

## Social policy

### Key issues in this chapter:

- ▶ Social policy and social welfare systems reflect and reinforce the gender norms of the society which created them historically and presently.
- ▶ The same gender assumptions which shaped social policy affected the study of social policy until recently.
- ▶ The concepts of citizenship and family are vital to an understanding of the gendered nature of social policy.
- ▶ Social policies alone do not create welfare states, policies on tax, employment, immigration amongst others and the structure of the labour market are also involved.

### At the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- ▶ Critique social policies from a gendered perspective
- ▶ Understand different types of models of social policy
- ▶ Discuss care as a gendered concept and as a cause of concern to feminists and other critical social policyists
- ▶ Show how social (and other) policies prescribe particular family forms

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## Introduction

**Fathers in protest on city bridge**

Protesting fathers caused traffic mayhem this morning when their demonstration led to the closure of the Clifton Suspension Bridge.

Four campaigners from Fathers 4 Justice, dressed as Superman, Spiderman, Batman and Robin, climbed the tower . . . just after 6.30am. The four, . . ., unveiled a banner proclaiming they were 'Superheroes fighting for their children's rights' . . . Mr Skinner, aged 37, said: . . . 'This is a campaign to raise awareness that there are thousands of dads who do not have access to their children because of an outdated family law system which we want abolished as soon as possible. We apologise for the inconvenience to motorists who have been denied access to the bridge but imagine how they would feel if they had been denied access to their children as we have been'.

(*Bristol Evening Post*, 2 February 2004)



**Figure 5.1**

Source: © Darren Staples/Reuters/Corbis

## What is social policy?

Before we can review the impact of gender upon social policy and upon the study of social policy it is useful to quickly review what is understood to be social policy. Primarily social policy is both an area of government legislation and of academic study. Traditionally social policy was seen as including areas such as health, education, housing and social security – in fact, the areas associated with social welfare. A strong trend in this mainstream tradition in academia has been a concern with analysing the processes of welfare and the implementation of policies, for example the ways in which housing policies can be developed, designed and delivered most efficiently. This element of social policy is known as Social Administration. Whilst critical approaches have examined the implementation of social policies the most fundamental challenge to traditional social policy has been that of feminism which broadened the definition of social policy to also include personal violence, childcare, care of elders and reproduction, amongst other areas. This has involved critical examinations of the structures of welfare systems; of the relationship between caring and employment; of the notion of citizenship and on the dichotomy of public and private (see *A Critical Look* 5.1). As such, feminism contributes strongly to 'critical social policy' which takes as its starting point a view of social policy as being underpinned by social inequalities such as ethnicity, social class and gender, sexuality and other social differences. As such Gillian Pascall's prediction that the result of feminist analyses of social welfare would be 'a new understanding, not only of the way the Welfare State deals with women, but also of social policy itself' (Pascall, 1986: 1) has come true. Our gendered approach to social policy builds upon this rich tradition to discuss social welfare systems and social policies from the differential positions of women and men and from the differential positions individual men and women hold: based on factors such as age, ability, citizenship status, sexuality, amongst others.

## A critical look 5.1

### 'Health warning' on public/private

Social Scientists refer to the public and the private not because they think the world is so neatly and rigidly divided but due to the power of these concepts to frame discussions around inclusion and exclusion, around what has been deemed as appropriate for study and what has not. The fluidity between these two categories must be kept in mind. As Marchbank states:

'although, . . . , I dispute the actual existence of these two separate spheres I do find them useful shorthand for the way in which patriarchy views society. Nonetheless, the public/private spheres vary in definition over cultures and historical periods and do not always equal male/female divide; that is, even if women are excluded from the public sphere men have never been excluded from the private sphere, the family sphere.' (2000: 26).

## A gendered approach to social policy

Social policies have a two-way relationship with gender roles: the first is that social policies inherently reflect the gender assumptions of the time of their creation and the other is that social policies can also be used to attempt to recognise changing trends in gender roles or to encourage changes in gender roles. We shall begin by reviewing these points in order, starting with the way in which social policies reflect gender roles. In doing so it is necessary to acknowledge the developments in the study of social policy which have occurred, primarily a move from social administration to feminist critiques of welfare. One gap has been the examination of social policy in the lives of men, in fact the majority of critique on welfare and men has been through the lens of social class (see Esping-Andersen, 1990) (one exception being Pringle, 1995) and that has most frequently been focused on class oppression not on examining where men as a group, irrespective of social class, are privileged in society. However, feminist attempts to build new models of social policy have pulled masculinity and men into a gendered analysis. In addition, some activists, such as Fathers 4 Justice (F4J) and politicians

## Gendered assumptions in social welfare

have been active in critiquing social welfare arguing that men are disadvantaged by welfare states. Our gendered approach to social policy encompasses an examination of all of these areas and of all the differential positions of women and men.

