50 percent or less than the median level of income within a nation, with profound implications for the ability of poor families to participate in their society (OECD, 2019). As of 2019, in four OECD countries more than 20 percent of children live in relative poverty, including the United States – one of the wealthiest nations in the world – where that proportion was a staggering 21 percent. In contrast, in other OECD nations such as Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Slovenia, Switzerland, Poland, and Finland, fewer than 10 percent of children live in relative poverty. Although Sweden was once the world leader with the lowest child poverty rates, Finland and Denmark now have the lowest relative child poverty rates at only 3-4 percent (Olsen, 2021).

Violence against children is yet another challenge to children’s survival and development. It is estimated that up to one billion children have experienced some form of physical, sexual, or emotional violence or neglect in the past year (World Health Organization, 2020). The most prevalent form of violence inflicted on children is corporal punishment, which is defined as “any punishment in which physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort, however light” (UN, 2008: 19). Here too, however, there is marked variation in the level violence against children and the measures in place to protect them. In April 2021, Colombia became the 63rd country to fully prohibit all corporal punishment of children. However remarkable it is that so many countries have taken this step, those countries protect only 12 percent of children in the world; 88 percent remain unprotected from punitive violence, living in countries where it remains legal, state authorized and, in many cases, a socially approved method of ‘discipline’ (End Corporal Punishment, 2021).

Corporal punishment prevalence rates vary across nations. Past research has revealed rates as low as under 5 percent in Nordic nations, to above 70 percent in Africa and Central

America (UNICEF, 2014; WHO, 2021). On July 1, 1979, Sweden became the first country to fully prohibit corporal punishment, with 98 percent of parliamentarians' support (Durrant, 1999). Since then, approval of corporal punishment has decreased dramatically, and today, only about 5 percent of children in Sweden have been 'spanked' (Swedish Institute, 2021).

In contrast, in countries such as the US and Canada corporal punishment is legal in the home, some alternative care settings, some day cares, some schools, and even some penal institutions (End Corporal Punishment, 2022). In a 2010 US study, approximately two thirds (67 percent) of the parents surveyed reported having physically punished their child at some point (Taylor, et al. 2010). Moreover, in a more recent study involving 7,551 US adults, it was found that 43 percent of the participants agreed that spanking is an effective way to punish a child (Ballard, 2018). According to data from the US Department of Education, more than 109,000 students were physically punished in US classrooms in 2013-2014 alone (Gershoff and Font, 2016; Harlan, 2015).

Another key area of inequality faced by children is access to child care. Public expenditure on early childhood education and care covers "all public spending (in cash or in kind) towards formal day care services (e.g., creches, day care centres, and family day care, generally aimed at children 0-2, inclusive) and pre-primary education services (including kindergartens and day care centres which usually provide educational content as well as traditional care for children aged from three to five, inclusive)" (OECD, 2019:1). The extent and level of spending on early childhood education and care, however, varies significantly across countries. In countries such as France, Norway, Sweden and Iceland, public expenditure on early childhood education and care is between 1.4 and 1.8 percent of the GDP, while it is less than 0.5 percent of GDP in Ireland, the US, the United Kingdom (UK) and Australia. The OECD average

falls at 0.7 percent. Child care is not only important for the well-being and development of children; it also enables parents, particularly mothers, to obtain education and training and to take advantage of employment opportunities. Increased child care provision promotes female labour force participation, as well as increased fertility rates (Thevenon, Adema and Ali, 2014). A policy framework to ensure a system of high-quality childhood education and care available to all is integral to reducing inequality and creating a more inclusive world for all children and parents.

As noted above, children endure many dimensions of inequality. However, the level and extent of inequality is markedly different across nations, and, in large part, this is dependent upon the character and commitment of national welfare states and the support they provide. The degree to which modern welfare states provide and achieve an adequate level of protection against different contingencies including poverty, unemployment, sickness, and old age varies significantly across the world, even across the wealthiest nations. However, children are too often excluded from cross-national research on the impact of welfare states on well-being. It is crucial to examine the various factors that affect children's well-being and the various ways in which these factors interact – including the impact of social policy.

The lack of attention to child well-being cross nationally has impeded not only the understanding of its complexity, but also the cause of variation which could potentially lead to prediction and prevention of inequalities faces by children. Many feminist researchers, such as Jane Lewis, Ann Orloff, Julia O'Connor, and Diane Sainsbury have noted this problem for understanding the well-being of women, and gender inequalities, but children have not been 'front and centre'. Though unlikely, it is not out of the question that a nation may be supportive of its adult citizens or residents, but not necessarily of its children – at least in some respects or

areas. The purpose of this study is to address this gap in research through the lens of Gøsta Esping-Andersen's welfare regime typology, assessing its applicability to understanding inequalities in certain aspects of child well-being across three nations representing three models of social welfare - France (Conservative); New Zealand (Liberal); and Denmark (Social Democratic). Today, the term 'child well-being' is widely used among scholars, policy makers and practitioners; however, it is conceptualized and defined in various ways. Without a consensus around a single definition of well-being, researchers from different fields have examined it through various measures and indicators, including: physical, social, economic, and emotional well-being, and development, activity and overall life satisfaction. While there are many ways of defining child well-being that are more or less encompassing, covering a wide range of issues and areas, for the purpose of this study, it will be limited to rates and character of child poverty; costs, accessibility, and quality of child care; and legal protection from corporal punishment.

Thesis Structure

This study is organized into seven chapters. Chapter two provides an overview of the relevant literature surrounding child well-being in order to demonstrate the complexity of the concept, and the variation in definitions, followed by a review of the social policy and welfare state responses. It will also examine the often neglected third pillar of the welfare state, protective legislation. In chapter three I provide an overview of comparative analysis, the methodology used for exploring and answering the research questions. It includes the rationale for my selection of nations, measures and data sources. Chapters four, five, and six, provide the results of the analysis across three nations, Denmark, France, and New Zealand, regarding each child

well-being indicator chosen for the study – rates and character of child poverty, costs, accessibility and quality of child care, and legal protection from corporal punishment. Finally, in chapter seven I summarize my key findings and identify avenues for future research.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of relevant literature in the area of child well-being and various social policy responses, in order to demonstrate the complexity of this growing field. More specifically, this will include a review of literature that analyzes the multidimensional aspects of child well-being, from concepts and definitions to measures and frameworks. This is followed by a review of the welfare state, and Esping-Andersen's typology comprising Conservative, Liberal and Social Democratic welfare state regimes. This literature review will situate my research within the larger context of critical scholarship on child well-being and social policy.

From Child Welfare to Child-Well Being

Article 1 of the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989:1) defines a child as a "human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier". Children are among the most marginalized and vulnerable members in most nations today. The needs, risks and vulnerabilities of children can vary markedly throughout the stages of childhood requiring ongoing forms of supports and interventions to promote their well-being. Due to their vulnerability, to some degree children have almost always been objects of some forms of societal attention. However, which children generate attention, how much attention, and the diversity in response has varied over time, and continues to vary cross-nationally.

Alfred J. Khan, expert in the development of child welfare policy, was among the first to study children's welfare across nations and over time. His work began in the 1940s, pioneering the study of the "state of children" in New York in collaboration with the Citizen Committee for Children. In the late 1970s Khan and Sheila Kamerman were the first to study and analyze child welfare across developed countries (Kamerman and Khan, 1978; Ben-Arieh, 2010). They argued that children, youth, and families have changed over time, and called for a reorganization of child welfare services with the aim of helping children face the implications of these changes for their life experiences and future opportunities. They maintained that children, by definition, constitute a vulnerable population. Consequently, universal policies that support the well-being of all children are required rather than narrowly targeting poor and disadvantaged children (Kahn and Kamerman, 1983; 1988).

The term 'child well-being' is now widely used among scholars, policy makers and practitioners but it is conceptualized and defined in varied ways (Amerijckx and Claire-Humnet, 2013; Ben-Arieh and Fronese, 2001; Engster and Stensöta, 2011; Jones, LaLiberte, and Piescher, 2015; Pollard and Lee, 2003; Pickett and Wilson, 2007; Tisdall, 2015; UNICEF, 2013). Over the last few decades, the concept of 'child well-being' has shifted from a narrow association with rescuing some 'at-risk' children to a broader understanding related to healthy child development within an ecological perspective (Ben-Arieh, 2010). The movement from deficit-oriented child welfare policy to a developmental model and the promotion of child well-being brought dramatic changes to the social indicators of the condition of children over time. This progress changed academics' and policy-makers view of children and childhood in major ways, including a growing emphasis on development throughout childhood rather than 'survival'; greater attention to the voices of children themselves; growing recognition of child rights; and a

focus on children's current well-being rather than their future as healthy adults (Ben-Arieh, 2000; Ben-Arieh, 2004; Ben-Arieh and George, 2001; Lippman, 2007). The field of child well-being and its indicators continues to grow, and I will now turn to where it stands today.

What is Child Well-being?

The term 'child well-being' is widely employed today but the concept can be understood in various ways (e.g. UNICEF, 2020). Well-being "has subjective (self-assessed) and objective (ascribed) dimensions; it can be measured at the level of individuals or society; it accounts for elements of life satisfaction that cannot be defined, explained or primarily influenced by economic growth" (Tisdall, 2015:2). Due to its complexity, researchers from different fields have examined a range of aspects of well-being, including physical, social, economic, and emotional well-being, and have focused on dimensions including development, activity and overall life satisfaction.

Like adult well-being, child well-being has been examined through a wide range of indicators across several domains of life quality and functioning, including physical, mental, social, and economic (Amerijckx and Humblet, 2014; Freeman, 2007; Jones, LaLiberte and Piescher, 2015; Tisdall, 2015). According to Ben-Arieh (2010) child well-being indicators reflect considerations related to ecological theories of child development; the normative concept of child rights; and the new sociology of the child which views childhood as a stage in and of itself. Methodological issues highlighting the subjective perspective of children, viewing children as a central unit of observation, the emergence of administrative data, and the variability of data sources, have also influenced child well-being indicators and the study of child welfare. Several data sources commonly used in assessing child well-being today are census, survey, and

longitudinal data, as well as other large-scale quantitative and comparative data bases. Interest in international comparison has grown over the last two decades, specifically with reports by large organizations and agencies such as UNICEF, and the OECD.

Measures of Child Well-Being

In the academic literature, there are two broad approaches to defining and measuring child well-being. The first is to consider child well-being as a multi-dimensional concept, measured by some key indicators. The second, approach is to ask children directly about their well-being.

UNICEF, which has raised the visibility of inequalities across countries takes a broad, encompassing view of well-being: “The true measure of a nation’s standing is how well it attends to its children – their health and safety, their material security, their education and socialization, and their sense of being loved, valued and included in the families and societies in which they are born”.¹ (UNICEF, 2007: 1). This inclusive definition recognizes that all childhood experiences, and happiness, life satisfaction, and quality of life contribute to children’s overall well-being.

Multidimensional Approach

UNICEF’s 2007 report card was the first to consider and compare children’s well-being across 21 industrialized countries using various indicators. Its 2013 report card identified five measures to measure child well-being across 29 industrialized countries: (1) material well-being; (2) health and safety; (3) educational well-being; (4) behaviours and risks; and (5) housing and environment (UNICEF, 2013). *Material well-being* is assessed through indicators of monetary

¹ In some studies, both approaches are employed, including objective and subjective aspects in their lists of indicators (Bradshaw et al., 2013; Voukelatou et al., 2021).

and material deprivation. This includes relative child poverty rate (proportion of children living in households with incomes below 50 percent of the national median) and the child poverty gap (distance between the national poverty line and the median income of households below the poverty line). Other related indicators address the proportion of children lacking specific items, including access to three meals a day, fresh fruit and vegetables, books, and leisure activities. The material well-being indicator also addressed the proportion of children reporting low family affluence.² *Health and safety* are measured in terms of health at birth, access to preventative health services, and child and youth mortality rates. *Educational well-being* is measured by school enrolment rates in early childhood (percent of those aged between 4 years and the start of compulsory education enrolled in preschool) and further education (percent of those aged 15 to 19 enrolled in further education), and achievement scores in tests of reading, math, and science literacy. The *behaviours and risks* dimension of child well-being includes components of health behaviours such as the proportion of children who are overweight, eat breakfast daily, eat fruit daily, and exercise; and risk behaviours such as the teenage fertility rate, smoking, alcohol and cannabis use, and exposure to violence including fighting and being bullied. However, protection from corporal punishment is not included among these risk indicators. The *housing and environment* dimension is measured in terms of housing adequacy (rooms per person, and proportion of households with children reporting more than one housing problem) and environmental safety (homicide rate and air pollution).

The OECD brings together 38 member countries and partners that represent approximately 80 percent of world trade and investment.³ In 2009, the OECD developed a

² Family affluence scale (% of children reporting low family affluence).

³ The Organization for Economic Growth and Development (OECD) is an intergovernmental organization with 38 member states who works to build better policies for better lives.

measurement framework to provide an extensive analysis of child well-being across nations in their report *Doing Better for Children* (OECD, 2009). That report measured child well-being across six dimensions: material well-being, housing and the environment, education, health, risk behaviours, and quality of school life. In 2011, the OECD began to include child well-being in its *How's Life?* Reports, which capture both material well-being and the broader quality of people's lives. The *How's Life?* report, released every two years, examines 11 dimensions of well-being including: income and wealth, jobs and earnings, housing, health, education, work-life balance, environment, social connections, civic engagement, safety, and subjective well-being. The OECD has created a *Child Well-Being Portal* where a range of various data on children, the settings in which they grow up, and information on public policies for children can be accessed.

Other researchers have used a Child Well-being Index (CWI) to compare the well-being of children across nations such as the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the UK (Bradshaw and Mayhew, 2005; Duke Centre for Child and Family Policy, 2014; Land, 2005; UNICEF Canada, 2018). The CWI measures 7 domains: family economic well-being, social relationships, health, safety/behavioural concerns, educational attainments, community connectedness, and emotional well-being (Duke Centre for Child and Family Policy, 2014; Land, 2007). Several countries conduct national surveys on child well-being on a regular basis. These include the CivEd survey; The Well-being of Children in the UK; and German surveys (Heshmati, Bajalan, and Tausch, 2007).⁴ Although there are differences among these projects and their objectives, they typically cover: material well-being, health, behaviour, education,

⁴ CivEd survey is a Civic Education Study provides data about students' attitudes towards democracy, national identity, international relations, and social cohesion and diversity among 28 participating countries (National Centre for Education Statistics, 2022).

social relationships, emotional and spiritual well-being, and social exclusion. Together, these various measures shed light on the wide range of conceptualizations of child well-being, identify various potential sources of well-being, and highlight the complexity of children's life situations.

Subjective Approach

In other studies, researchers have taken a different approach to defining child well-being. For example, some have used 'subjective' or self-report measures (e.g., Bradshaw and Richardson, 2009; Burton and Phipps, 2010; Heshmati, Bajalan, and Tausch 2007; OECD, 2009, 2011).

While subjective well-being is often assumed to be restricted to measuring *happiness*, it can cover a wide range of key aspects of children's lives such as social connectedness, perceptions of quality of life and overall life satisfaction. This approach allows children to assess their own well-being and reflect on how they feel about themselves and their environment (Heshmati, Bajalan, and Tausch, 2007). According to a recent report by UNICEF, "monitoring children's own perceptions of their well-being and crafting policies that are responsive to those measures offers a practical approach to deliver on this aspiration to help children thrive" (2021:12).

Over the past two decades, there has been exponential growth in measuring subjective well-being in addition to the use of standard indicators. This research has proven that subjective well-being, measured in surveys, is valid and reliable, and can inform policy making (OECD, 2013; UNICEF, 2021). Some large international surveys that integrate self-assessments of happiness and satisfaction with different life domains include UNICEF's *Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys* (MICS), the *International Survey of Children's Well-being*, and UNICEF's *Innocenti Report Card* series (Children's World, 2020; UNICEF, 2022). Since 2011, the OECD Child Well-being Portal has included analyses of subjective well-being indicators as part of the

Better Life Initiative, marking the OECD's first attempt to provide international recommendations on collecting and analysing subjective well-being of children. While child subjective well-being is now widely examined, there still are no agreed-upon guidelines in place for which measures to use or how to use them. The most common methods for measuring subjective child well-being include the Self-Anchoring Striving Scale, Student's Life Satisfaction Scale (SCLSS), and the Personal Well-Being Index (PWI) (Beckie and Hayduk, 1997; Dinisman and Ben-Arieh, 2015; Huebner and Gilman, 2002)). The dimensions used to measure child well-being objectively or subjectively have roots in the international standards set out in the UNCRC (UN, 1989). The next section explores the relevance of a human rights framework for measuring child well-being.

Child Well-Being in the Context of Child Rights

Human rights are basic standards to which every person is entitled in order to live and develop in dignity, regardless of age, race, sex, nationality, language, religion, or any other status. As set out in Article 1 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UN, 1948): "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights". Throughout history, however, the law has treated children and adults differently. Children's rights are human rights. However, prior to the 20th century, there were no specific human rights mechanisms in place to protect children (Reif, 2009). Children have historically been viewed as objects of concern to others who were responsible for them (e.g., parents, caregivers, the state) rather than as subjects in their own right and with their own rights - and they have not been recognized as autonomous beings separate from their parents. The need for a legal framework that embeds and protects their best interests is

vital. Rights do not only recognize the respect to which their bearers are entitled, but also allow them to exercise agency (Freeman, 2007).

Pairing of children's rights and well-being has appeared with increasing frequency in the discourse of researchers, policy makers, and child advocates in recent years. Laws more frequently promote children's status as autonomous individuals, whose physical and political vulnerability is as important and deserving of societal attention as that of adults (Daly, 2009; Freeman, 2007). Child well-being indicators are rationalised in light of the commitments taken on by nations that have ratified the UNCRC, which was adopted in 1989 by the UN General Assembly. It is the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history; every country of the world has ratified it with the exception of the United States. When a nation ratifies the CRC, it commits to upholding every child's right to provision, protection, and participation – however, in practice some nations may not do so, and there are few mechanisms in place to achieve compliance (UN, 1989). Although all human rights apply to all children at all times, without exception, some face structural disadvantages to realizing their rights because of their 'race', place of birth, disability, or other status. The concept of intersectionality applies to children, as well as adults, but this is rarely acknowledged.

The UNCRC is a legally binding international agreement outlining the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of every child (UN, 1989). Under its standards, governments are required to meet children's basic needs and to acknowledge that every child has basic fundamental rights, which are inalienable and indivisible. These include the right to: life, survival and development; protection from violence, abuse and neglect; an education that enables them to fulfil their potential; be raised by, or have a relationship with, their parents; and express

their opinions and have them heard and considered in decisions that affect them. The UNCRC sets out these rights in 54 articles, and in a set of Optional Protocols.

Although no international body can force countries to honour children's rights, nations that ratify the UNCRC must implement its provisions in their domestic laws, monitor the situation of their child citizens, report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child on their progress every five years, and explain the measures taken by their country to meet and realize children's rights (UNICEF, 2022). The CRC obligates ratifying governments to change laws and policies that are incompatible with its standards and to establish legal mechanisms to hold themselves accountable for violations (UN, 1989). These standards – or Articles - can be classified into three main categories – provision, protection, and participation – the ‘three Ps’ (UN,1989).

Provision, Protection and Participation

The UNCRC offers the highest international norms and standards for the well-being of the child. Its *provision* Articles refer to sharing and distribution. They recognize children's rights to basic necessities that support well-being: health, education, social security, physical care, family life, play, leisure, arts and recreation. States are obligated to comply with these Articles “to the maximum extent of their available resources”, to promote children's healthy development, not only physically, but also emotionally and spiritually. Spiritual development is defined as feelings of compassion, love, connectedness, and hope (Nelson, 2009). Access to and availability of resources is vital to the development and well-being of the child. However, there is tremendous cross-national variation in the organization and distribution of such resources (Quennerstedt, 2010; United Nations,1989).

The *protection* Articles proclaim the right of the child to protection from acts of exploitation or abuse - which threaten their dignity, survival, and development - and recognize their vulnerability in comparison to adults. Ratifying states commit to protecting all children from: maltreatment and neglect; child labour; sexual exploitation; torture and deprivation of liberty; and sale, trafficking and abduction. Although parenting is perceived as a private matter in most nations, the protection Articles seek to protect children in all settings, including their homes, and from the consequences of harmful decisions of all individuals, including parents, other family members and other caregivers. Articles 37 and 19 place responsibility on States to ensure that “no child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment”, and to “take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has care of the child” (UN, 2007:6).

The *participation* Articles recognize the right of the child to be heard and have an effective voice as an individual, to have a say in matters affecting them, and to participate equally in society. Under Article 12(1), “States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child” (UN, 1989). Historically, children and young people have been perceived and treated as passive recipients of policy decisions. Rationales for excluding children from participating in decision making and matters affecting them are consistent across the world. These include beliefs that: parents know what is best for their children; children lack competence, knowledge, and judgment; giving children a voice will result in bad behaviour and disrespect for adults; and

participation may expose children to harm (Quennerstedt, 2010; United Nations, 1989). Although children's participation continues to be difficult to realize in practice, children and young people have demonstrated that their views, experiences, and expressions contribute positively to policy decisions. The UNCRC obligates nations to recognize children as citizens and active contributors to decisions affecting their lives, as well as the wider society.

Children's rights are an important component of any framework for improving the lives of children and young people. However, despite international progress, the CRC is not fully implemented or widely known across all nations, and millions of children around the world suffer violations of their fundamental rights by being denied adequate health care, nutrition, education and protection from violence and exploitation. The three Ps are central to child well-being, and will be examined in this study, with a particular emphasis on *protection* – addressing its prominent and central forms, specifically within the welfare state/ regime literature – which today continues to be largely neglected in research and government.

Social Policy Response and the Welfare State

In 1990, UK Social Policy Professor Jonathon Bradshaw argued that “[i]n any society, the state of children should be of primary concern – their well-being is not only an indication of a society's moral worth, they are human capital, the most important resource for its national future” (Bradshaw, 1990:3). Today, there is a growing literature on what is increasingly commonly referred to as the ‘well-being of children’ across the world (Amerijckx and Claire-Humnlet, 2013; Axford, 2009; Ben-Arieh and Fronès, 2011; Engster and Stensöta, 2011; Jones, LaLiberte, and Piescher, 2015; Pollard and Lee, 2003; Pickett and Wilkinson, 2007; Tisdall, 2015; UNICEF, 2013). Economic development and growth have increased the ability and productivity of resources to be redistributed and invested in education, technology, learning

techniques, as well as measures to reduce child labour, physical, emotional, and sexual violence against children. Improved welfare has resulted in significant progress in enhancing the interests, needs and rights of children. However, although societies' responsibility for the safety and well-being of children has increased, this development is not homogenous, even among developed nations.

In wealthy nations, welfare states have emerged to promote and protect citizens' economic and social well-being (Esping-Andersen and Myles, 2009; Olsen, 2002). The term *welfare* is typically associated with the general security and well-being of a nation's citizens, whereas the *welfare state* refers to the central means by which they are secured. Welfare states are the principal form of welfare provision and social programs in wealthy nations, designed to promote and protect the economic and social well-being of their citizens. As noted by Olsen (2002, 21), "the term welfare state can be misleading because it appears to assume what must be demonstrated: that states actually do promote the welfare of their citizens through their social policies and what they achieve – or at least aim to achieve – greater levels of social and economic equality". However, some interventions, such as laws that criminalize homelessness or those that created the Indian Residential School system, have caused tremendous harm. Welfare states have been typically classified according to two central categories or pillars of social measures: (1) income supports, and (2) social services. The income support pillar includes a range of measures such as unemployment insurance, pensions, family allowances, parental leave programs, social assistance and housing allowances. There are two kinds of income support. Income maintenance programs which replace income that is lost when individuals become unemployed (unemployment insurance), or retire (pensions), or are ill or become disabled (sickness insurance). The second type consists of social assistance, public assistance, social

allowance, or family allowance, which is available for individuals who do not have income, or an adequate income (Olsen, 2002). The social services pillar includes a range of services such as labour market training programs, social housing, childcare, healthcare, elder care and education.

Welfare states' impacts, however, vary considerably cross-nationally, as they are shaped and influenced by the character of each country's policies, practices, and the emphasis they place on each sector, as well as their culture and politics. The degree to which the modern welfare state provides and achieves an adequate level of protection against different contingencies including poverty, unemployment, sickness, old age, and maltreatment, varies significantly among Western nations (Olsen, 2002; Scruggs, 2006). In some countries, certain policies and redistributive measures may do little to promote well-being or may actually undermine well-being and foster greater inequality among individuals, families and classes (Esping-Andersen and Myles 2009). Some wealthy nations, such as the United States, provide a minimal and very basic level of security and social services, while others, such as Sweden and other Nordic nations exhibit a markedly stronger commitment to social equality and redistribution. Cross-national variation in the goals, character, scope and impact of different welfare states has most often been studied through the lens of Esping-Andersen's (1990) welfare regimes framework.

Welfare States and Welfare Regimes

Much research on welfare states has attempted to classify and typify different welfare states into groups or families that have broadly similar social policy approaches. As Esping-Andersen (2009) explains, welfare states are, by definition, redistributive - citizens pay taxes to the state and the state provides services in return – but to markedly different degrees, depending on their character and orientation. Some welfare states provide targeted benefits, largely accessible only

to the poorest citizens, typically through means testing. Such policies are often widely unsupported by citizens who do not receive benefits but contribute to their financing via taxes (Esping-Andersen and Myles, 2009). This can result in ‘tax backlash’ which, in turn, can result in less generous assistance as governments cut back on social programs to appease large segments of their citizens.⁴ In other cases, welfare states provide universal income measures and/or social services such as free education (primary, secondary and, some cases, tertiary). It is evident that the character and generosity of the income and services pillars can vary greatly, creating different types of welfare states. Danish social policy researcher Esping-Andersen developed a now widely employed welfare regime typology arguing that the notable variation in the character of welfare states can be broadly captured in three regimes or models of social welfare: Conservative, Liberal, and Social Democratic.

Liberal Regime Welfare States

The Liberal regime comprises Anglo-American countries, namely Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the Republic of Ireland, the UK - and the US, which is the closest approximation of the ideal type. Liberal nations have residual welfare states, favouring targeted social policies and programs offered to those most in need (Esping-Andersen and Myles, 2009). This assistance is far from generous and often leads to the stigmatization of those living in poverty. Liberal welfare states typically require citizens to purchase social supports in the market, such as child care, health care and post-secondary education, which reinforces existing inequalities and heightens social insecurity (Olsen, 2002). Their impact is seen in the relatively high rates of poverty and income inequality in Liberal regime nations (Scruggs, 2006).

⁴ People who do not receive social assistance but pay it through their taxes. It is typically linked with the idea that poor people are lazy and should not be indulged with tax dollars.

The targeted manner of Liberal welfare states has resulted in high rates of poverty and income equality in those nations, most notably in the US (Scruggs, 2006; Olsen, 2002:2021). It is arguable that this alone fosters a greater development of violence towards children. Moreover, most Liberal regimes have only basic legal protections in place to ensure the well-being of its people, including children (Esping-Andersen, & Myles, 2009; Olsen, 2018; Mahon, Bergqvist & Brennan 2016).

Conservative Regime Welfare States

The Conservative welfare state regime consists of countries that are typically shaped by traditional family values and a strong paternalistic state. This regime is found in continental European nations including Austria, France, and Germany, which is considered closest to the Conservative ‘ideal type’. It also exists, in a modified form, in a number of Mediterranean nations, such as Greece, Italy and Spain. Conservative regimes tend to emphasize social insurance. They typically uphold and reproduce existing income differences and statuses among classes and sectors by offering a wide range of state-mandated separate programs that are available for members of different economic sectors – with higher paid employees receiving more generous payments than lower paid employees (Olsen 2002). Although workplace social insurance programs are compulsory in these nations, access to them is based on the contribution made by the employee and employer, not on citizenship rights. Because these states have historically excluded married women who are not gainfully employed from social insurance, their family benefits encourage single male “breadwinners” and conventional gendering of family roles (Esping-Andersen and Myles, 2009). However, due to high levels of social spending, generous benefits and minimal reliance on the private sector, and an emphasis on the

provision of universal social services, levels of poverty and inequality are much lower in these states than in nations that fall within the Liberal welfare regime (Miles,1998; Olsen, 2002).

Social Democratic Regime Welfare States

The welfare states of the Nordic nations - Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden - are identified by Esping-Andersen as characterizing the Social Democratic welfare regime.³⁵ This form of welfare state emphasizes generous income benefits provided universally, as well as high-quality social services. The ‘generosity’ of income benefits refers not only to the amount of income support they provide, but also to the short waiting periods before benefits commence, and the relatively long period of benefit reciprocity before benefits are ‘cut off’. The vertically redistributive Social Democratic welfare state is associated with much higher levels of equality than the Liberal regime (Esping-Andersen and Myles, 2009; Olsen, 2002). Relatively low poverty rates and high female employment rates are two of many indicators of greater equality in Nordic countries (Mahon, Bergqvist & Brennan, 2016). The impact of welfare state redistribution is especially evident in child poverty rates. The US child poverty rate is approximately 21 percent, whereas countries such as Denmark and Norway have rates of 5 percent or lower (OECD, 2021). Factors contributing to comparatively low child poverty rates in both Norway and Denmark are generous social transfers for families and increasingly high maternal labour force participation (Olsen, 2002; Olsen, 2021).

⁵ Despite some notable neo-liberal reforms emphasizing greater choice, and corresponding increases in some measures of inequality, Sweden is still typically considered the ideal-type social democratic welfare state (Olsen, 1999, 2003).

Critiques of Esping-Andersen's Welfare Regime Typology

It is evident that welfare states can produce very different results, depending on their character and generosity. Although Esping-Andersen's typology helps us examine and understand inequality by comparing different types of welfare state regimes and their respective politics and policies, it has been subject to criticism. Because it focuses primarily on class and production in its explanations of social policy (Williams, 1995), it has been criticized for (1) neglecting to include women and adequately address gender inequality (Borchost, 1994; Lewis, 1992, 1998; O'Connor, 1998; Orloff, 1993; Sainsbury, 1999) and, more recently, (2) failing to include protective legislation in welfare state modeling (Olsen 2019).

The Patriarchal State: Feminist Critiques

Premised on the argument that gender must be an integral part of welfare state analysis, feminists critique 'mainstream' welfare state literature on the basis that it is often gender-blind in its conceptions of class, citizenship, and the economy (Lewis, 1992; Orloff 1993). Until recently, there has been little critical consideration of the 'gendered' nature of welfare state provisions, especially with respect to the gendered division of labour, child care policies, and parental leave (Saxonberg, 2013), which affect gender equality in opportunities and outcomes. The welfare state is simultaneously a source of protection and social control. Not surprisingly, feminist researchers have found that nations such as Canada and the US reinforce patriarchal structures, especially with regard to child care. In contrast, the character of Social Democratic welfare states is considered somewhat more empowering for women in several respects (Olsen, 2002). The official ideology of the Nordic nations is that responsibilities for paid and unpaid work should be shared equally between women and men (Lewis, 1998; Saxonberg, 2013). For example, "the

objective of Swedish gender equality policy is that women and men shall have the same power to shape society and their own lives” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019:2). This is evident in Sweden’s welfare policies aimed at promoting gender equality, starting with separate income taxation for wife and husband (1971), development of public child care (1974), and introduction of a gender-neutral parental leave benefit (1974) (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019).

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, Swedish Social Democratic governments made a conscious effort to bring all adult women into the workforce and to make the two-breadwinner family the norm (Lewis, 1998). As a result, social entitlements for women were transformed from dependent wife to worker (Lewis, 1998). The implementation of separate taxation for partners (or husbands and wives) increased the number of places in public child care and created parental insurance in the form of compensation for loss of market earnings. Implementation of parental leave for both women and men increased women’s participation in the labour market significantly (Lewis, 1998).

Apparent in their increasing economic and political power, women represent a core constituency of the modern welfare state (Bolzendahl and Brooks, 2007). As a result of their increased labour market participation and political representation, women’s capacity for mobilization and collective action has significantly impacted the development of social policy outcomes (Bolzendahl and Brooks, 2007). Feminist literature has re-visioned Esping-Andersen’s typology from the perspective of the support welfare states provide to women and their concerns within broader patriarchal societies (e.g., Borchost, 1994). Feminist attempts to ‘degenderize’ welfare states has resulted in various transformations of the welfare state structure, character and impact. Compared over time and cross-nationally, feminist perspectives have had immense effects on gender relations within the state, market, and family.

The Third Pillar of the Welfare State: Protective Legislation

Esping-Andersen's work on welfare states focused primarily on inter-regime variation in income programs. Later researchers highlighted variation in the availability and quality of social services (e.g. Olsen 1994, 2002; Sipilä, 1998). This research has been significant in distinguishing key differences among welfare states and their impact in Anglo nations (Liberal), Nordic nations (Social Democratic) and the continental European nations (Conservative). Comparative social policy research has tended to focus on income supports (Pillar 1) and social services (Pillar 2). However, a third dimension of social policy with substantial impacts on human well-being has been largely neglected in this field to date – protective legislation (Olsen, 2019). This dimension refers to a “dense web of proactive and preventative laws, rights, and entitlements that safeguard our well-being, including many familiar and less-known measures, such as health and safety legislation, minimum wage laws, child protection acts, and laws governing evictions and foreclosures” (Olsen, 2019: 2). Although all three pillars are crucial to our well-being, *protective legislation*, the third pillar of the welfare state, has been virtually absent from comparative social policy research and welfare state modeling. When protective legislation has been addressed, the primary focus has been on regulation, increasingly punitive laws, and restrictions on benefits. In this form, such legislation can stigmatize and humiliate those it is intended to protect, with minimal means-tested income benefits. However, there is another form of protective legislation that is implemented to provide more security by protecting and promoting our well-being. An example of this form of protective legislation is child protection legislation.

Child protection laws refer to legislation that is in place to protect children from physical and sexual abuse, neglect, discrimination, and exploitation by acknowledging and reinforcing their rights. Proactive and protective forms of legislation are introduced to promote rather than

restrict or undermine child well-being, by ensuring children are fully protected under the law. An example of this form of legislation is the introduction of laws prohibiting all forms of corporal punishment of children in all settings. The first country to implement such a law was Sweden, in 1979. Sweden's law had three main objectives: (1) alter public attitudes toward corporal punishment. (2) increase early identification of children at risk for abuse, and (3) promote earlier and more supportive intervention to families (Durrant, 1999; Durrant and Janson, 2005). The purpose of criminalizing corporal punishment was not to prosecute parents for minor violations, but rather to raise awareness that children have the right to protection of their physical integrity to the same extent that adults do, and to enshrine this right in a legal statute. Not only is physical punishment counterproductive, but it has also been identified as a violation of children's basic human rights to physical integrity and dignity, and a predictor of solely negative health and well-being outcomes (Gershoff and Gorgan-Kaylor, 2016; Heilmann et al., 2021). Child protection laws are important to both the welfare of children and the well-being of society as a whole (Daly, 2019; Freeman, 2007).

Like other aspects of welfare states, protective legislation reflects a society's culture and values, the balance of power in the society, and state structures (Olsen, 2002). Its character within a welfare state is closely linked to and impacted by measures in the income pillar (e.g., family allowances and parental leave programs) and the social services pillar (e.g., childcare, healthcare, housing, and education). However, in welfare state research, specific laws and regulations are often examined alone, as if they were separate from the web of policies that shapes the character of the welfare state as a whole. To date, feminist researchers have been among the few to stress the importance of protective legislation in social policy, specifically by calling attention to laws and regulations related to gendered violence, discrimination and body

rights – although they have not identified it as a distinct policy pillar (O’Connor et al. 1999; Olsen, 2002; Olsen, 2019).

Like the first two pillars of the welfare state, the impact of protective legislation depends upon its character, design and interpretation and the state’s promotion and commitment to upholding it (Olsen, 2002). Due to the relative lack of research in this area, it is not known whether countries traditionally championed for having comprehensive and generous welfare states are more likely to institutionalize truly protective legislation. Although this pillar is significant to the well-being of children and all citizens, very little research to date has focused on identifying it as a central component of the welfare state, and it has been largely absent from Esping-Andersen’s analysis of welfare states. However, arguments have been made that it should be understood as a key component of any nation’s social policies (Olsen, 2002; Olsen, 2018), and it is clearly an important consideration when investigating the well-being of children in society.