## Gendered assumptions in social welfare

It is not possible to understand the underlying principles, structure and effects of our social welfare systems and policies without understanding their relation to gender roles and gender ideology. (Sapiro, 1990: 37)

What does Virginia Sapiro mean by this? Well, she is stating that each society has established gender roles, and an ideology of gender which creates and sustains these roles and that these are not restricted to the private domain. In fact, these roles and ideologies are the very keystones to understanding social welfare systems. In this example, Sapiro is discussing the United States system, as was Nancy Fraser (1989: 149–51) when she observed that the social security system is 'officially gender-neutral' but 'gets its structure from gender norms and assumptions'; however, it is possible to apply both these observations to any state welfare system.

These assumptions are not always accurate but are frequently *prescriptive*, that is, they are concerned with the views of how men and women should live, an example of such prescription is a social security system that assumes that when two adults of the opposite sex live together as a couple then they should be financially dependent upon each other; in fact, this assumption exists even for such adults living together *not* as a couple who have to prove they are not a couple. The prescription here is that couples are required to be financially, as well as romantically, entwined – that is, it is as if by living together the government tells you that you must share finances too. It is only recently in Britain that such assumptions have begun to be considered for same-sex couples also. As such, yet another layer of prescription exists – one of 'telling' people that heterosexuality is preferred as the state, the government, seems not to have recognised same-sex relationships in this policy area in many countries.

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In addition, at the time of the creation of most welfare systems in the twentieth century the gender ideology not only prescribed the shape of social policies (see A Closer Look 5.1) but also created, via social policies, implicit ideologies of the family. Whilst Marxist theorists have argued that the welfare state exists to provide capitalists with healthy and educated workers, Marxist feminists have argued that a further role of the welfare state has been to manage women in terms of family and motherhood balanced against the needs of certain industries for

cheap female labour (Wilson, 1977) and, as such, created familial ideologies as well as gender ideologies. Yet, these familial ideologies are as prescriptive as the gender ideologies – that is, social policies operate in such ways as to support certain family forms over others. The creation of part-time work opportunities has been viewed by Elizabeth Wilson (1977) as a solution to the needs of industry for cheap workers without reducing women's abilities to fulfil their reproductive and family responsibilities (see A Critical Look 5.2).

### A closer look 5.1

#### Beveridge and the construction of dependent womanhood in the British welfare state

William Beveridge's 1942 Report is recognised as the document which created the modern British welfare state. In it Beveridge had seen a particular role for women, reflecting the gender ideology of his time. This led to a welfare state design predicated on full *male* employment with married women receiving their protection through marriage. People were divided into different categories and were to receive their social security benefits and to make their contributions based on the rules for those categories – these included employed, self-employed, too old to work, etc. Married women were constructed as a wholly distinct and separate class of contributors whose access to benefits in their own right were severely curtailed. That is, upon marriage, working women were to move from the employed category to that of wife. Whether they continued to work or not, and even if they had built up a long record of contributions in their own right:

Every woman on marriage will become a new person, acquiring new rights, and not carrying on into marriage claims to unemployment or disability benefit in respect of contributions made before marriage.  
(Beveridge Report, 1942: para. 339)

The basis of this was a gender ideology that saw it as the husband's responsibility to provide for his wife and the wife's responsibility to be providing in the private sphere and not working in the public sphere. As such, women's rights to pensions and benefits were wholly reliant, after marriage, on her husband's contribution record. Despite recent changes this still affects both men and women.

### A critical look 5.2

#### Women's part-time work in Britain

The ability to work part time was not universal. Carby (1982) argues that the part-time work of White women was only made possible by the full-time work of Black immigrants, especially Caribbean women. Black women were not considered in the same context of familialism as indigenous women for their family responsibilities were not considered and often their children were unable to live with them due to restrictions of immigration or availability of childcare.

### Stop and think 5.1

Many welfare systems in the past, and some in the present, provided tax breaks for being married, i.e. a reduction in the family tax bill. Consider what social messages such policies send about what kind of family form the state prefers.

## Citizenship, qualification and family

Another area of gendered assumptions has been in the definition of citizenship. Historically the basic qualification for citizenship has been independence and this has been based on masculine criteria. T.H. Marshall's (1950) famous work outlining the various aspects of citizenship (political, social and civil) has been shown to be based on the experiences and rights of men (Hernes, 1984; Pateman, 1988a, Gordon, 1990):

... citizenship, originally resting on the capacity to provide military service, was eventually extended to most men while women's relationship to their states remained defined through men (husbands or fathers). Women were ascribed the status of 'the protected' and located within the private/domestic sphere, even when lived realities were starkly different.

(Jacobs *et al.*, 2000: 7)

In modern times the criteria for citizenship has shifted from military service to worker, yet in the formation of welfare systems, women remained defined through men, that is as the dependants of male workers rather than as workers in their own rights. This is relevant to social policy as one's rights to social welfare are related to one's citizenship status, which is achieved through contributions made in the public sphere (Marshall, 1950) as workers. Worker was defined as a man with a dependant family, a *breadwinner*, and this definition has been built into notions of welfare across the western world (Pateman, 1988a). As such, women were and still can be required to gain their subsistence via their husbands' contributory record and not their own.