The Definition of Child Well-Being Adopted for this Study

As the literature reviewed above suggests, child well-being is a complex multi-level concept (e.g., Amerijckx and Humblet, 2013; Axford, 2009; Ben-Arieh, 2010; Ben-Arieh and Frones, 2011; Engster and Stensöta, 2011; Heshmati, Bajalan, and Tausch, 2007; Jones, LaLiberte, and Piescher, 2015; Land, Lamb, Meadows, and Taylor, 2007; Pickett and Wilson, 2007; Pollard and Lee, 2003; Tisdall, 2015; UNICEF, 2007:2013). The considerable variation among measurement frameworks reflects differences in underlying perceptions of children. Although there is no universally accepted method of measuring child well-being, the literature indicates that there are

two broad approaches to measuring it: (1) as a multi-dimensional construct with multiple indicators; and (2) through self-reported subjective measures.

This study adopts the definition of child well-being as a multidimensional construct incorporating several indicators across domains of life quality including physical, mental, social and economic outcomes. Although all the dimensions/indicators mentioned above are important to child well-being, this study will focus on three dimensions, related to the three pillars of the welfare state: rates and character of child poverty (pillar 1); costs, accessibility and quality of child care (pillar 2) and legal protection from corporal punishment (pillar 3). Each of these dimensions has roots in the internationally agreed-upon standards for children in the UNCRC (UN, 1989). These three dimensions will be examined across three nations: France, New Zealand and Denmark. Each of these nations represents a specific type of welfare state, classified according to the extent to which it mediates provision and resources. This will be further explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Comparative Analysis

According to Swanson (1971), “[t]hinking without comparison is unthinkable. And in the absence of comparison, so is all scientific thought and scientific research” (145). Prior to the 1970s, with a few exceptions, sociological studies were mainly descriptive single case-study accounts focusing on one country or society. This approach, although beneficial to the nation of focus, limits the findings about social inequality to the specific setting, and risks making broad and homogenizing assumptions about cases and patterns across other nations. It was not until the 1970s that a substantial increase and expansion of comparative case analysis across social research was seen. The qualitative comparative analysis technique was promoted by Charles Ragin and many others in the late 1980s. Rather than focusing on one case/nation, this method of analysis allowed researchers to find general patterns across large samples. Ragin (1987) has argued that comparisons are crucial in all empirical social research, and over the last three decades, comparative analysis has continued to develop at a steady pace.

Today, the comparative cross-national approach is widely employed in studies of social inequality, social policy and welfare states. Ragin (1987, 2014) noted that this approach steadily gained traction since the 1970s and 1980s as researchers and scholars juxtaposed a few nations (typically 2- 5 countries) to maintain the insight, depth and complexity of case studies while opening the possibility of discovering broad patterns of similarities and differences.

Comparative analysis goes further than a simple ‘compare and contrast’, which merely identifies similarities and differences. Rather it engages in analytical discussion with the goal of coming to a deeper understanding of a concept, social policy, or our society *as a whole*.

Comparative analysis combines strong points from both qualitative and quantitative methods, with the goal of “meeting the needs to gather in depth insight into different cases and to capture their complexity, whilst at the same time attempting to produce some form of generalization” (Befani, 2013; Rihoux and Lobe, 2009:472). Comparative approaches have been particularly useful to understanding the role of policy in amplifying or mitigating social inequalities. For example, Sweden’s welfare state has been relatively successful in increasing employment and reducing poverty, relative to those of Canada and the US (Olsen, 2011). Such findings can provide social policy ‘lessons’ and lead to the identification of policy structures to decrease inequality. Often, single-nation case studies may lead us to conclude that what we find in the country examined must be true for all. Many feminist studies of the US welfare state in the 1970s and 1980s, for example, incorrectly concluded that welfare states always oppressed women; comparative analysis shows us where and why this may differ over place and time.

The comparative approach can also reduce ethnocentrism – the belief that the values and norms of one’s own culture are more ‘advanced’ than those of other cultures (Olsen 2002; Pakes, 2019). By reducing ethnocentrism, we open ourselves to the diversity of policy approaches, and to recognizing that those found in other countries could benefit our own. Comparative research also enables researchers to “assess, qualify, and rethink popular hypotheses, explanations, and theories about social inequality and generate new ones” (Olsen, 2012:29). It allows us to test hypotheses about the impact of policies on inequality. For example, the belief that poverty is a product of social programs associated with welfare states – a view widely and firmly held in the US -- is challenged when we consider the low poverty rates found in the Nordic countries despite high social welfare spending (Olsen, 2012). Thus, comparative approaches enable us to engage in re-evaluating our current understandings of the social world.

Why Contrast France, New Zealand, and Denmark?

Comparative studies of welfare states and inequality often focus on Germany, the US and Sweden – the closest approximations of the Conservative, Liberal and Social Democratic regime idea types (Kesler, 2015; Olsen, 2002; Pierson, 1996; Zimmer and Toepler, 1996). Relatively few comparative studies have juxtaposed nations that deviate – in often notable ways – from these ‘best representatives’ of the three regimes.⁴ Although rarely examined together, the three nations juxtaposed in this study – France (Conservative), New Zealand (Liberal), and Denmark (Social Democratic) – provide some interesting and unexpected insights on child well-being, an area that remains under-researched from a comparative, cross-national perspective. The next section will briefly summarize the aspects of these nations that make them particularly interesting points of contrast.

France

Conservative welfare regimes, by their nature, serve to reproduce and uphold existing social hierarchies. Thus, their spending on benefits is relatively high but it is targeted at specific economic sectors in a manner that can sustain certain forms of inequality. Their income support measures are typically provided to employees via workplace and status-related public insurance programs with higher benefits for higher-paid workers. Historically, women have often received benefits to work in the home. France is typically placed within the Conservative welfare regime, but it challenges that classification in several respects. As expected, France is among the top social spenders on families, with expenditures equating to 3.7 percent of the GDP in 2007, as

⁴ Other studies focus on intra-regime comparisons, highlighting variations among the Anglo or Nordic nations (Fritzell et al., 2005; Myles, 1998; Orloff, 1996; O’Connor et al., 1999; Raphael, 2014).

compared to the OECD average of 2.2 percent (OECD n.d.). But its policies have often combined measures encouraging women's employment with other measures that encourage large families (Pailhé, Rossier and Toulemon 2008). Since family policy is dominant in France, the French social security system has integrated generous family benefits into the wage system to compensate parents for the costs of raising children (Fagnani, 2007; Lewis, 1998; Martin, 2010).

Since the 1990s, France has implemented several benefits and programs to increase gender equality by encouraging a 'working mother' model. These policies were focused on reconciling work and family and were designed to encourage mothers' "free choice" in continuing or interrupting their paid employment (Martin, 2010; Revillard, 2006; Toulemon, Palihe, and Rossier, 2008). While 90 percent of women aged 15 years and older are in the labour force, 60 percent of women with children under 3 years of age are employed (World Bank, 2019; OECD, 2019). The idea was that women should not be penalized, whatever their choice, and that public policies should help women have their desired number of children. France offers women incentives to have children through funded child care, longer maternity leaves, high income replacement levels, and other benefits that are dependent on the number of children they bear or adopt (Fagnani, 2002).

Spending on young children (birth to five years) has remained stable in France, representing one-third of all per capita spending on all children. The share of national wealth invested in child care is 1.12 percent of GDP, higher than the OECD average of 0.96 percent (Thevenon, Adema and Ali, 2014). Large social transfers for families and high female employment rates are associated with a positive impact on overall child well-being (Engster and Stensota, 2010; Fagnani, 2002; Olsen, 2002; 2021). Such policies and measures are more commonly found in Social Democratic nations. France's deviation from the Conservative

approach and movement toward nations like Sweden, in at least some respects related to child well-being, are noteworthy and merit further exploration.

New Zealand

Liberal regimes utilize a targeted and means-tested approach that aims to provide services and programs to the least well-off. Due to lack of broad electoral support, targeted redistribution is typically meagre (ungenerous) and stigmatizing (Esping-Andersen and Myles, 2009). Although some public social insurance programs are central (e.g. unemployment insurance, pensions), Liberal welfare states place far greater emphasis on the private market than their Social Democratic or Conservative counterparts, reinforcing inequalities and social insecurity. New Zealand is another interesting and, in some respects, surprising case because, unlike the US, Canada and the UK, it has banned corporal punishment in all settings (Global Initiative to End Corporal Punishment, 2020).⁵ Patterns of corporal punishment legislation appear to correspond with what we might expect based on the ‘welfare regime’ typology. Sweden and other Nordic countries were among the first to pass such laws, whereas most other Liberal regime countries (Canada, the US, the United Kingdom, and Australia) have not yet done so. Exploring the unexpected prohibition of corporal punishment in New Zealand will offer insight into measures that independently promote the welfare of children, and the socio-economic, socio-cultural, and socio-political context of the society that contributes to their welfare state modeling and emphasis on different policies and measures.

⁵The Other Liberal nation that has banned corporal punishment is the Republic of Ireland. Scotland and Wales have also done so, but the United Kingdom (ruled by Westminster) has not.

Denmark

Through the vertical redistribution of resources and other measures, Social-Democratic regime nations have fostered greater levels of equality. This is evident in their relatively low poverty rates, generous social transfers for families, and increasingly high parental labour force participation (Esping-Andersen and Myles, 2009). For decades, Sweden has led by example across all three pillars of the welfare state and has been a model for addressing poverty and creating a more egalitarian society. Consequently, it is typically highlighted in cross-national comparisons as the best representation of a Social Democratic regime (e.g., Esping-Andersen, 1990; Olsen, 2002). However, with changes to its social programs over the past two decades, Sweden has fallen back in some areas (Olsen, 2013).

Denmark, however, remains a strong representative of the Social Democratic regime. In 2017, Denmark had one of the lowest poverty rates out of all OECD countries, at 5.8 percent, whereas Sweden's rate was 9.3 percent. Denmark's employment rate is 72.8 percent, the 7th highest globally and well above the OECD average (OECD, 2020). Approximately 30.8 percent of the country's GDP is spent on social welfare, the second highest proportion globally (OECD, 2020). Denmark's impressive performance in reducing poverty and increasing employment rates makes it an important case to investigate as a representative of the Social Democratic welfare regime type.

Data Sources and Measures of Child Well-Being

Poverty is conceptualized, measured, and defined in various ways across nations. Generally, 'poverty' refers to low income and the struggle to meet basic needs. The two common measures are absolute poverty and relative poverty. I will examine poverty rates and character of poverty

across the three nations (France, New Zealand, and Denmark) using relative measures. This is based on costs of necessities in relation to others in your society, most commonly if your income level is 50 percent or less than the average median income in your society (Olsen, 2011).

Relative child poverty rates will be compared across the three nations using the most recent data available in each nation, drawn from data gathered systematically by the Luxembourg Income Study (LIS) Cross-National Data Center and the OECD.

Measures of childcare access across the three nations will be: fees paid by parents, funds allocated to childcare by the state, and accessibility and quality of child care. Data sources will include the OECD Family Database, government sources, and additional secondary accounts. The indicator of protective legislation, prohibition of corporal punishment, will be measured by examining literature on the character of corporal punishment bans and related child protection legislation from government and secondary accounts in each of the three nations. Because corporal punishment bans do not necessarily eliminate physical punishment, I will examine efforts taken by each nation to reduce it through education and other policies using sources such as End Corporal Punishment and government documents.

Chapter 4

CHILD POVERTY IN FRANCE, NEW ZEALAND, AND DENMARK

Introduction

In recent decades, the world has made remarkable advances in reducing poverty rates across the globe. However, despite this progress, approximately 736 million people today live in extreme poverty, defined as an income of less than \$1.90 a day. Children are disproportionately affected, and while they make up one third of the world population, they represent half of those facing poverty (UN, 2022). According to UNICEF (2022), approximately 1 billion children are multi-dimensionally poor, lacking basic necessities such as nutrition and clean water. Childhood is a critical period of social and physical development, and the consequences for children in poverty are grave. Worldwide, impoverishment affects children's living conditions, health, educational outcomes, and their integration into the labour market later in life (Brooks-Gun and Duncan, 1997; Yoshikawa, Aber and Beardslee, 2012). Although poverty is often associated with developing nations, it is intrinsically linked to welfare and affects children even in the wealthiest industrialized nations. Recent research shows that material inequality has grown virtually everywhere and the gap between the poor and the rich has become much wider (e.g., Atkinson, 2015; Bernsetin, 2017; Brown, 2017; Carroll and Sapinski, 2018; Collins, 2018; Huber and Stephens, 2014; Osberg, 2018; Philips, 2018; Stiglitz, 2013; Wolff, 2017), however, some welfare states do better at distributing wealth and resources with the aim of reducing the gap and fighting poverty. This chapter will focus on child poverty as an inherent and defining feature of society, while exploring the cross-national variation in its character, extent, intensity, and acceleration among three developed welfare states – France, New Zealand, and Denmark.

What is Poverty?

Despite economic growth, and the ongoing struggle to address poverty, approximately 9% of the world's population – or one out of every ten people on the planet - continues to live below the international poverty line, making poverty one of the most salient problems that the world faces today. But what is poverty? While many understand poverty as primarily a lack of income, it entails much more than that. Poverty is intimately linked with many social problems, including hunger and malnutrition, limited or no access to education and health care, social discrimination and exclusion, marginalization, and job security (Duncan, 1998; Olsen, 2011). Struggling to fulfil the most basic human needs further limits one's opportunity to improve their livelihood and participate in the wider community, as well as their general welfare.

According to the WHO (2022: para 4), people facing poverty “are exposed to greater personal and environmental health risks, are less well-nourished, have less information and are less able to access health care; thus, they have a risk of illness and disability”. While poverty is a global phenomenon affecting people worldwide, it is not equally distributed. Some populations are more vulnerable than others. Structural discrimination and systems of oppressions such as colonization and racism contribute to poverty and disproportionately affect people living in poverty, even in the most developed nations. Among the populations that are most disproportionately vulnerable and affected by poverty are children.

Children in Poverty

Poverty is a global phenomenon affecting people at all point along the life course; however, it can be most threatening to children and, arguably, the elderly. According to recent UN data, nearly 356 million children around the world survive on less than US\$1.90 per day (UN, 2022).

Research finds that children are disproportionately sensitive to their environment, and thus poverty is especially harmful to their health and to their social, emotional, and cognitive development. This harm is most pronounced in the prenatal stages and first five years of life, and it provides an unstable foundation that increases the likelihood of life-long health challenges, delayed cognitive development and behavioural problems (Gupta et al., 2007; Hertzman, 2010; Pagani, 2007; Olsen, 2021).

Virtually all aspects of family life are affected by deprivation and poverty, as the daily strain of unemployment, inadequate income and threat of homelessness is associated with higher stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms (Engle and Black, 2008; Evans, 2004; Gupta et al., 2007). The burden and strain of poverty makes life unpredictable and chaotic for families, commonly resulting in family distress and causing severe strains on parent-child relationship. Children's vulnerability was recently underscored by the UN General Assembly: "Children living in poverty are deprived of nutrition, water and sanitation facilities, access to basic health-care services, shelter, education, participation and protection", and "while a severe lack of goods and services hurts every human being, it is most threatening and harmful to children, leaving them unable to enjoy their rights, to reach their full potential and to participate as full members of the society" (2007: 11). While fighting child poverty is not new, it has received new attention as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by UN Member states in 2015, declared the objective of ending poverty as its number one goal (UN, 2015). This global mandate is an explicit commitment for member states to act and respond appropriately to child poverty.

While child poverty is more prevalent in developing nations and those involved in conflict/war, it is also widely present in the world's wealthiest nations, with poverty rates varying from under 3 percent to over 25 percent (OECD, 2021). Approximately, one in every

seven children across OECD nations lives in ‘relative’ poverty – most commonly defined as living on income that is less than half of the median household income of the total population (OECD, 2018). Despite worldwide economical advances and efforts aimed at reducing child poverty, child poverty rates have increased across a number of OECD nations. UNICEF’s Innocenti Report Card on *Child Poverty in Rich Nations* describes the persistence of child poverty in rich countries as “undermining both equality of opportunity and commonality of values. It therefore confronts the industrialized world with a test both of its ideals and of its capacity to resolve many of its most intractable social problems” (2000:1). Effectively combating child poverty is essential to improving child well-being. Cross-national research is important for understanding the variation of child poverty rates among similar standing nations. Like well-being, however, poverty is a multidimensional concept with no agreed-upon definition or measure, making it challenging to compare and analyze.

Measuring Poverty

Poverty is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, without a simple and consistent definition. Its multidimensional nature often restricts cross-national comparison, as its indicators are not always standardized. Consequently, the focus is generally restricted to financial well-being of individuals and families. Although measuring both consumption expenditure and income would result in a better understanding of monetary well-being, most industrialized nations rely primarily on income as a comparative indicator due to the reliability of records.⁶ Olsen (2021) argues that, despite its limitations, income can be a useful poverty indicator in advanced market/capitalist nations because most of what people need to access must be purchased.

⁶ Consumption expenditure refers to spending by households on goods and services (Arnold, 2008).

However, in some nations, certain services and income supports to purchase necessities are provided by the state. Moreover, the notion of what is a necessary can vary cross-nationally. One way to address these issues is to examine poverty in both ‘absolute’ and ‘relative’ terms.

Absolute Poverty

A nation’s poverty line is “the minimum expenditure required by an individual to fulfill his or her basic food and non-food needs” (Haughton and Khandker, 2009: 41). Individuals living below this line are unable to meet basic needs such as food, water, shelter, education, and healthcare. These individuals are considered to be living in ‘absolute poverty’.

A nation’s poverty line is based upon people’s ‘objective’ needs, and thus is considered fixed and independent of economic growth and social and political context (Olsen, 2021). However, there is a certain level of subjectivity in decisions made regarding the amount, quantity, or quality of what is considered essential or basic. In constructing the minimum income required for an absolute poverty measure, one must first establish which goods and services are essential to survival, as well as the quantity and quality required for subsistence in a particular economic, social, and political context.

National poverty lines are used to measure and track poverty trends in a specific country comparing households based on a set income, consistent with the country’s economic and living standards. While this is important to the nation in question, due to cost variability and purchasing power, national poverty lines cannot be used for comparison across countries. The World Bank and UN have set the global poverty line at \$1.90 a day (World Bank, 2022; UN, 2022). This is a worldwide standard, independent of region. While it may appear low to many across Western nations, this threshold considers regions with extreme poverty. This rate, however, is often

contested due to real world/cross-national variability, and the increasing global distribution of people living below poverty lines that may be significantly higher than the international poverty line. However, a global threshold is valuable as it draws attention to the reality of extreme poverty people face across the world, with children accounting for more than half of them (Roser, 2021).

Several issues and problems have been identified with the use of absolute measures of poverty. First, they provide a very narrow view of poverty as they are based on only the most basic amenities and typically very little of each. Additionally, it fails to include items such as transportation, books, toys, and vacations – that many consider necessities. It also falsely suggests that we can ‘objectively’ determine the cost of necessities for all individuals and families, whose situations vary widely. For these reasons, among others, most poverty researchers prefer to use more inclusive definitions and measures that keep pace with changing patterns of consumption.⁷ An alternative way of identifying individuals with limited resources who may be considered poor based on the surrounding societal standards is through relative poverty definitions and measures.

Relative Poverty

Peter Townsend, a major theorist, and poverty researcher, contributed tremendously to the understanding of poverty, most specifically by emphasizing the strengths of conceptualizing, defining, and measuring poverty in relative rather than absolute terms (Townsend, 1962).

Townsend critiqued absolute poverty measures, arguing that poverty was not so much about lack

⁷ Absolute poverty definitions and measures are still useful; they can provide some indication of the severity of poverty in a nation. However, most nations use rigorous ‘depth of poverty’ measure to address extreme poverty (Olsen, 2021).

or shortage of income, but rather the inability of people on low income to actively and fully engage in society (Townsend, 1979). Townsend equates poverty with ‘relative deprivation’, more specifically ‘conditions of deprivation relative to others’ in the society. Relative poverty is conceptualized in relation to members of a specific society and their standard of living, considering needs above the basic amenities deemed crucial for survival. Individuals are defined as relatively poor if their economic and social circumstances are below those of average members of their society, resulting in exclusion from an ordinary standard of living, activities, and customs enjoyed by most other members of the society in which they live.

Relative poverty is the most widely used poverty measure among developed nations.⁸ The relative poverty threshold is relative to the members of a particular society at a particular time. It is commonly measured using individual or household income that falls below a certain percentage, most typically 50 percent or less of the country’s median or mean national income (Jolliffe and Prydz, 2021; OECD, 2021). Decisions related to the average income level, the percentage cut-off, or what is included as income vary across countries. For example, the OECD uses a 50 percent cut-off point, but within the European Union (EU) people falling below 60 percent of median income are considered to be at risk of relative poverty (Burkhauser, 2009; Olsen, 2011). The most commonly used cut-off is 50 percent or less of average (median) income.

Relative poverty is an important measure for estimating the scope of poverty and identifying those left behind who may not be considered poor under absolute poverty guidelines, but whose limited resources compared to others in their society result in both material deprivation and social exclusion. Additionally, this measure of poverty is essential in unveiling

⁸ Perhaps not surprisingly, narrow absolute definitions and measures of poverty are more popular in Liberal regime nations – especially the US, where it is the official poverty measure.

income inequality across nations. While there is no fixed or standardized measure of poverty, international institutions such as the OECD, the LIS Cross-National Data Center (LIS), and Eurostat (statistical office of the EU) provide data that allow for comparative analysis of poverty, inequality, and well-being over time, using a ‘harmonized’ measure (Olsen, 2021).⁹

The next section will provide an overview of the key dimensions and character of child poverty in France, New Zealand, and Denmark using available data from OECD and LIS. The emphasis will be placed on each nation’s welfare state and cross-national variability in their social policy approaches to targeting child poverty and inequality.

Child Poverty in France, New Zealand, and Denmark

Despite broadly similar levels of national wealth and income, there are striking differences in levels of poverty and inequality across France, New Zealand, and Denmark. While various explanations have been proposed for child poverty variation across countries of similar levels of development, research has primarily focused on three broad areas: the labour market, family structure, and the character/nature of welfare institutions (Bradbury and Jantti, 1999). Using Esping-Andersen’s welfare regime model, we would expect Denmark to be among the best in keeping children out of poverty, whereas France and New Zealand would be expected to offer less support across the pillars of the central policy domains. Keeping Esping-Andersen’s typology in mind, the following section will compare the three nations with respect to their child poverty rates and the degree to which they are committed to reducing social inequality among children.

⁹ Agencies that provide poverty data for many nations do everything possible to make the poverty rates they provide as similar to one another as possible. While in some cases it may be impossible to completely ‘standardize’ data and take everything into consideration, the term ‘harmonized’ is commonly used. This approach is widely employed and considered valid and valuable by virtually all poverty research institutes.

France: The Conservative State

In welfare and policy research, the French welfare system has been classified as a Conservative regime (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Palier and Martin, 2007). Nations within the Conservative regime provide relatively generous benefits based upon principles of insurance contributions and earnings related, with an emphasis of upholding familial tradition and maintaining existing social patterns (Andersen and Myles, 2009; Bambra, 2007). Although these nations emphasize social insurance, rather than social assistance or universal measures, because of their relatively high social spending and social transfers we can expect lower levels of income inequality and poverty, in comparison to Liberal welfare states. Germany is the definitive Conservative regime member, closest to the 'ideal type'. France is not as close an approximation of the ideal type, so we might expect some deviation in terms of child poverty.

It is estimated that on average across OECD countries, one in seven children are currently living in relative income poverty (OECD, 2021). In many of these countries, children are facing higher risk of falling into poverty than the general population. According to the most recent OECD data available for France, in 2019 the total population relative poverty rate was 8.4 percent, whereas the relative child poverty rate (0–17-year-olds) was 11.8 percent, which is slightly lower than the OECD average of 12.9 percent (OECD Income Distribution Database, 2022).

In France, one-third of impoverished children live in single-family households. As of 2018, approximately 22.5 percent of children (0-17) in France were living with a single parent (OECD Income Distribution Database, 2022). By definition, children with lone parents are more vulnerable to poverty because there is only one potential earner and, therefore, a greater chance of lacking financial resources compared to two-parent families. This is especially true for

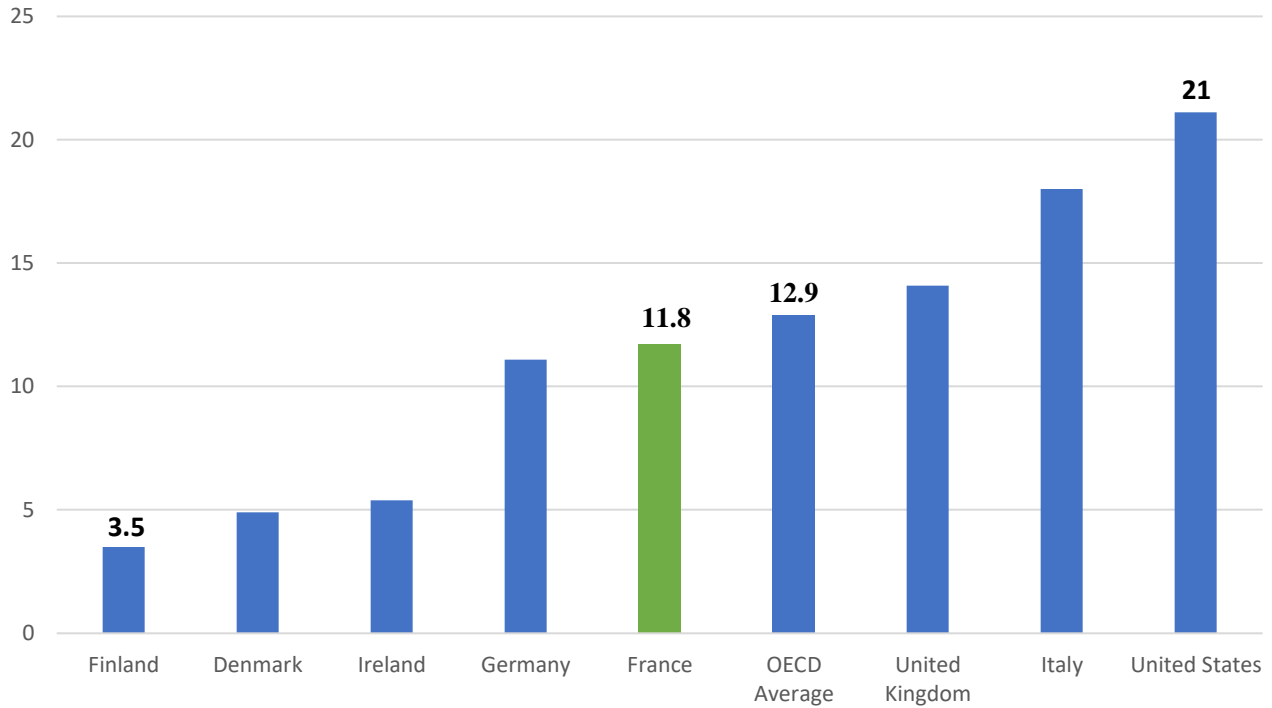
families made up of single women and children (Bradbury and Jantti, 1999; Haughton and Khandker, 2009; UNICEF, 2007).

Other poverty indicators show that 13.2 percent of children in France are deprived of basic clothing, and 9.9 percent of children lack basic nutrition. Additionally, as of 2018, 12.1 percent of children were living in households where all adults were unemployed (OECD Income Distribution Database, 2022). Nevertheless, due to extensive social services and health care, France remains one of the countries with the lowest child mortality rate. Over the last two decades, France has reduced its child mortality rate by more than half, from 9 percent in 1990 to 3.8 percent in 2020 (OECD, 2022).

The French child relative poverty rate may be considered somewhat low when compared to nations such as the US with its staggering child relative poverty rate of 21 percent, or fellow Conservative nations such as Italy where 18 percent of children are living in relative poverty. However, France's rate of 11.7 percent is alarming when compared to nations such as Finland and Denmark, where the child poverty rate is only around 3.5-4 percent (OECD Income Distribution Database, 2022) (see Figure 4.1).

Despite efforts in tackling and reducing poverty, child poverty is on the rise in many OECD countries, including France. According to data from the LIS Cross National Data Centre, France saw relative child poverty rates rise by over two percentage points during the first two decades of the 21st century (see Table 4.1), despite its declared political agenda to alleviate child poverty through a comprehensive system of social and child benefits.

Figure 4.1: Child Relative Income Poverty rate, 2019 or latest available year



Note: Data are based on equivalized household disposable income, i.e. income after taxes and transfers adjusted for household size. The poverty threshold is set at 50% of median disposable income in each country.

Source: OECD (2022) *Income Distribution Database*
(Accessed on May 16, 2022)

Table 4.1 Relative Poverty Rates (%) of Total Population and Children (0-17 years) in France, Selected Years

	<i>France</i>		
	<i>2000</i>	<i>2011</i>	<i>2018</i>
Total population (individuals)	8.2	9.1	9.2
Children	9.7	11.3	12.1

Source: LIS Cross-National Data Centre
(Accessed on May 16, 2022)

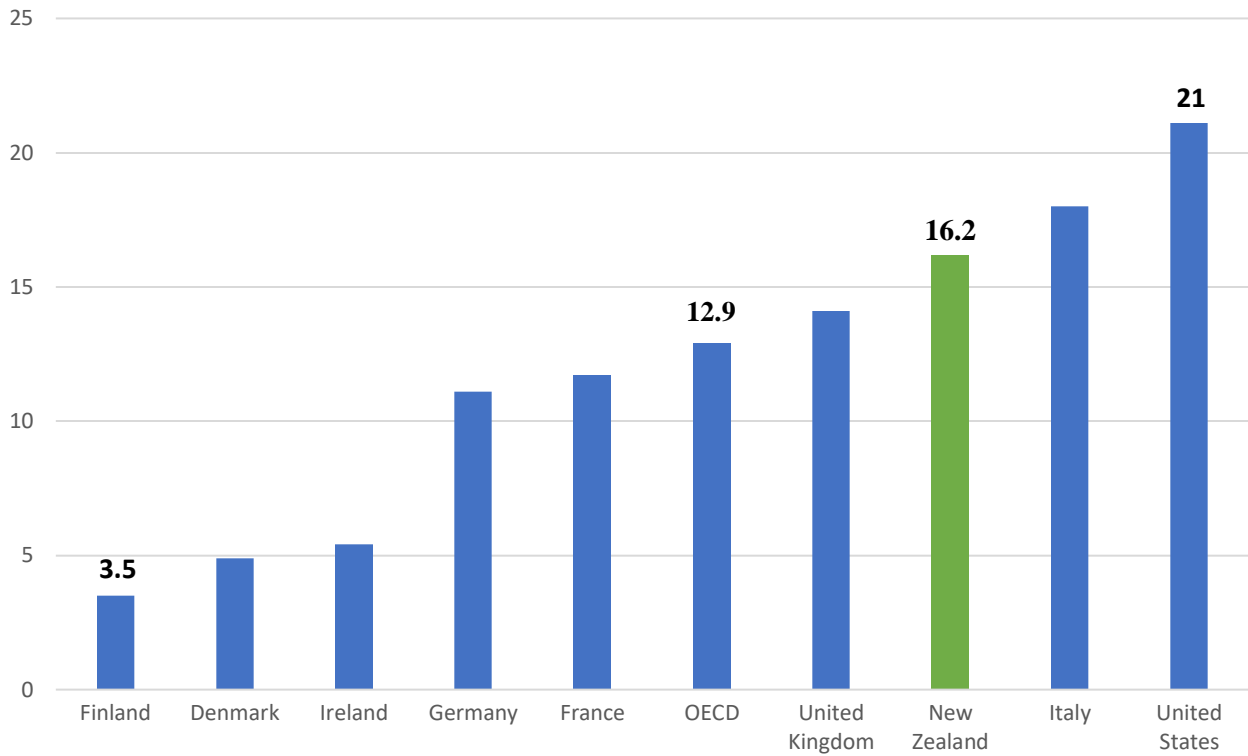
New Zealand: The Liberal State

Within welfare and social policy research, New Zealand represents the Liberal regime. These regimes offer basic social safety nets and are characterized by means- tested assistance targeting the poorest individuals. The far-from- generous assistance they provide typically requires citizens to purchase social supports in the market, reinforcing existing inequalities and heightening social insecurity. This impact is evident in the relatively high rates of poverty and income inequality found in these nations.

While the total poverty rate in New Zealand is close to that of France, there are some noteworthy differences in child poverty rates and trends across the two countries. According to the most recent OECD data available, the total relative poverty rate is 10.9 percent, slightly lower than the OECD average of 11.7 percent. However, in 2018 the child relative poverty rate (0-17 years old) was 16.2 percent, higher than the OECD average of 12.9 percent (see Figure 4.2). There is an unequal distribution of poverty in New Zealand, with Pacific Peoples and Māori experiencing higher levels of poverty than other cultural groups. This is especially true for children, with poverty rates of 19.8 percent for Māori children, and just over 20 percent for children of Pacific Peoples (Stats NZ, 2021).

Like other OECD countries, beginning in the 1980s New Zealand pursued neo-liberal policies, resulting in significant economic reconstruction. The path towards free market reforms resulted in prosperity for some, and poverty for others. In 1984, the national poverty rate was 9 percent. Over just two decades it reached 22 percent (Deeming, 2013; Peters and Beasley, 2014). While the current overall child poverty rate represents a striking decrease from the peak, it remains high, especially among children and children of vulnerable groups.

Figure 4.2: Child relative poverty rate, 2019 or latest available



Note: Data are based on equivalized household disposable income, i.e. income after taxes and transfers adjusted for household size. The poverty threshold is set at 50% of median disposable income in each country.

Source: OECD (2022) *Income Distribution Database*
(Accessed on May 16, 2022)

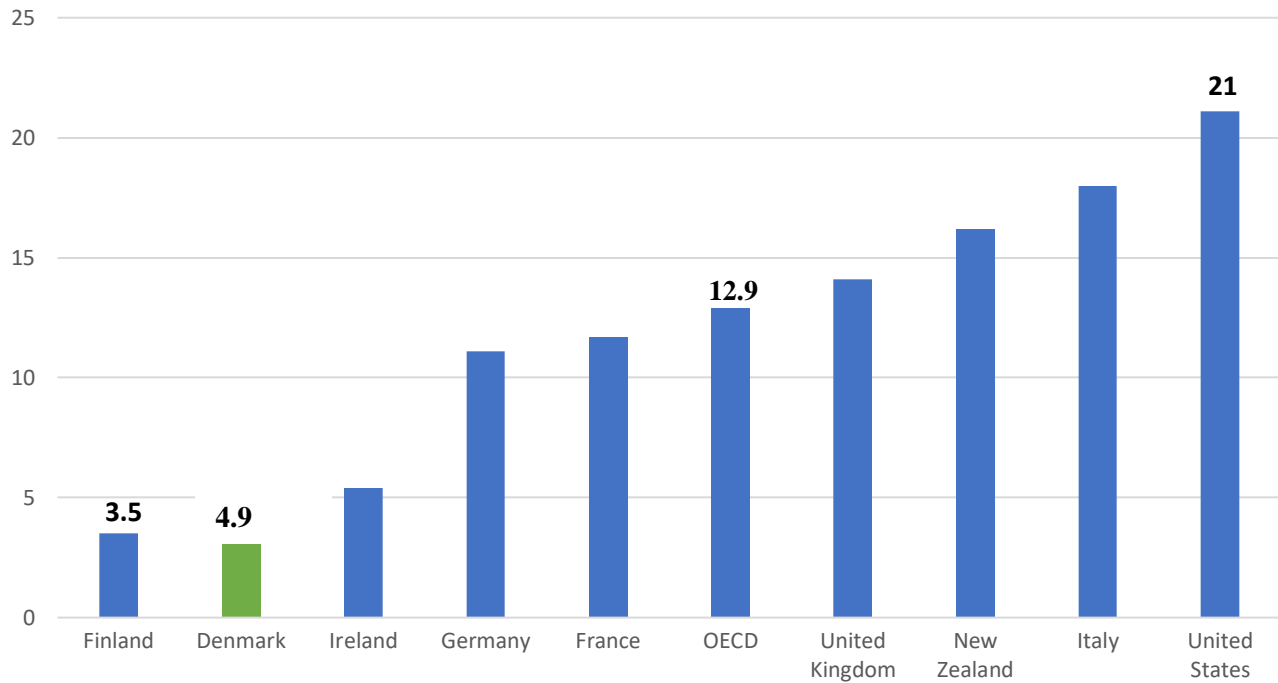
Denmark: The Social Democratic State

Social Democratic regimes - which comprise the Nordic nations (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden), offer generous universal benefits and social services (Andersen and Myles, 2009). Through vertical redistribution, Social Democratic regimes result in greater levels of equality.¹⁰ In addition, those living in poverty in these welfare regimes have access to a range of publicly provided services, at little or no charge. This is evident in low poverty rates, generous social transfers for families, and increasingly high parental labour force participation (Olsen, 2002). Alongside its neighbouring countries, Denmark is internationally renowned for its highly developed welfare state, low levels of inequality, and its continuous success in maintaining one of the world's lowest poverty rates.