Why does it matter if women gain their social rights via men? It matters as it makes a significant difference to entitlement (as shown by the details of the Beveridge system given in A Closer Look 5.1) and responsibility. Welfare states require that working-age adults contribute to the state and many have training schemes which unemployed workers are required to attend as a condition of receiving state aid. Defining a worker as male has meant that women have not been obliged to actively seek work or training, unlike men. For example, it was only in 1998 that the wives and female partners of unemployed men in Britain were required to also seek work. In his 1998 Budget, Chancellor Gordon Brown, announced that the New Deal for Workers would be extended to such women, to assist them in achieving their role as workers. Such an action shifted these women's status in the eyes of the government from one of dependants of men, sustained through payments made to men, to one of workers with equal rights to the same services but also with equal responsibilities to the state. As such, it was a subtle but major change towards gender equity in the British welfare system (see A Closer Look 5.2).

## A closer look 5.2

### Budgeting for equality

Chancellor Gordon Brown used his 1998 Budget to make two changes to British social policy, balancing gender rights and responsibilities for both men and women.

1. Tax allowances which had previously only been available to men with children and an incapacitated wife now to be applied to women with an incapacitated husband.
2. Women included in the New Deal for Workers – extended the requirements of unemployed men to their female partners, that is, these women now have to participate in training and actively seek work, just like the men.

Jonathan Scourfield and Mark Drakeford (2002) argue that New Labour in Britain have broken new ground as they have also made policies around masculinity: 'it is only in the last few years that a government has made quite such explicit references to men some areas of policy. The most high-profile initiatives have been in relation to fathering and the education of boys' (Scourfield and Drakeford, 2002: 619) [**Hotlink** → **Education (Chapter 13)**]. In fact they argue that New Labour have made policies to support men in the home and women in the workplace. The policy direction on men includes a certain pessimism regarding men outside the home, especially in relation to criminal justice policies which view men as a 'problem'; they conclude that:

New Labour can be seen as optimistic about men inside the home and pessimistic about men outside, whereas, in contrast, there is policy pessimism about women inside the home and policy optimism about women outside . . .

Although political rhetoric is often negative about men, some actual policies could be seen as representing the retrenchment of traditional masculinities predicated on social advantage.

(Scourfield and Drakeford, 2002: 634)

[**Hotlink** → **Political Science (Chapter 8)**].

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## Gendered assumptions in the study of social policy

Not only have there been gendered assumptions in social policies reflecting and reinforcing traditional gender roles but also reflecting and adapting attitudes towards these. Further, it is also clear that approaches to studying social welfare, or welfare states, have also taken a similar journey. Using the British welfare state as an example, we will now follow the footsteps of these studies towards our goal of a gendered approach.

### Collectivism

The British welfare state developed from a Collectivist tradition, sometimes referred to as Fabian, an approach identifiable by its three central values of solidarity, equality and freedom and by its methods. These methods can be described as rationalist and empiricist and they derived from a desire to use social policy to relieve social problems. Britain had a long history of men and women working in these ways documenting and studying social problems so that they might be ameliorated, for example Charles Booth, Joseph Rowntree (see A Closer Look 5.3), Women's Co-operative Guild, amongst others. This was an approach that focused on determining what worked or what did not, rather than asking fundamental questions regarding the distribution of social and economic resources, and on how best to administer social welfare.

The gender problem in social administration is twofold: firstly, a social administrative approach never questions the division of social and economic resources based on gender nor the structure of the 'normal' family; secondly, the language and analysis of social policy hides gender differences. Pascall (1896) shows how most work actually about women in social administration has been disguised within other categories, such as 'elderly' or 'single parent families' (both of which are gender neutral categories dominated by women).

The opposite position from Collectivism is that of Individualism, a belief that it is not the state's responsibility to provide for the welfare of its people but the

### A closer look 5.3

#### Booth, Rowntree and poverty measures

Between 1886 and 1903 Charles Booth mapped poverty in London in his *Survey of Life and Labour*. His maps show the social condition of every street in London, classifying people in a colour code of class and income. These can be accessed online at <http://booth.lse.ac.uk/>

A few years later Joseph Rowntree, of the famous chocolate family of York, developed notions of poverty to include a 'basic level', the first time a poverty line was determined. Although Rowntree argued for social costs, such as newspapers and social interactions, to be included in his minimum needs, not just food and shelter, these are not universally accepted to this day as necessities of life.

responsibility of individuals and that people can do this by earning money in a market, a market kept free by the state. This approach accepts that inequalities exist between different members of society and does not see this as a social wrong, as they are inequalities created by the market. Individualism views attempts to reduce or hide inequalities as restrictive and as a preventive force upon individuals taking risks on which wealth and progress depend. The classic work here is Frederick Hayek's (1944) *Road to Serfdom* within which the individual in the marketplace is the primary focus of his analysis. This individual is masculine, though as can be seen in the A Closer Look 5.4, forty plus years on, individual women were recognised by Margaret Thatcher. However, their (Hayek's and Thatcher's) opinions regarding families reflect similar positions, that is families are adjuncts to the individual worker – be that male or female – and that these families are constructed in very traditional ways, that is traditional in Judeo-Christian western terms. This means that families are self-supporting and, in individualistic terms, women carry the costs of individualism in terms of caring for dependent children and adults – we will return to the importance of care below.

## A closer look 5.4

### Individualism

In an interview with the magazine *Woman's Own*, Margaret Thatcher, then Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, expressed her view of society:

I think we have gone through a period when too many children and people have been given to understand 'I have a problem, it is the Government's job to cope with it!' or 'I have a problem, I will go and get a grant to cope with it!', 'I am homeless, the Government must house me!' and so they are casting their problems on society and who is society? There is no such thing! There are individual men and women and there are families and no government can do anything except through people and people look to themselves first. It is our duty to look after ourselves and then also to help look after our neighbour and life is a reciprocal business and people have got the entitlements too much in mind without the obligations, because there is no such thing as an entitlement unless someone has first met an obligation.

Source: *Woman's Own*, 31st October 1987.

## Stop and think 5.2

Attempt these tasks; re-read the section above if necessary.

1. List the three central values of the Collectivist tradition.
2. How do Individualists view inequality?

## Marxist approaches

Whilst Individualism represents the philosophy of the political right many writers on the welfare state from the 1960s took a left-of-centre stance, one also involving analysis from a political economy perspective. From the late 1960s Marxist critiques of the role of welfare states were developed which pointed out the ways in which the welfare state acts as a form of social control which, rather than meeting the needs of the

people creates a dependency upon the state, whilst denying those in receipt of welfare any control over the nature of the service. Marxist theory critiques liberal welfare states (for example, the UK, USA, Canada, New Zealand, Australia) for being products of, and founded within, capitalist relations of production. Marxist writers argue that liberal welfare states are the product of two opposing forces, that of working-class struggle and the needs of capitalism and that they are engaged in two distinct activities. The activities are firstly, to ensure the reproduction of the labour force, for capitalism requires healthy workers and, secondly to preserve the state through maintaining social order – this is achieved by the provisions of certain services and benefits to ameliorate the worst excesses of capitalism.

Marxism seems to have provided some space for a feminist analysis of state welfare in that it opens up questions as to the ways and means of reproducing workers. Whereas Marxism pointed towards the role of state welfare in reproducing workers, Marxist feminists pointed out that most social, as well as biological, reproduction was actually done by women. In addition, Marxist analysis of labour also showed how women have been used by capital as a 'reserve army' of labour. These approaches provide two ways in which women are located within Marxist interpretations and understandings of state welfare but the purely economic focus on the reproduction of the worker rather than the reproduction of people did not provide all the answers. For instance, it offers no explanation as to why it is that women, not men, do the majority of work within the home and family and it also makes the public world of work and state the prime focus, ignoring the ways in which the public and private spheres are inextricably linked. Yet, long before the Second Wave of feminism, work on social policy existed which did address the experiences of the private aspects of life (Pember Reeves, 1913).

## Regime types

An influential approach on the studying of welfare systems has been the numerous comparative studies. One such approach has been to look at the ways countries cluster along certain factors, perhaps the best known of these being Gösta Esping-Andersen's (1990, 1996)

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work on the three worlds of welfare capitalism. Esping-Andersen's analysis results in three different versions of social welfare: social democratic, liberal and conservative (see Table 5.1).

Of course, none of this work stands alone, and Marshall's notions of citizenship, and the class focus of Marxism has been combined with these regime types (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Korpi and Palme, 1998) to reveal linkages between politics and social rights. Marxism has pointed out that many of the gains of state welfare have resulted from workers' movements demanding social rights. Esping-Andersen (1990) argues that to understand the ways in which welfare systems affect the relationships between social classes it is necessary to measure the level of social rights. The ultimate social right being complete *decommodification* of labour. Decommodification means the ability to maintain one's lifestyle without recourse to selling one's labour in the employment market. In such a situation workers are protected somewhat from the demands of capitalism by being protected from the pressures of capitalism to certain degrees.

## Feminist approaches

Feminists have focused on the dynamics between public and private spheres, the shifting boundary between the two and the interdependence between them. As such, decommodification has been critiqued as being inherently male – being focused on a measure of social rights derived from, and related to, the degree of participation in the labour market. It has been suggested that to use decommodification as a true measure of social rights requires some modification. Basically, the addition of the consideration of (1) access to paid work and (2) the ability to create and maintain independent households (Orloff, 1993). This is important for both men and women but particularly for women as the ability to live outside of marriage or cohabitation is necessary for women. Without freedom from economic dependency women are not free, in a gendered labour market, to make real choices about entering into partnerships.