According to the latest data available, the total relative poverty rate for Denmark is 6.4 percent, whereas the child relative poverty rate is 4.9 percent, making it the second lowest among OECD nations after Finland with its record low child relative poverty rate of 3.5 percent (OECD 2022) (See Figure 4.3). Denmark is one of the few OECD countries where children are less likely to live in relative poverty than the general population. Child poverty is overrepresented among children of single parents, children of unemployed parents, and children of immigrant and other ethnic groups. Although children of single parents are more likely to live in poverty, Denmark has the smallest gap in poverty rates between single adult or two or more adult households with children (OECD Family Database, 2021).

¹⁰ Vertical redistribution refers to fiscal policy or progressive taxation, and income supports, through which welfare states redistribute income from the top toward the bottom.

Figure 4.3: Child Relative Income Poverty rate, 2019 or latest available year



Note: Data are based on equivalized household disposable income, i.e. income after taxes and transfers adjusted for household size. The poverty threshold is set at 50% of median disposable income in each country.

Source: OECD (2022) *Income Distribution Database*
(Accessed on May 16, 2022)

Despite Denmark's reputation for its comprehensive welfare programs, child relative poverty rose in the country from 2.7 percent in 2000 to 4.9 percent in 2018 (see Table 4.2). One factor that contributed to this increase was to the introduction of new government benefit caps, which affected many children and families, especially newly arrived refugees and immigrants, as well as other vulnerable groups. The intention behind the policy was to motivate and incentivise recipients to find employment. While reducing social benefits for immigrants and refugees only resulted in a small increase in employment rates among these groups, the poverty rate increased among this already vulnerable population (Andersen, Dustmann, and Landerso, 2019; Save the Children, 2021). Despite small fluctuations over the years, Denmark continues to be a world leader in reducing child poverty, reaching levels considerably lower than those found in the rest of the industrialized world, with the exception of Finland.

Understanding Cross-National Contrasts: Social Protection and Redistribution

While global progress has been made in reducing poverty overall, its prevalence varies substantially across the world's wealthiest nations. As Table 4.3 indicates, this variation is especially great when child poverty is examined, with rates varying from 3 percent to more than 20 percent. The relative child poverty rate in France is over two times as high as that in Denmark, while the child poverty rate in New Zealand is over three times Denmark's. While this pattern is consistent with what we would expect from the regimes represented by the three nations, this variation is best understood through a closer look at the *character* of each nation's welfare state, and the steps they take to distribute wealth and resources to reduce poverty and promote child well-being.

Table 4.2 Relative Poverty Rates (%) of Total Population and Children in Denmark, Selected Years

	<i>Denmark</i>		
	<i>2000</i>	<i>2010</i>	<i>2018</i>
Total population (individuals)	5.4	6.3	6.1
Children	2.7	4.4	4.9

Source: LIS Cross-National Data Centre
(Accessed on May 16, 2022)

Table 4.3 Impact of Welfare States on Poverty Rates (%) in Eight Nations in 2019 (poverty = under 50% of median income)

Nation	Social Expenditure Rate (% of GDP)	Total Poverty Rate <i>after</i> Taxes and Transfers	Child Poverty Rate <i>after</i> Taxes and Transfers
France	31	8.4	11.7
Denmark	28.3	6.4	4.9
New Zealand	19.4	10.9	16.2
OECD Average	20	11.6	12.9
Finland	29.1	6.5	3.5
Germany	25.9	9.8	11.1
Sweden	25.5	9.3	9.4
Canada	18	11.6	11.4
United States	18.7	18	21

Source: OECD (2022) *Social Expenditure Database and Income Distribution Database* (Accessed on: May 16, 2022)

Spending as a percentage of GDP has been the most widely used measure of nations' efforts to directly redistribute income. Poverty research has established a strong empirical relationship between the overall level of spending and measures of inequality, including relative poverty (Atkinson, Rainwater and Smeeding 1995; Ferrarini and Nelson 2003; Immervoll and Richardson, 2013; Kraus 2004; Nolan and Marx 2009; Olsen 2002, 2021; Pestieau 2006). The OECD defines public social spending as "social spending with financial flows controlled by General Government (different levels of government and social security funds), as social insurance and social assistance payments" (OECD, 2022). Notable in Table 4.3 is that countries with a relatively high social expenditure rate tend to have lower relative total and child poverty rates, with no country achieving low levels of poverty with low social spending. Marx, Nolan, and Olivera (2014:19) argue that "while in theory low or moderate levels of social spending could produce low poverty rates if resources were well-targeted, the reality remains that almost no advanced economy achieves a low (relative) poverty rate, or a high level of redistribution, with a low level of social spending".

France is a unique example of a country that is achieving limited poverty reduction, despite high social spending. France's social expenditures, including health, housing, and employment support, came to 31 percent of GDP, more than any other country in Europe – yet its child relative poverty rate is still more than double that of countries with similarly high social spending (e.g, Denmark and Finland). Part of this may be due to the redistributive impact of taxes and transfers in France. Although France is spending a large amount of its GDP on social expenditures, access to various programs and assistance is not a citizenship right but, rather, dependent on payment of social security contributions related to earnings. As of 2015, approximately 20 percent of the poorest population in France were receiving only about 16

percent of spending on benefits (OECD Economic Survey, 2021). This fits with Esping-Andersen's Conservative welfare type which emphasizes social insurance, while upholding and reproducing income differences and statuses among classes, therefore limiting poverty reduction. Despite this, France's high level of spending and minimal reliance on the private sector results in lower poverty rates than most nations within the Liberal welfare regime. This is especially evident in the more recent steps taken by France with the aim of reducing inequality and child poverty.

While many developed countries provide a wide range of supports for families with newborns and young children, some do more to help parents cope with the social and economic changes that come with childbirth and parenting. Since family policy is dominant in France, the government has taken various measures to support the combination of work and family responsibilities, allowing men and women to equally participate in the labour market. Some of its family friendly policies include parental leave, childcare, out of school hours care, and flexible working hours. Additionally, alongside few other OECD countries, France has put forward the *First 1000 Days Approach* aimed at assisting families with young children. These initiatives share features such as “measures to combat family poverty and help parents reconcile work and family commitments, support for good maternal and paternal physical and mental health, enhancing parents' awareness of good nutrition practices, improving the quality of parent-child interactions and reducing family stress” (OECD, 2021b: 8).

In 2018, French President Macron said, “our welfare model, even if it corrects a little, even if it allows some to live better, does not do enough to prevent people from falling into poverty, does not do enough to eradicate poverty” (Lough, 2018). He gave this speech on the day that he unveiled an anti-poverty plan worth eight billion euros over four years, with a focus on

improving the life chances of children born into low-income families. Part of this plan includes free breakfast for the most impoverished students, as well as subsidized lunches priced at one euro (Ludovic, 2018). Additionally, the plan is to extend free health care to millions of people who were previously excluded and redefine compulsory school or vocational training to include children until the age of 18, up from 16 (Lough, 2018; Ludovic, 2018). To address inequality and increase support for low-income families, in the last decade the French government also introduced schemes combining minimum income programs with active in work benefits such as *Revenue de solidarité active* (Coady, Matsumoto, and Shang, 2021; Mongin, 2008). Such measures are commonly associated with Social Democratic welfare states, indicating that France has deviated from its ideal welfare regime type. Although child relative poverty remains near the OECD average in France, the current policies, combined with high social spending are promising steps for reducing it.

Compared to France, New Zealand has a lower GDP spending of 19.4 percent - slightly under the OECD average of 20 percent (see Table 4.3). While low GDP spending would predict the high child poverty rates in New Zealand, so do the targeted manner of their social policies and assistance. Child poverty rates in New Zealand rose sharply in 1990s, during a time when welfare payments were cut by more than 20 percent and user pay policies were introduced (Boston, 2014; OECD, 2022b). Over a period of two decades, New Zealand's income inequality increased more than that of any other OECD country (OECD, 2008). While changes resulting from neoliberalism led to growing poverty overall, the biggest impact was on children, especially those in families reliant on financial assistance (O'Brien, 2008; O'Brien and Salonen, 2011). Following reduction of welfare support and benefits, the percentage of children in poverty in

‘beneficiary’ families in New Zealand increased from 25 to 75 percent (Asher and St John, 2016). This is an important policy lesson regarding neo-liberalism, retrenchment, and cutbacks.

Child poverty rates in New Zealand have remained relatively high over the last two decades. In addressing the issue, governments and leaders have argued that ‘paid work is the way out of poverty’ and have designed their welfare reforms based on this approach. However, data indicate that a working parent was not necessarily a way out of poverty, as in 2012 and 2015 nearly 40 percent of children in poverty lived in families where at least one adult was working full time (Asher and St John, 2016; Boston, 2013).

One of the distinguishing characteristics of Liberal welfare regimes is the prevalence of social assistance. Social assistance refers to ‘the general category of direct cash transfers and social services that use some form of means or income test to determine eligibility’ (Olsen, 2002: 73). Abolishing the universal payment for children, known as *Family Benefit* in 1991, New Zealand moved towards targeted form of assistance, now known as the *Family Tax Credit*, part of the *Working for Families* assistance package (Perry, 2013). This assistance to families with children is based on adults’ work participation and income, with those who meet the ‘work test’ and job seeking obligations qualifying for higher levels of financial assistance (Asher and St. John, 2016; O’Brien and Salonen, 2011; Perry, 2013). The logic behind this approach was to enhance labour participation rates through work- related financial assistance, especially targeting lone parents. However, it has been argued that this approach is not only discriminatory and unjust to families of different levels of labour participation but is also a contributor to the persistent high child poverty rates in ‘workless’ households (Asher and St John, 2016; Boston, 2013; Perry 2013; St John and Dale, 2012).

Commenting on the matter, Jonathon Boston, academic and co-chair of the Expert Advisory Group (EAG) on child poverty, aptly noted that “New Zealand has chosen to tolerate significant child deprivation. We could choose otherwise” (Peters and Besley, 2014: 955). The EAG has called for universal child allowances; however, current policies continue to have targeted elements. Following the EAG’s recommendation, in 2018, the New Zealand government introduced the Child Poverty Reduction Act with the goal of achieving a significant and sustained reduction in child poverty. Using data from the Household Economic Survey, the Act itself sets out a multi-level approach with intermediate (three year) and long term (ten year) provisions that

- a) Encourage a focus by government and society on child poverty reduction:
- b) Facilitate political accountability against published targets:
- c) Require transparent reporting on levels of child poverty (New Zealand Government, 2018).

While New Zealand is taking steps towards child poverty reduction and enhancing political accountability for policy outcomes, the current design of family allowance/assistance continues to be problematic. It is evident that New Zealand must increase the level of assistance to families who have little or no income, and ideally – based on what has worked in other nations – through non-means-tested approaches, including universal child benefits. International comparisons show that countries with the lowest rates of child poverty rely on and emphasize generous benefits provided universally, as is the case in Denmark (Boston, 2014; Hvinden and Johansson, 2007; Mkandawire, 2005; Olsen, 2002: 2021; St John, 2013).

The Nordic countries have long traditions of high social spending, low-income inequality, and high equality with respect to material, educational, and overall well-being

(Hakovirta, 2010; Olsen, 2002; Povlsen, Regber, Fosse, Eklund and Gunnarsdottir, 2018). As of 2019, Denmark spent 28.3 percent of its GDP on public social spending, just below France and Finland, and well above the OECD average (see Table 4.3). Denmark's social safety net is based on the guiding principles of solidarity, universalism, and redistribution of resources. Equal access to public services, universal health care, childcare, universal old age pensions, and generous tuition support are some key institutional features of the Danish welfare state that contribute to its low levels of poverty.

Over the last 50 years, Denmark has increasingly invested in family friendly policies including public childcare, flexible parental leave and working hours, family allowances, and other measures with the goal of promoting gender equality and reducing gender gaps in employment (Abrahamson, 2010). While OECD countries spend on average 2.34 percent of their GDP on family benefits, Denmark's public spending on family benefits is currently at 3.4 percent, closely behind France's rate of 3.6 percent (OECD, 2021). The efforts made to support families, especially through comprehensive publicly supported early childhood education and care systems, have played a pivotal role in women's employment rates, with mothers more likely to be in full time jobs than elsewhere in the world (Kuhnle and Hort, 2004; Pedersen and Kuhnle, 2017; OECD, 2018).

Additional to universal programs and services, the Danish government also provides various forms of family allowances designed to support families with children under the age of 18. This includes the child and youth benefit, which is a universal allowance, and the child maintenance benefit available to parents in need and/or in special situations (European Commission, 2022). Denmark is also well known for having one of the best parental leave policies in the world. Since 2002, its flexible parental leave legislation inclusive of maternity,

paternity, parental, and childcare leave, allows for a leave period of up to 52 weeks, of which 32 weeks can be shared between parents (Abrahamson, 2010; Blocksgaard and Rostgaard, 2014; Ismiris, 2018). The generous benefits and flexible parental leave reduce the gender wage gap within the household, and contribute to the overall household financial well-being, thus reducing the likelihood of poverty. The comprehensive, redistributive and universalist nature of the tax/benefit system and family policies that enable citizens to accommodate work and family life, are key components of the Danish welfare state that are contributing to the relative low child poverty rate.

Concluding Remarks

By comparing relative child poverty rates across three industrialized nations, it is evident that some do notably better in providing extensive social supports that protect children from poverty. This examination of the three countries' welfare states and social policy responses to child poverty, reveals marked differences that matter. While Esping-Andersen's welfare regime typology was not designed with children at the forefront, it is useful for examining and describing child poverty variation among three different welfare state types. When it comes to aspects of child poverty and social policy measures taken to protect children from this contingency, Denmark remains a strong representative of the Social Democratic welfare regime, surpassing once world leader Sweden. Indeed, many researchers would argue that the provision of a network of high quality, universal social services exemplified by Denmark represents the most distinctive component of the Social Democratic welfare states. However, France and New Zealand show some variation from their ideal welfare regime type.

Although child poverty rates in New Zealand remain high, the total poverty rates have declined in the last two decades. In 2004, total poverty rates reached a rate of 22 percent, whereas today the rate is below the OECD average at 10.9 percent and lower than other Liberal regime nations, including Canada and the US. New Zealand is a unique example because it once had a very developed welfare state, more in line with the Social Democratic Nordic nations. However, the reduction of welfare support and benefit cuts and the shift towards privatization and targeted assistance came at a great cost, especially for children. The current policies in place, including the Child Poverty Reduction Act is an example of New Zealand introducing more progressive policies in recent years, and perhaps a shift toward its previous welfare state.

Chapter 5

CHILD CARE IN FRANCE, NEW ZEALAND, AND DENMARK

Introduction

Child care is a key component of the social services pillar (pillar two) of the welfare state, and quality care is essential for the well-being and healthy development of children. However, globally nearly 350 million children below primary school age need child care but do not have access to it (World Bank, 2021). Universal quality child care has mutigenerational impacts, including increasing women's labour force participation and promoting greater gender equality, increasing family income and economic growth, and enhancing children's well-being (Barigozzi, Cremer and Roeder, 2018; Bradley and Vandell, 2007; Burchinal et al, 2000; Cornelissen, et al, 2018; Friendly and Prentice, 2016; Haeck, Libihan and Meerigan, 2018; Prentice, 2009). While numerous studies have demonstrated the benefit and importance of quality child care, the extent and level of spending on early childhood education and care continues to vary significantly across nations and welfare states, even among most industrialized nations.

This chapter examines and contrasts child care policies and services in France, New Zealand, and Denmark. I will examine costs to parents (fees), state investment (percentage of GDP allotted to early childhood education and care), accessibility (number of facilities per child population) and quality (child to worker ratio) using the most recent data available. An examination of these key areas will allow for a better understanding of (1) the extent to which these nations are promoting child well-being through child care policies, and (2) whether such policies fit within the character of their designated welfare state regime.

Why Child Care Matters

Over the last few decades, countries around the world have taken an increased interest in the matter of public responsibility for child care and the development of services. This interest is in part the result of changing family dynamics and growing research indicating that accessible and affordable quality child care has tremendous benefits for the child, family, and society as a whole (e.g., Armstrong, 2020; Baker, Grubber, and Milligan, 2015; Cornelissen, et al., 2018; Devercelli and Beaton-Day, 2020; Jenson and Sineau, 2001; Prentice, 2009). The call for high-quality, affordable, and accessible child care has drawn on a range of rationales, including that of a “gender equity measure; targeted assistance for immigrant and working class/single mothers; a poverty reduction strategy; a strategy for balancing work and families; a social investment for creating future effective workers; a tool for child development during critical years; and an economic stimulus strategy” (Langford, Prentice, Richardson, and Albanese, 2016:1).

Child Development Outcomes

The early years are a crucial period for development - with children’s brains developing faster during the first five years than any other time in life (Hertzman, 2010; Pagani, 2007; Gupta et al., 2007; Stiles and Jernigan, 2010; Shuey and Kankaras, 2018). During this period the brain has extraordinary capacity for learning, making this a critical period for quality intervention, and building foundational skills for later success. High quality early childhood education and care provides a wide range of benefits for children, including supporting social and emotional learning, improved cognitive and language development, communicative skills, and school readiness (Armstrong, 2020; Burchinal et al., 2000; Jenkins et al., 2015). Quality childhood and care have been proven especially beneficial for children from diverse and disadvantaged

families, with better education outcomes and improved employment prospects and earning (Devercelli and Beaton-Bay, 2020; OECD, 2017).