Of course, as Jan Pahl (1989), Christine Delphy and Diana Leonard (1992) and others have shown, financial

**Table 5.1** Features of Esping-Andersen's Regime Types

| Regime Type and Examples                              | Features  |
|---|---|
| Liberal:<br>USA, Canada, Australia, UK                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Differentiate between people based on whether they are able to self support through the market or need state support.</li> <li>▶ Services provided by the market as well as state.</li> <li>▶ Few alternatives to participating in the labour market as welfare is at low levels/limited.</li> </ul> |
| Social Democratic:<br>Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ All citizens covered by state provision.</li> <li>▶ Universal, egalitarian and significant public services.</li> <li>▶ Decommodification of labour – that is, alternatives to labour market participation exist and provide a sufficient standard of living.</li> </ul>                              |
| Conservative:<br>Austria, Germany, France, Italy      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ All citizens covered by state provision.</li> <li>▶ Retain class differences, inegalitarian with few public services.</li> <li>▶ Rights to benefits based on employment.</li> </ul>  |



## Gendered assumptions in the study of social policy

resources are not always equally available to all family members, sometimes based on sex and sometimes on other factors such as age. Ruth Lister (1994) uses the term *defamilialisation* to act as the measure of social rights. Unlike decommodification, defamilialisation is 'the degree to which individual adults can uphold a socially acceptable standard of living, independently of family relationships, either through paid work or social security' (Lister, 1994: 32).

### Stop and think 5.3

Think about decommodification and defamilialisation. Without looking back briefly outline each. Now check your answers.

Feminist social policy has a long history, which indicates that mainstream social policy analysis has had this information available, just not made use of it. The political and social work of women such as Maud Pember Reeves (1913), Margery Spring Rice, Eleanor Rathbone and of organisations such as the Women's Cooperative Guild in the first half of the twentieth century in Britain provides this evidence.

Although there are many feminist theoretical positions it is possible to summarise feminist views of social welfare. In summary, feminist critiques of state welfare take account of social welfare relationships in both the private and public spheres, acknowledging the linkages between the two spheres and that actions in one sphere have implications in the other. In other words, feminist analyses reject the dualism character-

ising classical approaches in which economic and social policy, the private and the public, are deemed to operate independently of each other. Treating these worlds as unconnected enables other non-feminist theorists to ignore the contribution the domestic economy makes to sustaining and reproducing accepted public welfare relationships. In addition, it also ignores the role of the reproduction, not just of workers – that is their social reproduction – but the actual biological reproduction of people.

Not only can it be seen that welfare states reflect and reinforce gender and family assumed norms, but it has also been shown that social policies can be used to reproduce other social relations such as between social classes and between people of different ethnic origins. Fiona Williams (1989) has clearly shown that there have been two dominant themes in British social policy: themes of nation and of the family. She notes the ways in which reforms of social welfare were introduced in Britain to preserve existing power relations rather than to change them, these being the power relations of imperialism, capitalism and patriarchy. In this light, Williams argues that the welfare systems of western industrialised states have not only institutionalised gender relations (which she describes as patriarchal) but also institutionalised racism. This racism has operated through denying certain people access to services and benefits through differential provisions and treatment and the maintenance of immigration controls. However, in some countries indigenous people were also not included or treated differentially – see World in Focus 5.1 for examples of such cases.

### World in focus 5.1

#### Racism and social policy

Some of the earliest examples of welfare provisions from the state include services to mothers to ensure infant health and well-being. However, the well-being of some babies was deemed more important than that of

others. As O'Connor, Orloff and Shaver (1999: 37) note: 'In the United States, Australia and Canada, maternalist programs – mothers' pensions, maternal health programs, and the like – were not consistently accessible to African-Americans, other women of colour and indigenous women.'

In addition, even where non-white women could receive benefits implementation practices resulted in lack of support. In the USA in the 1950s illegitimacy and welfare reduction had become a national cause with many believing that Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) went to

## Social policy

## World in focus 5.1 continued

the undeserving, associating illegitimacy with African-American mothers. As such many:

states made concerted efforts to purge black families from welfare rolls, especially through laws withdrawing support from illegitimate children. Louisiana's 1960 law stated: 'In no instance shall assistance be granted to any person who is living with his or her mother if the mother has had an illegitimate child after a check has been received from the

Welfare Department unless and until proof satisfactory to the Parish Board of Public Welfare has been presented showing that the mother has ceased illicit relationship and is maintaining suitable home.' A Gallup Poll taken soon after the passage of this legislation reported that a majority found it acceptable to withhold federal support or food money from illegitimate black babies. But facts and social perceptions often fail to match.

In 1959, 30 per cent of unwed white mothers who kept their children received ADC grants – nearly twice as many as black unwed mothers. Nonetheless, ADC became stigmatized as a black program because of the growing numbers of black recipients. Meanwhile, immigrant women, especially the increased numbers who entered the country illegally, could not even apply for such assistance.

(Boris, 1995: 172)

## Model making

In order to understand welfare systems and variations several attempts have been made to devise ideal type models. These have been found to be weak in their predictions of how welfare systems treat women and men (Sainsbury, 1996), the first problem being that most of the models developed have made assumptions that gender is not an issue and that welfare systems treat women and men the same. Ironically too, it is clear that there have been times where welfare policies have been specifically designed to benefit one gender rather than another. For example, early welfare reforms in the USA included protective measures for women and children at work, pensions for mothers and public health care for children but did not include social insurance schemes for working men akin to those being introduced in western Europe at the same time (Skocpol, 1992). In more recent times it has been shown that advances in welfare provision have had a beneficial, even emancipatory, effect for women (O'Connor 1993; Orloff, 1993) leading some to discuss states in terms of the potential for 'woman-friendliness' (Hernes, 1987).

Only a few years ago, mainstream comparative research and gender-sensitive work on welfare states were almost mutually exclusive sets. The result of which was that there was little systematically comparative work on gender and welfare states (O'Connor *et*

*al.*, 1999: 10); see A Closer Look 5.5 for a feminist critique of mainstream modelling.

The advantage of model building is that it allows analysts to look beyond the features and idiosyncrasies of any one state and to see if particular variations in type result in specific outcomes. In contrast to the

## A closer look 5.5

## Making gender visible

Sainsbury (1996) summarises the achievements of feminist critiques of mainstream models:

1. brought gender into focus by making women visible in analyses which focus on individuals, households, occupations and/or social classes;
2. displayed how social programmes, policies and rights have been gendered;
3. shown how mainstream concepts and assumptions are gendered;
4. emphasised the interrelationships amongst family, state and market;
5. re-examined the analyses of welfare which focus upon the ways in which social programmes and policies redistribute income and services amongst sectors of the population, usually by class, generation or other social group, to include the distribution between sexes.

mainstream comparative approaches which have used measures of state provision, extent of state spending on welfare, whether (and to what extent) coverage is based on citizenship or occupational status or the relationship between the state and the market as the basis for devising typologies, feminist comparative research has included analyses of *unpaid* work. [Hotlink → **Work and Leisure (Chapter 14)**]

## Modelling the ideology of male breadwinner

We have already looked at the ways in which the British welfare state reflected gender role norms of the time of its creation, with men being constructed as workers and women as dependant wives. The result of such constructions is that when in need of social assistance that assistance was to be offered in ways which reflected the man's 'job' to provide financial security for the family. In terms of employment this was expressed in pay policies which paid men a 'family wage' and justified paying women less, for they had, supposedly, no equivalent family responsibilities. In terms of social welfare it permitted differential rates of social security to be paid to men and women, youths and adults. Feminist work has shown how women's social entitlements have been as wives and the implications for social provision in many states and comparative work has been able to reveal variations in the breadwinner model across states (Lewis, 1992; Sainsbury, 1996).

For the Breadwinner Model to exist certain characteristics must be in place, which are:

1. A familial ideology supporting and celebrating marriage.
2. Traditional sexual division of labour within the marriage; husband being responsible for providing for the family through his employment, this making him the 'Head of the household'.
3. The role and responsibility of the wife is to ensure the social reproduction of the husband and to care for non-independent others within the family, most likely children. This role is unpaid.
4. The state recognises the family as the unit not the individual and benefits are paid to support this unit

and taxes collected which recognise this unit, not the individuals within it. Benefits are paid to the 'Head of the household' and embody notions of the family wage. Taxes are calculated based on the income of the household with deductions permitted for dependants.

Not only are social policies imbued with the Breadwinner ideology, so too are fiscal policies in the structuring of the tax system and also employment policies in the sense that men, given their responsibilities, have to be given priority in the workplace over women and their earnings have to be sufficient to cover the costs of keeping a family.

The Breadwinner Model has been employed primarily for two purposes amongst social policists. Firstly, to provide a focus for analysing the extent of gender inequity within and across states – though disagreement exists as to the categorization of certain states (see Controversy 5.1). Secondly, to act as the starting point to the development of other models of social welfare which, if enacted, would lead to more gender equitable social welfare. A major influence in this area has been Individual models, such as that of Sainsbury (1996).