More recently, there has been growing evidence that quality child care setting can have a positive impact on nutritional outcomes (Bernal et al. 2009; Rahman et al. 2012) Additionally, child care centres can play a role in keeping children safe and connecting them with critical services, such as “screening for development and health services, including immunizations, growth monitoring and promotion, and others” (Devercelli and Beaton-Bat, 2020:16).

Gender Equality

Over the last few decades, many nations have introduced a range of child care policies to reconcile family and work. But in several developed countries, child care remains the responsibility of parents and is primarily provided by the private market. In contrast, other nations have taken measures to make it easier for parents to continue working by offering public childcare and benefits aimed at reducing its costs for families (Fagnani and Math, 2008). The welfare state is simultaneously a source of protection and social control, with some nations’ policies reinforcing patriarchal structures, while others empower women and promote gender equality. This is especially true in the case of child care policies.

Countries vary in the extent to which gender equality has been prioritized as a significant issue in policy development and implementation (Kjeldstad, 2001). As previously noted, welfare state research has been critiqued for being gender-blind in its conceptions of class, citizenship, and the economy (Orloff, 1993). Though women were excluded from the original welfare state typology (1990), Esping-Andersen considered some of the feminist critiques and began bringing

attention to the distribution of welfare within the family, more specifically linking family, economy, and the state (Esping-Andersen, 1999, 2009).

Arguably, the early debates around child care provision were a response to rising commitments to gender equality (Ostner and Lewis, 1995). In 1992, the EU Council Recommendation on Child Care stated:

Whereas inadequate provision on child care services at affordable to parents and other initiatives to reconcile responsibility for the family and upbringing of children with their employment, or with the education or training of parents in order to obtain employment constitutes a major barrier to women's access to and more effective participation in the labour market, on equal terms with men. It is recommended that Member States should take and/or progressively encourage initiatives to enable women and men to reconcile their occupational, family and upbringing responsibilities arising from the care of children (Official Journal #L 123)

However, although women's labour force participation has increased substantially over the last few decades, gender inequalities in the labour market remain substantial. With women carrying the greater burden for care in households, the lack of childcare continues to disproportionately affect women's employment and is often identified as the biggest barrier to their work opportunities (Hein and Cassirer, 2010; Diaz and Rodriques-Chumssy 2013; Barigozzi, Cremer, and Roeder, 2018; Revenga and Dooley, 2020). According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), approximately 606 million women of working age are unavailable for employment or not seeking work due to care responsibilities, compared to only 41 million men (2018).

Poverty and Economic Growth

'Early years' policies play an important role in fighting poverty, while also promoting social and economic development. Several landmark longitudinal studies have found that investing in early

childhood education and children yields high economic benefits, with every \$1 investment generating far more in return (Alexander et al., 2017; Cleveland and Krashinsky, 1998; Galinsky, 2006; Heckman, 2006; Prentice, 2009; Schweinhart, 2005). Providing an affordable, safe, and healthy place for children allows women to work, contributing to closing gender gaps in economic participation. Studies have estimated that universally accessible child care would result in substantial global value, increasing women's income by 76 percent, with an approximate global value of US\$17 trillion (ActionAid, 2015; Woetzel et al., 2015). Expanding child care services to meet current needs would also result in creating approximately 43 new million jobs globally, many of them for women (Devercelli and Beaton-Bay, 2020). Building human capital and increasing equity by scaling up access to quality child care has the potential to lift families out of poverty, as for many parents a lack of affordable and accessible child care means a continuing cycle of poverty.

The purpose of accessible quality child care policies is to “ensure that families have meaningful choices available to keep children safe and well cared for and that parents can engage in productive employment” (Devercelli and Beaton-Day: 18). However, child care policies vary significantly among developed nations, with some furthering inequalities, while others promote child and family well-being. The section that follows presents key findings related to child care policies in France, New Zealand, and Denmark through the measures of proportional expenditure, costs to parents, accessibility, and quality.

Proportional Expenditure

According to the OECD, public expenditure on early childhood education and care covers “all public spending (in cash or in-kind) towards formal day-care services (e.g. crèches, day care

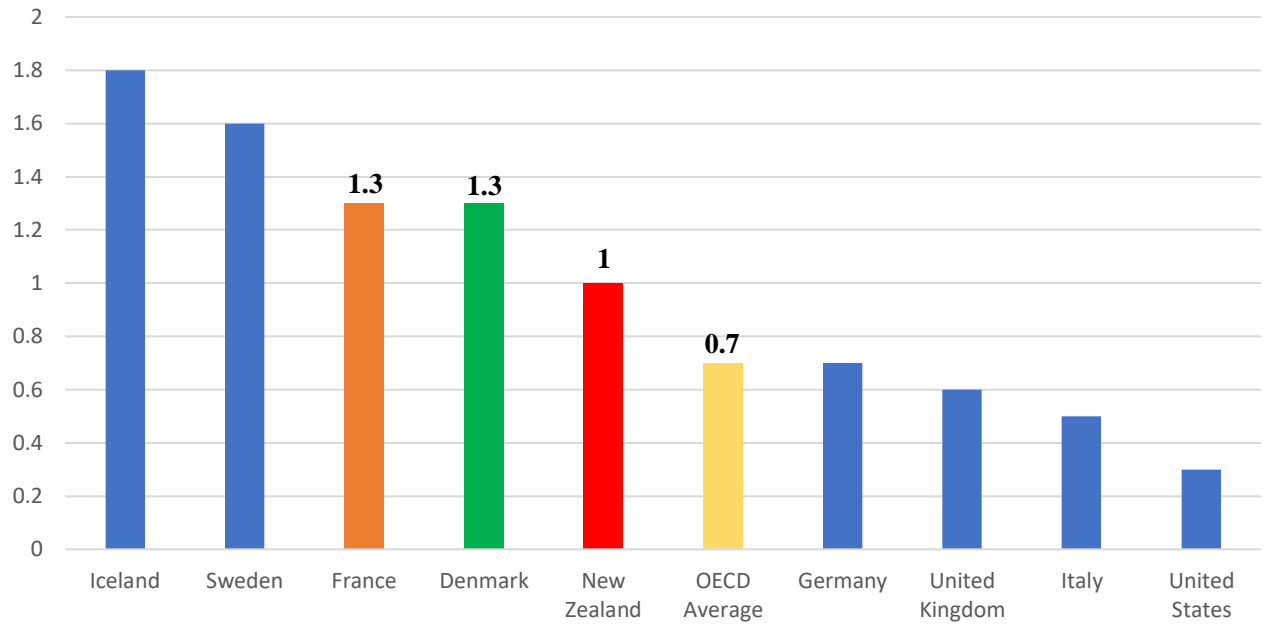
centres, and family day care, generally aimed at children 0 to 2, inclusive) and pre-primary education services (including kindergartens and day-care centres, which usually provide educational content as well as care for children aged 3 to 6 years, inclusive) (OECD, 2021:1). For the purpose of this study, public expenditure will be measured by public spending on early childhood education and care: 1) as a percent of GDP, and 2) per child.

On average, OECD nations spend approximately 0.7 percent of their GDP on early childhood education and care (OECD, 2021). However, spending varies across countries, ranging from 1.8 percent in Iceland to less than 0.5 percent in Italy and the US. Public spending on early childhood education and care in France, Denmark and New Zealand is above the OECD average, with France and Denmark spending 1.3 percent and New Zealand spending one percent of GDP (see Figure 5.1). Of their total expenditures on early child care and education, France and Denmark spend similar amounts on child care (0.6 percent) as they do on pre-primary education (0.7 percent). In contrast, New Zealand spends substantially more on pre-primary education (0.9 percent) compared to child care (0.1 percent) (OECD Social Expenditure Database).

The average total public spending on early childhood education and care per child under six across OECD countries is approximately USD PPP 5,200.¹¹ There is considerable variation across countries, with Nordic nations spending more than USD PPP 11,000, with per-child spending highest at approximately USD PPP 13,000-14,000 in Iceland and Norway. In contrast, the UK and US are ranked among the lowest spenders ranging from USD PPP 2,600 to 3,600 – approximately three times less than most Nordic nations (see Figure 5.2).

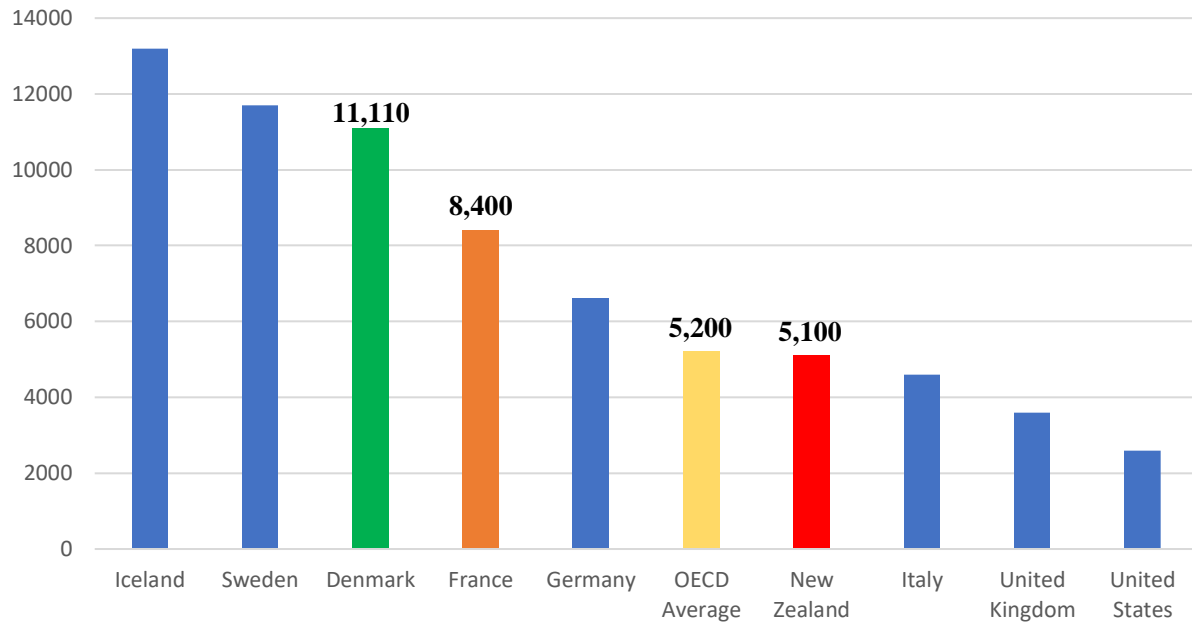
¹¹ Purchasing power parities are the rates of currency conversion that try to equalise the purchasing power of different currencies, by eliminating the differences in price levels between countries (OECD, 2022).

Figure 5.1: Public spending on early childhood education and care, as a % of GDP, 2017 or latest year available



Source: OECD Social Expenditure Database
(Accessed on June 10, 2022) from <http://www.oecd.org/social/expenditure.htm>

Figure 5.2: Total public spending on early childhood education and care per child aged 0-5 years, in USD PPP, 2017 and latest data available



Source: OECD Social Expenditure Database
(Accessed on June 10, 2022) from <http://www.oecd.org/social/expenditure.htm>

Among this study's three target nations, Denmark is the leader, spending USD PPP 11,100, followed by France at USD PPP 8,400 and New Zealand at USD PPP 5,100, just below the OECD average (see Figure 5.2). Over the past three decades, Denmark has consistently spent more per child than France and New Zealand, however the latter nations are recognized as world leaders in daycare services, with abundant provision for preschool aged children. This is the result of their comprehensive and generous child care policies aimed at reducing the burden on families and encouraging women's labour force participation. The lower spending per child in New Zealand and other nations within the Liberal regime is typically a result of the predominantly private provision of child care, with parents and families carrying the financial burden.

Parental Costs

Developed welfare states provide financial support to parents needing childcare through various means. Some nations (e.g., Sweden, Norway, Denmark) offer free child care to all, while others cover anywhere from small to a significant portion of the cost of care. Other nations, especially those whose welfare states are categorized as belonging to the Liberal regime, only provide support to those most in need by reducing the cost of child care for families in particular circumstances (e.g., single parent or low-income families). Additionally, countries may also provide a wide range of cash benefits, rebates, and tax reductions to help reduce the burden of child care costs on parents.

In France, school becomes compulsory when children turn six, but most children enter preschool at the age of three. Prior to compulsory schooling, there are two systems of publicly funded services for children – child care consisting of *crèche* (centre-based care) and *assistant*

maternelles (family day care); and *ecole maternelle* (pre-school) (OECD, 2016). Preschools in France are free, widely utilized, have standardized curricula, and are operated by the Ministry of Education (OECD, 2015). Costs of for children under the age of three depend on factors including the type of nursery, parental income, number of dependent children in the family, and the municipality. Roughly, a family considered to be low income may pay as little as €50/month, while the highest earning families pay up to a maximum of €1,000/month (Dimitrijevic, 2022; Centre of European and International Liaisons for Social Security (CLEISS), 2022). The net cost of child care (for two children aged two and three in full-time care) for a two-earner family equates to approximately 10 percent of average earnings, equivalent to the OECD average (OECD, 2022). Parents of children under the age of six benefit from a 50 percent tax credit on amounts paid, but this is capped at €1,150 per year (approx. \$1,500) (CLEISS, 2022).

In Denmark, the compulsory school age for children is seven years. Systems of publicly funded services for children are full time (32 hours) *dagpleje* (family day care) and *vuggestuer* (centre-based care) up to the age of three; *bornehaver* (kindergarten) from age three to seven; and *aldersintegreret* (age-integrated facility) (OECD, 2016). The net cost of child care (for two children aged 2 and 3 in full time care) for a two-earner family equates to approximately nine percent of average earnings, slightly lower than costs in France and the OECD average (OECD, 2022). In Denmark, families pay up to a maximum of 25 percent of the cost for children below school age, with single parents in low-income families receiving a subsidy covering 75 to 100 percent of the cost (European Commission, 2022). The rates vary across municipalities but, on average, the monthly rates for children under the age of three vary between DKK 2,800 and DKK 3,500 per child (approximately \$490 to \$620) (International Staff Mobility, 2017). The

monthly cost for children over the age of three are roughly DKK 2,000 per child (approximately \$350).

In contrast to France and Denmark, early provision of childcare in New Zealand is accessed predominantly through the private market, in line with a Liberal regime approach. For children under the age of three, parents are responsible for securing formal or informal care for their children. The per-hour cost ranges from \$4 to \$10 NZD, averaging approximately \$320 NZD a week or \$15,536 NZD for a 48-week year (Office of Early Childhood Education, 2022). The net cost of child care (for two children aged two and three in full time care) for a two-earner family equates to 27 percent of average earnings, which is three times higher than the OECD average - the highest in the developed world (OECD, 2022). While some public subsidy is available, it targets low-income and disadvantaged families in particular circumstances, with specific earnings criteria that must be met for eligibility. Subsidy rates and the total amount parents can receive are dependent on their income and number of dependent children. Parents who are not working, studying, or training are eligible for only up to nine hours of subsidized childcare a week.

As of 2008, children aged three to five can receive up to 20 hours of early childhood education, funded by the Ministry of Education. This subsidy is paid directly to the early learning centre or *kōhanga reo*, for up to six hours a day, for a total of 20 hours a week, regardless of families' employment or socio-economic status (Ministry of Education NZ, 2022). While this assistance is beneficial to families, it also presents a few challenges. This public assistance is only part time, and not inclusive of children under the age of three. Parents are required to find an early centre that participates in the government's '20 Hours ECE', and parents are responsible for paying additional fees presented by the child care centres, including

additional weekly fees as part of their minimum enrollment hours policies (Gallagher, 2016). When it comes to child care costs and affordability, Denmark's and France's policies are far more generous than that of New Zealand for children under the age of three. However, for better understanding we must also consider access to, and the quality of the care offered in each country.

Enrolment in Childcare

One of targets set out in the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) mandates “that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education” (UN, 2022: SDG 4.2). To date, most rich nations provide some free access to childcare (UNICEF, 2021). While a small number of nations provide free access to child care for children under the age of three, in the majority of nations, free access does not begin until pre-school, and may be for limited hours, as is the case in New Zealand. Affordable and accessible quality child care results in higher enrolment rates. For example, enrolment in early childhood and care services for children under three years in France is 60 percent, followed by Denmark at 58 percent, and New Zealand at 45 percent (OECD, 2021). On average, children in France and Denmark spend over 32 hours a week in childcare, just above the OECD average of 30 hours per week. In New Zealand, the average is 20 hours per week. For children aged 3 to 5 years, the enrolment rates are 100 percent in France and Denmark, and 90 percent in New Zealand (OECD, 2021).

Quality

According to UNICEF (2021) “childcare should provide affection, protection, stimulation, and nutrition and enable children to develop social, emotional and cognitive skills. These goals can be achieved through high-quality childcare both within and outside the family” (9). High quality learning and care promotes children’s physical, social, and emotional well-being. While there is no single definition of ‘quality’ in child care, in this study it was measured in terms of child-to-caregiver/teacher ratio and caregivers’ qualifications.

Child to Caregiver/Teacher Ratio

While child to caregiver/teacher ratio is not the only quality determining element, research generally shows that lower ratios are associated with better developmental outcomes (Fiene, 2002; Mathers, Sylva, Hansen, Plewis, Johnson, & George, 2007; Bennet, 2008). The average child-to-caregiver/teacher ratio for pre-primary education (age three and above) across the OECD is 14.3:1, France has among the highest ratios for pre-primary education across the OECD, at 20:1. New Zealand and Denmark have among the lowest ratios for this category, at respectively 5:1 to 6:1. For early childhood services (aged zero-to-two), the OECD average is 7:1 (OECD, 2020). For this age group, all three countries have ratios that fall below the OECD average: 5:1 in France, 4:1 in New Zealand, and 4:1 in Denmark (OECD, 2020).