## Individual model

The Individual Model is the polar opposite of the Breadwinner Model as it makes no assumptions about family form, providing no social welfare benefits to support or encourage marriage or any other family form. Within this model household labour is shared between partners as is paid work. As both parents are earners and both are carers both have the same entitlements to benefits – not through their relationship to anyone else but due to their membership of society, their citizenship. Correspondingly, they are treated as individuals in terms of contributions and qualifications and the 'unit' which makes contributions and receives benefits is the individual not the household. Likewise, the tax system does not provide allowances for spouses and both are taxed as individuals sharing whatever tax relief exists for their dependent children. A further difference from the Breadwinner Model is in the area of social care and reproduction; in the

## Controversy 5.1

### Classifying the breadwinner states

Lewis (1992) argues that the male breadwinner model has been the basis of all modern welfare states, but that it has been adapted in different ways in different societies. Her study examines Britain, Ireland, France and Sweden. She examines the way women have been treated as wives and mothers in terms of social security, services for working mothers and women's position in the labour market generally. On this basis she describes Britain and Ireland as *strong breadwinner* states, classifies France as a *modified breadwinner* state and Sweden as a *weakened breadwinner* state.

Sainsbury (1996) uses a different approach and reaches some differences in her conclusions. Using both the male breadwinner model and its opposing ideal type – an *individual* model – also on four countries, in her case: Britain, USA, the Netherlands and Sweden. She concludes that Sweden has *never* been a male breadwinner state. Rather, she argues that Swedish social policies were historically grounded in a strong emphasis upon citizenship (male and female) as the basis to entitlements. So, rather than representing, as Lewis argues, a male breadwinner state weakened by women's entry into the labour force, Sweden, from the beginning of social welfare, created policies which weakened the influence of the breadwinner male. Sainsbury cites as examples policies from the 1930s which provided comprehensive benefits for mothers, e.g. maternity grants, child benefit, collective care.

Individual Model this not only has an element of pay but also has a strong state involvement which is absent in the Breadwinner scenario.

The Individual Model opens up other ways of analysing welfare regimes in terms of gender. Further, welfare systems which contain all, or some, aspects of the Individual Model are more positive towards women's independence from men. Likewise, the Individual Model provides a place for recognising the role of men in caregiving. Nonetheless, it too remains rather prescriptive in that amongst its characteristics is an ideology which supports shared roles for husband and wife (or their unwed equivalents). As such, it implicitly reinforces the hegemony of a household and

family structure of dual-earning heterosexuals. Not all families fit this, for example migrant women with their children in another country, lesbian couples, single parents, extended families, amongst others. In fact, the presence of migrant women workers can be seen as making it possible for a dual-earning household to operate, through the provision of paid care (Williams, 1989).

### New world, new model?

Earlier it was noted that welfare states are a product of industrial capitalist states and that their structure encoded the 'norms' of industrial capitalism into welfare systems, for example with the family wage. Yet, this is not the world as it is today; in many societies the labour market does not pay a family wage and many families need two adults to be earning to survive. In addition, as commented upon above, the 'family' in post-industrial society can no longer be assumed to be any one thing [[Hotlink](#) → [Family \(Chapter 11\)](#)]. So, it has been argued that a new world of less stable employment and more diverse family forms needs a new form of welfare state (Fraser, 1997). Fraser's argument is that such a welfare state must support a new gender order, that of gender equity. She examines two feminist models – the first where women also become breadwinners – a universal *breadwinner* – a second whereby both sexes share the care work – *caregiver parity*. Elements of both of these models are visible in modern social welfare systems. The United States is perhaps the furthest along in terms of achieving Universal Breadwinner by increasing the number of women in employment. Aspects of Caregiver Parity are visible in the practice of most western European states, with the Dutch 'Combination Model' being a good example – [[Hotlink](#) → [Work and Leisure \(Chapter 14\)](#), [World in Focus 14.3](#)] By supporting informal care work, through caregiver allowances such as the British Home Responsibilities Pension, gender equality can be increased. A major criticism of these alternative models to male breadwinner is that they do little to change the role of men. Gender equality can be increased in the Universal Breadwinner by making women more like men in terms of employment patterns; gender equality in terms of entitlements to pensions and benefits can

## Key debates in gender and social policy

be increased by recognising caregiving as a contribution to the welfare state. Again, however, nothing changes for men, this time it is the state that changes. Fraser (1997) flips all of this on its head and suggests that it's not that women need to have work patterns like men but that men need to have work and care patterns like women – a *universal caregiver* model. The elements of this model need to include:

1. All jobs designed in such a way as to allow for the combination of paid work and informal unpaid work; there would be leave for both men and women to support their parenting role.
2. Care would be performed within the household, which need not be either heterosexual nor nuclear.
3. The state would provide finance and services to support care done in the household.

### Stop and think 5.4

What reasons might there be to explain why in many western societies aspects of the Universal Breadwinner model seem to be more common than the Universal Caregiver?

## Key debates in gender and social policy

All areas of social policy have been subjected to a gendered analysis, from health care to education. As these topics have their own chapters here we will focus on the fundamental debates around the issues of care work and family. This overlaps with the relationship of both these areas and paid employment and you should

read this section in conjunction with the chapters on Work and Leisure (Chapter 14) and Family (Chapter 11). A further key issue, citizenship, has already been discussed.