Caregiver/Teacher Qualifications

Only one third of OECD nations with data available require staff working with children under three to have a diploma. In contrast, more than three quarters of countries including New Zealand and Denmark, require a minimum of a bachelor’s diploma for staff working with

children in pre-school, (OECD, 2020). France is one of four OECD nations that requires pre-school teachers to carry a master's diploma. As well, France requires that approximately 75 percent of key staff in crèches and child care services have appropriate education and a diploma (UNICEF, 2021). Denmark requires a three-and-a-half-year specific study programme for child and youth educators, for which training fees are free for all students, as with all other education programmes at higher institutions (Ministry of Social Affairs, 2000; Karila, 2012). Though childcare and early education is highly privatized in New Zealand, the Ministry of Education does have set rules and licensing criteria for those operating ECE services, as well as the power to influence employment and staffing practices (Ministry of Education NZ, 2022).

Concluding Remarks

The significant rise in maternal employment has resulted in more young children than ever in formalised child care. In France, Denmark, and New Zealand, child care policies are embedded in each nation's larger welfare regime. Denmark again fits the profile of the Social Democratic type with its generous and comprehensive policies. New Zealand fits the profile of the Liberal type, with its minimal, targeted, and means tested policies aimed at assisting families most in need. France, however, does not fit the Conservative regime when it comes to family and child policy. France's current generous child care policies are more commonly found in Social Democratic welfare states, thus, presenting a deviation from the Conservative approach. Arguably, the comprehensive, accessible, and affordable child care policies in France may be only the beginning of a shift away from Bismarckian or social insurance system of welfare provision to a more Beveridgean 'universalism' approach. Analyzing child care policies across welfare regimes demonstrates that although focusing on children does not dramatically change

the ordering of nations within their welfare regimes, some nations are less securely placed, in this case France, when children are brought to the forefront.

Early childhood is the most crucial period for child development. It is during this time that children reach developmental milestones, and the first five years impact long term social, cognitive, emotional, and physical development. The high spending on early childhood education, and provision of quality child care in France and Denmark demonstrated commitment to children, families, and their overall well-being. Allowing parents to balance work and family, while providing them with the support and resources they need, gives children the best chance for a happy and healthy childhood.

Chapter 6

PROTECTIVE LEGISLATION: CORPORAL PUNISHMENT BANS

Introduction

The belief that everyone's well-being, including that of children, is a collective responsibility has led to various forms of government intervention. According to Durrant and Olsen (1997:451), governments are "charged with protecting children's interests and implementing policies that foster their development". Years of research on violence against children have found that the most prevalent form of violence inflicted on children is corporal punishment. The legal prohibition of corporal punishment has been gaining ground over recent decades based on child rights standards, as well as the social science hypothesis that doing so can reduce violence against children, shift public attitudes, and promote awareness of children's rights. This chapter focuses on corporal punishment bans as a form of protective legislation - the third pillar of the welfare state - that addresses child well-being, with a focus on France, New Zealand, and Denmark.

Protective Legislation

Welfare states have the ability to shape the experiences and well-being of citizens across a variety of social policy domains. Although there has been extensive research on the first and second pillars of welfare states (income supports and social services) protective legislation has received relatively little attention in the social policy literature and, apart from research by feminist researchers – is rarely acknowledged as a component of welfare states (e.g., Lewis 1992; O'Connor et al. 1999; Olsen, 2002; Olsen, 2018; Sainsbury 1993). Historically, welfare

states have often denied women social rights, excluded them from various benefits or coverage and/or treated them as second-class citizens, especially in nations such as the US (O'Connor et al. 1999; Olsen, 2002). Feminist research has thus stressed the importance of developing social welfare models that are not gender blind, highlighting legislation and regulations addressing issues such as gendered violence and discrimination and the patriarchal character of welfare states.

Although the protective legislation pillar is significant to the well-being of citizens, very little research has focused on identifying it as a central component of welfare states. Esping Andersen's work on welfare states and the welfare regime typology focuses primarily on inter-regime variation in income programs and social services. This research has been significant in distinguishing key differences between Conservative, Liberal and Social Democratic nations and their welfare characteristics across a number of social policy domains. However, protective legislation has been largely absent from Esping-Andersen's analysis of welfare states. Olsen (2002, 2018) has argued that it is the 'third pillar' of the welfare state and is important to understand as a key component of any nation's social policies (Olsen, 2002; Olsen, 2018).

Nations' welfare states provide safety and security in a variety of ways, emphasizing different types of measures and programs. Like other pillars of the welfare state, the impact of protective legislation depends on its interpretation and the state's commitment to upholding it (Olsen, 2002). Whether countries traditionally heralded for having comprehensive and generous welfare states are more likely to institutionalize protective legislation is an unanswered question.

Corporal Punishment

Corporal punishment is defined as “any punishment in which physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort, however light” (UN, 2008:19). The goals of the caregiver administering physical punishment are often to immediately stop a child’s behaviour and deter it in the future, control the child, assert authority, or gain retribution. While adults often believe that it will teach a “valuable lesson,” several decades of research have found that it consistently predicts negative outcomes for children. A recent meta-analysis examined data from 160,927 children, yielding 111 unique effect sizes (Gershoff and Grogan-Kaylor, 2016). Of the effect sizes that were statistically significant, 99 percent indicated a relationship between “spanking” and negative outcomes such as child aggression, externalizing behaviour problems, low moral internalization, low self-esteem, and violence against partners and children later in life (Gershoff and Grogan-Kaylor 2016). Corporal punishment has also been found to damage the parent-child bond as a result of the hurt, anger and fear it generates (Milne, 2015). “Spanking” – a popular euphemism for corporal punishment and violence against children – has recently been identified as an Adverse Childhood Experience, due to its association with suicide attempts and misuse of alcohol and street drugs (Afifi, Fleisher and Sareen, 2009).

Not only is physical punishment counterproductive, but it has also been identified as a violation of children’s basic human rights to physical integrity and dignity. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2008: 10) acknowledges “the right of the child to protection from corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment”. Articles 37 and 19 of the UNCRC place responsibility on States to ensure that “no child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment”, while also requiring that States must “take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to

protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment, or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has care of the child” (UN, 2007: 6). Therefore, the CRC explicitly calls for legislation to protect children from corporal punishment. Using Esping-Andersen’s model, I predict that Denmark will be a leader in protective legislation with regard to corporal punishment of children, followed by France and, finally New Zealand.

The Legal Status of Corporal Punishment in Denmark, France, and New Zealand

Underscoring the destructive impact of corporal punishment on children, the UN Secretary-General’s Study on Violence against Children recommended full prohibition of all forms of corporal punishment of children, in all settings, and in all states around the world (Pinheiro, 2006). But more than a quarter of a century earlier, on July 1 of 1979, Sweden became the first country in the world to fully prohibit all corporal punishment of children, with the support of 98 percent of parliamentarians (Durrant,1999). The law, in the Civil Code, enacted in the *Parenthood and Guardianship Code*, states: “Children are entitled to care, security and good upbringing. They shall be treated with respect for their person and their distinctive character and may not be subjected to corporal punishment or any other humiliating treatment” (End Corporal Punishment, 2020:1)

Sweden’s legislation promoted global debate on violence against children and opened the way for a global trend over the ensuing years. Today, 63 nations have prohibited corporal punishment of children in all settings, including France, New Zealand, and Denmark (End Corporal Punishment, 2022). In the following section, I present these three countries’ laws and

examine their history and context to determine whether they reflect the characters of their respective welfare regimes.

Law Reform

Denmark achieved prohibition of all corporal punishment of children in 1997 – 18 years after Sweden – making it the sixth nation in the world to do so. Twelve years earlier, Denmark attempted to protect children from corporal punishment by amending the *Custody and Care Act* to state that parental custody implies the obligation and duty to protect children from any physical and psychological violence. This amendment was intended to protect children from corporal punishment. But a court judgement found that corporal punishment was not equivalent to “violence”. Subsequently, in 1997, Denmark amended its law to explicitly include protection from corporal punishment and other degrading treatment. Article 2 (2) of the *Danish Act on Parental Authority and Contact* (a Civil Code) now states that “Children have the right to care and security. (Lund-Andersen and Jeppesen de Boer, 2003:7). While the change in legislation meant that any violence against children is to be treated in the same way as violence against other persons, it also underscored the message that corporal punishment is entirely unacceptable’. By 2003, nine nations had banned corporal punishment, five (56%) of which are Social Democratic welfare states (Sweden, Finland, Norway, Denmark, and Iceland).

In 2007, after nearly two years of public debate, Liberal New Zealand became the 23rd nation to ban corporal punishment in all settings. The new law repealed the legal defense for the use of “reasonable force by way of correction” in section 59 of the *Crimes Act 1961* – New Zealand’s Penal Code (Wood, Hassall, Hook and Ludbrook, 2008). The old section 59 was replaced with a new section entitled *Parental Control* with a clear purpose: “to make better

provision for children to live in a safe and secure environment free from violence by abolishing the use of parental force for the purpose of correction” (Wood et al, 2008:19). In doing this, New Zealand became the first English-speaking and Liberal regime nation to achieve full prohibition of corporal punishment.

In 2019, France became the 56th country to achieve full prohibition of corporal punishment of children (End Corporal Punishment, 2022). The passing of the Bill entitled ‘*interdiction des violences éducatives ordinaires*’ grants all children in France protection against physical and emotional violence, reversing Napoleon-era parental discipline rights.¹² The law, enacted in the French *Civil Code*, states:

Parental authority is a cluster of rights and duties whose finality is the interest of the child. It is vested in the father and mother until the majority or emancipation of the child in order to protect him in his security, health and morality, to ensure his education and allow his development, with all due respect owed to his person. Parental authority is exercised without any physical or psychological violence. The parents shall make a child a party to decisions that concern him, according to his age and degree of maturity (Art. 371-1).

The pattern of corporal punishment bans across rich capitalist nations generally corresponds with what we might expect based on the welfare regime typologies (Olsen 2019; see Table 6.1). Nations belonging to the Social Democratic welfare world were first in achieving prohibition of corporal punishment in all settings. With the exception of Belgium, all other Conservative regime nations have introduced complete bans, with France having done so very recently. In contrast, in the Liberal welfare state world only two of the six ‘Anglo’ nations have

¹² *Interdiction des violences éducatives ordinaires* is the French term for corporal punishment.

banned corporal punishment in the home and other settings (see Table 6.2). Within the next section, I will examine the contexts of these laws to gain a deeper understanding of how they relate to Esping-Andersen's welfare regime typology.

Public Attitudes and Prevalence

Societal attitudes are a result of a wide range of factors from individual experience to the character of legal, political, and socio-cultural environments. Durrant (2003) has argued that legislation prohibiting corporal punishment is an important step in bringing about attitudinal change with the aim of protecting children and respecting their human right to dignity and bodily integrity. Law and legislation are a reflection of a nation's standards and commitment to recognizing children's rights and protection, which are internalized by its population over time (Durrant, 2003). The available data support this position (Becker, 2017; Becker, 201; Durrant, 2003; Durrant, 1999; Durrant and Olsen, 1997; Trevathan and Briggs, 2009; Zolotor and Puzia, 2010; Wood, et al. 2008). In the following sections, I will examine the evidence available in France, New Zealand, and Denmark.

Table 6.1 Prohibition of Corporal Punishment in 16 Industrialized Nations

Welfare regime/nation	Legal status of corporal punishment
Conservative	
Austria	Prohibited in all settings, 1989
Belgium	Legal in home; some alternative care, daycare, schools
France	Prohibited in all settings, 2019
Germany	Prohibited in all settings, 2000
Netherlands	Prohibited in all settings, 2007
Liberal	
Australia	Legal in home; some alternative care, daycare, schools
Canada	Legal in home; some alternative care, daycare, schools
New Zealand	Prohibited in all settings, 2007
United Kingdom	Legal in home; some alternative care, daycare
United States	Legal in home; some alternative care, daycare, schools
Ireland	Prohibited in all settings, 2015
Social Democratic	
Denmark	Prohibited in all settings, 1997
Finland	Prohibited in all settings, 1983
Iceland	Prohibited in all settings, 2003
Norway	Prohibited in all settings, 1987
Sweden	Prohibited in all settings, 1979

Source: End Corporal Punishment; Olsen, 2019
 Retrieved from: <https://endcorporalpunishment.org>

France

Prior to prohibition, spanking was common and accepted among French parents. In 2007, a survey conducted by the Union des Familles en Europe (TUFÉ) of 685 grandparents, 856 parents, and 776 children, found that more than 95 percent of both adults and children have been smacked.¹³ Of the adults, approximately 85 percent had administered corporal punishment, with 10 percent having used a small whip to punish their children. When asked for their reasoning, more than 75 percent of parents indicated that spanking is deserved as it is a normal part of ‘bringing up’ and educating children (Union des Familles en Europe, 2007).

In 2009, a study examining attitudes toward and experiences of corporal punishment in five European nations – Sweden, Austria, Germany, France, and Spain - found that parents in France reported the highest prevalence rates: 72 percent of parents said they had “mildly” slapped their child on the face; 87 percent had spanked their child’s bottom with their hand; 32 percent had given children a slap on the face; and 4.5 percent had used an object to hit their children. Over nine percent of French parents considered severe beating to be legally admissible (Bussmann, Erthal, and Schroth, 2009). Among these five nations, the largest proportion of parents opposed to the prohibition of corporal punishment was found in France (50 percent), replicating a finding of the TUFÉ survey (Bussmann, Erthal, and Schroth, 2009; TUFÉ, 2007). Because France’s was only relatively recently changed, there are still no data or studies on public attitudes and prevalence post prohibition. These studies were conducted at least a decade before France enacted its prohibition.

¹³ Union des Familles en Europe is part of COFACE Families Europe – pluralist network of civil society associations representing interests of all families (European Commission, 2022).

New Zealand

Opinion polls conducted in New Zealand in 2001 and 2007 showed that physical punishment was regarded by most parents as acceptable and necessary, with a large majority opposing its prohibition (Lawrence and Smith, 2009; Ministry of Justice, 2001). Research on the prevalence and acceptance of physical punishment in New Zealand describes a society in which authoritarian attitudes are dominant, children are a private/family responsibility, and physical punishment of children has a ‘salutary’ effect (Wood, et al., 2008; Wood: 2015). Wood, et al. (2008) argue that this orientation is common among ‘Anglo nations’ – the UK, US, Canada and Australia – as the populations “of these countries believe, to a greater degree than those of other Western countries, in the efficacy of punishment in dealing with disobedience and wrongdoing’. In addition, they all have high rates of imprisonment of adult offenders as well as legally sanctioned physical punishment by parents” (132).

In 2001, the Ministry of Justice published a survey asking a thousand adults, aged 18 or over, if they agreed that: ‘[a] person parenting a child should be allowed, by law, to smack the child with an open hand if that child is naughty’. Approximately 80 percent of respondents agreed with the statement and believed physical punishment should remain legal (Ministry of Justice, 2001). These results were maintained in a survey conducted during the period in which the repeal bill was before Parliament; 84 percent of the 5,322 respondents disagreed with prohibition (Office of the Children’s Commissioner, 2006). In 2003, UNICEF published a report showing that New Zealand had an average child maltreatment death rate of 1.2 per 100,000 per year – the third highest out of 27 countries. The average child maltreatment death rate for France was 0.5 per 100,000 – whereas for Denmark it was slightly higher at 0.7 per 100,000 per year.

Children in New Zealand were four to six times more likely to die from physical abuse than children in the 26 other countries surveyed (UNICEF, 2003).

A year after New Zealand implemented its ban, a national survey found that 91 percent of adults were aware of it. Of those, 43 percent were in support; 29 percent were neutral; and 28 percent were opposed (New Zealand's Children's Commissioner, 2008). Six years following the ban, another study found that support for corporal punishment had markedly declined from 89 percent in 1981, to 40 percent in 2013 (D'Souza, Russell, Wood, Signal, and Elder, 2016). A longitudinal study revealed a downtrend trend in the number of parents using physical punishment between 2002 to 2017. Among a sample of 736 parents, the percentage that used corporal punishment declined from 77 percent in 2002 to 42 percent in 2017 (McLeod, Horwood, Boden, and Woodward, 2021). Severe punishment, including hitting in the face with a fist or object, saw an even more dramatic decrease - from 12 to 4 percent.

The campaign to prohibit corporal punishment of children in New Zealand is considered one of the most contentious in the nation's history, with strong support from child advocates on one side and intense opposition from the other. Groups opposing the prohibition held public demonstrations and sponsored numerous expensive marketing campaigns that included full page advertisements, television ads, billboards, and free busses (Becker, 2018; Hassall, 2019). The opposition based their stance on three main arguments: corporal punishment is a necessary and positive aspect of parental discipline; banning corporal punishment would 'intrude' into the privacy of family life; and the repeal would result in the prosecution and criminalization of 'good parents' (Becker, 2018; Wood, 2015). This strong and organized opposition resulted in a last-minute amendment to the bill, allowing 'reasonable' force under certain circumstances. While the amendment of subsection 59(2) of the Parental Control explicitly states that the use of force

is no longer permitted as a means of correcting children's behaviour, it does set out four different situations in which parents can use 'reasonable' force for purposes other than correcting their children. The justification for reasonable force is acceptable in the following four situations:

- (a) preventing or minimizing harm to the child or another person
- (b) preventing the child from engaging... in conduct that amounts to a criminal offence
- (c) preventing the child from engaging... in offensive or disruptive behaviour
- (d) performing the normal daily tasks that are incidental to good care and parenting

(Wood et al, 2008: 85).

These qualifications led a significant number of parents, as well TV outlets and newspapers, to believe that the new law allowed parents could still hit children under certain circumstances. Using the terms 'justified' and 'reasonable' in the new bill does not only continue to blame children for the force used against them, but does not respect their integrity and accords them a lower status in society.

New Zealand is one of the few countries in which the prohibition of corporal punishment has been added to the Penal Code and carries criminal penalties. This law carries a penalty of up to two years in prison, with an exclusion for 'inconsequential' force (Zoltor and Puzia, 2010). In Denmark and France, corporal punishment is considered unlawful under articles of Civil Codes, and do not carry penalties beyond those already in place for assault (End Corporal Punishment, 2022). Placing the new law in the Civil Code as done by France and Denmark, clarifies its objective of preventing child abuse rather than introducing a new crime of corporal punishment. However, despite the criminal nature of New Zealand's ban, eleven police reports issued between 2002 and 2012 found that while the number of 'smacking' cases increased over the five years after the ban, prosecutions of those cases did not (New Zealand Police, 2013). Rather those

cases were referred to child and family support services, and of the few cases that were prosecuted, none ended in prison sentences (Durrant, 2019). The increase in reports attended by police is attributable greater awareness among the public of violence against children and increased family violence training for police (Durrant, 2019).

The fierce opposition to prohibition in New Zealand reflects the belief that is generally common across Liberal nations that the family is a private sanctuary to be protected from state ‘intrusion’ or intervention (Olsen, 2001;2018; Kelly, 2011; Wood et al, 2008). While it is true that legal prohibitions are most successful when they have strong advocates and government support, the law is the ultimate intervention that grants children protection, including from their parents. The struggle in New Zealand has been ongoing. In 2009, a citizen-initiated non-binding referendum was held in which 87 percent of respondents were asked, “Should a smack as part of good parental correction be a criminal offence in New Zealand?”. Only 56 percent of voters participated; of those, 87 percent voted “no”. The government chose not to make any changes to the law. In 2017, there were more calls to reverse the legislation (Hassall, 2018). However, being the first English speaking country in the world to prohibit all corporal punishment of children sends a strong message to other nations, including Canada, that change is possible even in nations where corporal punishment is ingrained in social norms and culture.

Denmark

Having banned corporal punishment more than 25 years ago, approval of corporal punishment is relatively low among Danish families. A 2011 UNICEF survey of 1,008 individuals found that only 9.8 percent agreed that a child should be corporally punished, and 89 percent agreed that children must be protected from all forms of physical violence, including corporal punishment

(UNICEF, 2011). Another study by the National Research Centre for Welfare (SFI) involving nearly 3,000 young people found that 13 percent of all respondents had experienced physical violence at the hands of their parents at least once in the last 12 months (Rud, Fisher and Oldrup, 2010). While corporal punishment has not fully disappeared in Denmark, its approval and prevalence are significantly lower than those of France and New Zealand.

Prevention

Corporal punishment bans have three main objectives – to: “(1) reduce and ultimately eliminate all physical punishment of children (2) raise public awareness and reduce societal tolerance of it (3) allow earlier supportive intervention into situations where children are experiencing violence and thereby reduce its risk of escalation” (Gershoff and Durrant, 2019:156-157). Sweden was extremely successful in achieving these three objectives because the purpose of criminalizing corporal punishment was not to prosecute and punishing parents, but rather to raise awareness that children deserve protection of their physical integrity equal to that of any other human.

Alongside the implementation of the law, Sweden worked intensively to raise public awareness, including printing critical information on milk cartons to open up discussions at the dinner table, as well as distributing pamphlets to every household with young children (Durrant, 1999; Durrant and Olsen 1997). The Swedish ban promoted a dramatic shift in attitudes towards corporal punishment and legislative change internationally, with a diverse range of countries following its example. However, the social and educational measures taken up following the ban vary across countries and welfare regimes.

The 2019 French Government report on corporal punishment, as mandated by the law, stated that the law is important but not enough to stop physical violence against children. The

plan outlined in the report indicates a commitment to strengthening parental support through various measures including: the implementation of the National Parenting Support Strategy, targeted actions to raise awareness of the consequences of corporal punishment, and training of professionals with an emphasis placed on the prevention of all forms of violence (Ministry of Solidarity and Health, 2019). France's parenting support policies consists of supporting parents in their roles as educators by informing them, listening to them, and providing them with services and means enabling them to develop and enhance their parental skills. Such policies and support are universal in nature and are available through various systems through Ministries of Solidarity and Health, National Education, and Justice, and the family branch of Social Security. Other measures to raise awareness of the consequences of physical punishment include the funding of "Triple P" (Positive Parenting Program), a course available to all parents with the goal of promoting positive relationships between parents and children. New pamphlets created in partnership with the State and Caisse Nationale d'Allocations Familiales are distributed to expectant parents informing them of the law and the negative consequences of hitting a child (Ministry of Solidarity and Health, 2019). The educational steps taken, and support measures for parents and professionals in contact with children, are another example of France deviating from its regime, as such extensive and universalist policies and support are more commonly found in nations characterizing Social Democratic regimes.

Since the passing of the law in New Zealand in 2007, there has been no public campaign to publicize or support the new law, as seen in Sweden. Indeed, due to high level of public opposition to the ban, political parties have been largely silent about their views on the law. There were also no promotions of effective parenting in regard to alternative and positive strategies for disciplining children. While the New Zealand government agreed to review the

effect of the law within two years of implementation, no review has been undertaken to date. A study surveying individuals from professional groups that are in a position to support parents, found that much more needs to be done to address the determinants of violence to children (Wood, 2016). While all participants were aware of the law, a number commented on the need for more resources in educating staff, parents, and communities with the goal of facilitating positive parenting. Although there are a number of excellent parenting education and support measures in place, the majority of them are targeted at specific groups, with only a few are universally available to all parents. The current policy measures in New Zealand target already ‘vulnerable’ children – those who are abused or at high risk of abuse (Wood, 2016). The limited emphasis on primary prevention – addressing the determinants of violence - is common among Liberal nations. Having social policies and programs in place only for families and children at extreme risk does less to reduce inequality and the lack of support available for all fosters greater risk of violence towards children.

Children’s rights and well-being has increasingly become central among Nordic nations. Denmark is broadly similar to Sweden in ideological and political orientation, with both nations widely celebrated for their extensive universal social policies and programs that foster greater equality of opportunity and equality of condition for its citizens (Olsen, 2002). In 2004, Denmark’s Ministry of Social Affairs published an action plan on violence against children, addressing all forms of violence, including corporal punishment. Part of the action plan included campaigns to raise awareness by targeting the public, as well as professionals who are in direct contact with children. Materials were provided for training teachers and social workers with the goal of further promoting positive discipline – enabling staff to offer the child or the family the support they needed. In Denmark’s prevention strategies it is stated that the “municipal authority

shall ensure that the parents of children or young persons or any other persons having the actual care of a child, or a young person are offered free family-related counselling designed to resolve any difficulty and trouble in the family” (UN, 2004: 12).

Olsen (2019) argues that child well-being “can be further promoted, secured, and enhanced when this legislation is supplemented by policies that allow parents to reduce their workdays and when social services (such as the provision of education to caregivers concerning constructive approaches to childrearing) and income supports are provided” (7). The collective support for ensuring children’s well-being in Denmark is reflected in a number of other policies including health care delivery, parental leave, childcare, living standards, and parent education. This is achieved primarily through the emphasis on the well-being of all and freedom for the state to support all through various means.

Concluding Remarks

Although all three pillars of the welfare state are crucial to our well-being, protective legislation, the third pillar, has often been largely neglected from comparative social policy research and welfare state modeling. While in some countries, the welfare state has the ability to promote and achieve well-being of all, in others certain policies and redistributive measures may foster greater inequality among individuals, families and classes (Esping-Andersen and Myles, 2009).

Acknowledging that different methodologies make international comparisons difficult, this chapter has sought to shed light on the legislative steps taken by France, New Zealand, and Denmark in recognizing children’s rights and eliminating physical punishment. It was demonstrated that in Denmark the rights of children and child welfare is at utmost importance and is perceived as a collective societal responsibility rather than just that of parents. This is

evident in legislation and in their extensive policies and support measures available to parents and families. While France has just recently banned corporal punishment, their preventative plan outlines a commitment to strengthening parental support through various measures, much like Denmark and other Nordic nations. The case of New Zealand remains a unique one, as it does not neatly or completely correspond with what we might expect based on the ‘welfare regime’ typology. However, though the law change is a significant step forward, fully protecting children from all forms of violence is currently still a work in progress. Still, the widespread intro of bans in so many conservative regimes is also counterintuitive because, by definition, they should favour family-oriented decisions and solutions. However, as this study, among others, notes, few nations closely follow the regime type in all policy domains, or even policies within domains.

Chapter 7

CONCLUSION

Social inequality is a familiar and defining feature of all capitalist societies. Material indicators of inequality such as poverty, income, and wealth, and non-material indicators such as rights, have been on the rise and are experienced virtually everywhere. However, children have been largely neglected in most accounts of inequality. According to UNICEF (2022), people under the age of 18 make up approximately a quarter of the world's population. However, despite notable progress made over the recent years in some areas, the situation faced by millions of children is still desperate, as they are denied basic human rights and deprived of what they need to grow up healthy and strong, even in the some of the most economically developed countries. While children experience inequalities everywhere, there is a cross-national variation in the character, intensity and acceleration of such inequalities that merits our attention.

The cross-national variation in inequalities is a result of nations' welfare states, which are the central forms of provision and social programs in wealthy nations, designed to promote and protect the economic and social well-being of their citizens. Welfare states thus play a significant role in impacting the well-being of citizens in industrialized nations. However, welfare states are influenced by each nation's specific policies and practices, resulting in tremendous national variation in the degree of support, universality, and generosity of practices across central policy domains. While variation among welfare states has been commonly examined and analysed in social research, children have too often been excluded from cross-national comparison, particularly from research on the impact of social policy and welfare states on child well-being.¹⁴

¹⁴ Sociology and political studies typically have women and gender focused courses, as well as courses addressing 'race' and ethnicity. However, courses on children are extremely rare.

This thesis has contributed to addressing this significant gap, shedding light on some of the central inequalities faced by children, highlighting child poverty, child care, and corporal punishment in three nations representing three models of social welfare - France (Conservative), New Zealand (Liberal), and Denmark (Social Democratic). Like this key inequality axis/fault line (children), these nations are not commonly examined or juxtaposed. The comparative lens can help us to better understand the inequalities faced by children, and the impact of the policies in place to protect them. It also helps to shed light on the dominant welfare regime typology. Although children are facing inequalities in all three nations, Denmark and France do notably better than New Zealand in protecting children from contingencies such as poverty and violence. The analysis of three indicators of child well-being here – representing the three pillars of the welfare state (income, services, and legislation) – confirm Denmark’s characterization as a clearly Social Democratic welfare regime. France and New Zealand, however, do not fit as neatly in their assigned welfare worlds.

With a child relative poverty rate of 4.9 percent, only second in the world after Finland, Denmark is considered a world leader in the fight against child poverty. Denmark’s relative success in reducing poverty and inequality is largely dependent on its comprehensive social policies that are based on guiding principles of solidarity, universalism, and redistribution of resources. Denmark has also increasingly invested in family friendly policies, including child care, flexible parental leave, and family allowance, with the goal of promoting gender equality and reducing gender gaps in employment.

Across all three pillars of the welfare state, the results indicate that Denmark is a model for addressing poverty, promoting child well-being, and creating a more egalitarian society. Being one of the few industrialized countries where children are less likely than the general

population to live in relative poverty, Denmark is an example of a nation where the needs and rights of children are central. The low child poverty rate, generous social transfers for families, high quality child care, and high parental labour force participation make Denmark a strong representative of the Social Democratic welfare regime, even surpassing Sweden, widely endorsed as the welfare state leader and closest to the Social Democratic ideal type. While Sweden remains a remarkable example for its elaborate and highly developed welfare state, some neo-liberal restructuring, and other changes to social programs over the past two decades have resulted in rise in poverty, homelessness, and income inequality.¹⁵ Today, the child relative poverty rate in Sweden is almost double that of Denmark's (9.4 vs 4.9 percent). Arguably, Denmark's exceptional provision of comprehensive social programs especially those targeting children, make it one of the most egalitarian nations in the world, and a strong representative of the Social Democratic welfare regime.

In contrast to Denmark, France and New Zealand fit somewhat less easily within their welfare regimes when child well-being indicators are examined. France is not the definitive Conservative regime member and caring for children has proven to be another area where it deviates from the Conservative ideal type and some of its fellow regime members. Child poverty in France is just below the OECD average, lower than that of Liberal regime nations (e.g., the US, Canada, and the UK), but higher than that of nations belonging to the Social Democratic regime. This might be expected for France as the Conservative welfare framework places greater emphasis on social insurance than generous universal supports, upholding and reproducing

¹⁵ Neo-liberal changes, however, reflect a different political dynamic than in the liberal world nations. In the latter, we see policy retrenchment and cutbacks designed to force 'lazy people' to work. In Sweden, the changes have reflected the neo-liberal idea that people are entitled to 'choice', which has led to the emergence of private health care, elderly care, childcare, education, etc. The idea of universality - especially regarding pensions - was also undermined (Olsen, 1996, 1999, 2013).

income differences. However, France's overall high level of social spending, wide range of support for families, including parental leave, childcare, flexible working hours, and the current eight-billion-euro anti-poverty plan, are all measures more commonly associated with Social Democratic welfare states – helping to account for its greater success in addressing child well-being.

Indeed, over the past three decades, France has increasingly turned to more universal measures. The *Revenu minimum d'insertion* (RMI) introduced in 1988 was the first universal, non-contributory social program in France aimed at assisting people without any income (Bonoli and Palier, 1998). In 1995, France introduced the *Juppé Plan*, arguably the most important reform of French social security. The plan made first steps towards universal health care insurance, and proposed reforms in family policy and in pensions. The doctrine of the plan was clearly expressed “in the name of justice we have decided a social security for all” (Bouget, 1998: 162). This brought forward a right to benefits for all, without any difference between those who are insured and uninsured.¹⁶ Arguably, these changes were only the beginning of France shifting away from the Bismarckian approach, towards a more Beveridgean citizenship model. This shift away from social insurance to a greater emphasis on citizenship rights, and social services, can be viewed as positive, with increased access and coverage for health care, child care, and family benefits. However, as the state increasingly takes control and finances social services, there is a potential for future cuts and welfare reform.

The findings on France also demonstrate that while high social spending is necessary, it is not sufficient to end child poverty. This is primarily because nations may spend a lot on other

¹⁶ RMI was fully replaced by the *Revenu de solidarité active* (RSA) in 2009, and in 2016 universal health care called the *Protection Universelle Maladie* (PUMA) replaced the previous universal system.

areas, but not so much on children directly. France has the highest rate of social spending; however, its poverty rate – and especially its child poverty rate - is not the lowest. This indicates that it is important to consider how money is spent, and what the expenditures reflect and address.

New Zealand's welfare state can be seen as dramatically different from those in Denmark and France. Its greater reliance upon the private sector, notably lower level of social spending, more restricted population coverage, and high child poverty rates clearly distinguish it from most European welfare models. However, New Zealand once had a very progressive welfare state, considered by some to similar to Sweden's (e.g., Davidson, 1989). However, dramatic policy changes and the neo-liberal focus beginning in the 1980s resulted in a marked move away from a social citizenship model to a more stringent targeting approach. The shift from universal provision to targeting of vulnerable groups has seen poverty among low-income households and children reach very high rates. The high child poverty rate in New Zealand remains a critical social problem. The means tested social assistance programs, and the 'Working for Families' package, which until recently rendered workless households ineligible for support, have made it nearly impossible for major reductions in child poverty to be achieved.

Like France, New Zealand is an example of a nation that has changed over time and, consequently, does not always fit easily into its assigned regime. Most recently it has introduced more far-reaching policies to address child poverty. These include changes to the in-work tax-credit (IWTC), removing requirements for parents to work a minimum number of hours, which came into effect in mid-2020. Additionally, the child poverty reduction and wellbeing legislation has set out a commitment to reducing child poverty and improving child well-being through successive governments. And, while the nation's child care policies do not distinguish it from its

other Liberal regime members, New Zealand was the first Anglo nation to ban corporal punishment. This commitment to children's rights seems highly unlikely in the most definitive nations of the Liberal regime – Canada, the UK and, especially the US – in the near future. Arguably, the efforts taken by New Zealand today in promoting child well-being, and in slightly shifting away from its ideal welfare regime type in some respects, may be an indication of a move towards its old welfare state model.

Limitations of this Study/Future Research

This study examined policies addressing child well-being in France, Denmark and New Zealand over a circumscribed period. Although beyond the scope of this study, further research including more nations from each of the three welfare regimes and more policy domains could prove beneficial for better understanding the scope of variation within and across welfare regimes. The present study indicates that, depending on what policy is examined, a nation may fit within more than one regime. In several respects, France appears more Social Democratic and New Zealand's approach to corporal punishment has affinities with the Social Democratic approach. This supports other research examining, for example, the provision of universal healthcare in Canada or primary and secondary education in the US. A more inclusive study of France – examining other axes and dimensions of inequality and more social policy domains – could help us to evaluate whether France is still best placed within the Conservative regime. As well, future research juxtaposing New Zealand with other Liberal regime nations that have introduced corporal punishment bans – the Republic of Ireland, Scotland and Wales – could help us to better understand the conditions under which nations deviate from the policy approaches that define the regime that they are placed within.

No nation fits perfectly with a particular ideal type. However, the varied ways that nations deviate from their regimes is interesting and may be instructive. Further research is required to explore how and why this is so. Future research should address additional dimensions of inequality and policy domains and policies, such as health inequalities and healthcare. This study also underscored a difficulty with cross-national comparative research – finding standardized measures for all indicators for the same time frame across all of the nations included.

In general, over the last two decades, material inequality has grown virtually everywhere and the gap between the poor and the rich has become much wider. While notable changes have occurred in all countries with globalization and the trend toward some form of neo-liberalism, some welfare states have done considerably better in protecting their citizens, especially children, one of the most vulnerable groups. Bringing children to the forefront of Esping-Andersen's welfare regime typology is useful for understanding inequalities in child well-being. This study has raised further questions for better understanding child well-being, specifically the three indicators examined, and the cause of variation cross nationally. Directions for future research could include more child well-being indicators and other policies that promote child well-being, across a larger number of countries.

The present study has attempted to contribute to our understanding of child well-being in the context of the comparative welfare state literature. Its findings may offer policy alternatives to other industrialized nations, including the US and Canada, nations that too often fall behind in the promotion of child well-being. While Canada is a prosperous country, children do not share in this prosperity. With one in five children facing poverty, a lack of affordable and accessible childcare, and no move towards the full legal protection of children against physical violence,

Canada has yet to prioritize children and their well-being. Canadian policy makers could learn much from the social policy approaches taken in Europe, and elsewhere, reflecting a greater commitment to the well-being and flourishing of children.

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