## Care

Hernes (1984) points out that many tasks previously conducted within the private sphere, the family, are now in the public domain. They may be provided by the state (as in formal education), regulated by the state (as in childminding) or supported by the state (such as universal child benefits). What this means is that with the advent of state welfare there has been a shift in family–state relationships. In what follows we will trace the provision of care in Britain, or rather the debates and discourses on care in Britain, to show how gender norms have shaped, reshaped and been shaped by social policy.

### Care as cause of women's dependency

The fact that the majority of care work, be it for dependent children, dependent elders and other dependent adults, is still performed by women is shown across nations (see Table 5.2), affects women's lives in ways that it does not affect men's. Should care not be the starting point for social policy rather than services, and debates, on the periphery (Graham, 1988)?

In some cases, care of small children is only possible through either the parent/s combining paid work with care (for example Britain, the Netherlands) [**Hotlink** → **Work and Leisure (Chapter 14)**] or concentrating on care alone or work alone (e.g. the USA, though only a few have the luxury of choice). In a few places the support offered to parents allows a real

Table 5.2 Sex of carers across the European Community

|       | Denmark | Spain | France | Ireland | Austria | Sweden | UK   | UK   |
|-------|---------|-------|--------|---------|---------|--------|------|------|
| Year  | 2002    | 1999  | 1999   | 2000    | 2000    | 2000   | 1989 | 1995 |
| Men   | 20      | 26    | 36     | 33      | 20      | 27     | 35   | 42   |
| Women | 80      | 74    | 64     | 67      | 80      | 72     | 65   | 58   |

Source: Derived from Table 23 Distribution of informal carers by sex in %, Grammenos (July 2003).

## Social policy

choice to be made regarding care and paid work (Sweden). In all of these cases, however, it appears that the majority responsibility for raising children remains in the female gender role (Marchbank, 2000).

Not surprising then that care work has been seen as a cause of women's dependency, either on the state or on individual men, and examined as such. Marxist feminists, seeking a way to improve women's lives, asked whether they should campaign to increase the services and benefits women received from the state or increase women's independence from both men and the state by increasing women's paid work. Seeking independence meant for some, such as Mary McIntosh (1981), the latter position was preferred. But what room then for women who are not free to enter the labour market? The answer lay in the public provision, not of benefits and pensions for caring but of caring work. There are two problems with this: firstly, even with increasing the state's role in care, the care work which remains within the community, remains as women's responsibility (Finch and Groves, 1980; Finch, 1984), with three times as many women as men caring for dependent adults in Britain in 1980 (EOC, 1980) though in recent years this has become more balanced. Secondly, this approach ignores the emotional element involved in providing social care for family members; as Hilary Graham (1988) makes clear, care is about labour *and* about love.

Ignoring the emotional role underplays the identity of many carers, that is, it minimises and undervalues

their role. In addition, describing care in the terms of industrial economics and labour market participation access limits the debate to women's access to paid employment, not women's access to care. As such, as British social policy moved away from institutional care towards community care to replace state care from the 1950s to the 1980s, this was viewed as a threat to equality between the sexes for, 'community care equals care by the family, and in practice care by the family equals care by women' (Finch and Groves, 1980: 494). As such, some feminists argued against increasing community care and for new forms of residential care (Dalley, 1988). Unfortunately, this was done without considering that many of those in need of care and are women, especially elder and disabled women, were in support of care in the community (Morris, 1991).

State support for caring work has disadvantaged both women and men due to the gender norms inherent within the welfare system. It was not until 1998 that the allowance paid to husbands to support them caring for invalid wives was made available to married women in Britain as it was assumed that caring for a husband was a wifely duty. Likewise, the assumption that men need more help than women in caring is visible in findings that show that male carers received more help and received it earlier than female carers due to their supposed other responsibilities (EOC, 1984: 31). Even when social policies recognise men's caring role, such as the European Union's granting of

## World in focus 5.2

### Gender of carers

Men's role as carers has been increasingly recognised as has their contribution. In 1980 in Britain, three times as many women as men were carers but by 1995, 42 per cent of carers were men. Yet women still perform the majority of care work. As Eurostat explains:

Data in Great Britain indicates that women were more likely to

be carers than men were but the difference was not marked, 14% compared to 11%. However, since there are more women than men in the total adult population of Great Britain, it is true that the number of women caring is considerably greater than that of men, 3.3 million compared with 2.4 million. This gives 42% men and 58% women.

Grammenos (2003: 87)

In Spain . . . there is a significant difference concerning the origin of help between elderly men and women with disabilities. About 45% of men receive assistance from a partner and 21% from a daughter. In comparison, the rates for women are 15% and 37% respectively. This might be partly due to the longer life expectancy of women.

Grammenos (2003: 89)

Source: Grammenos (2003).

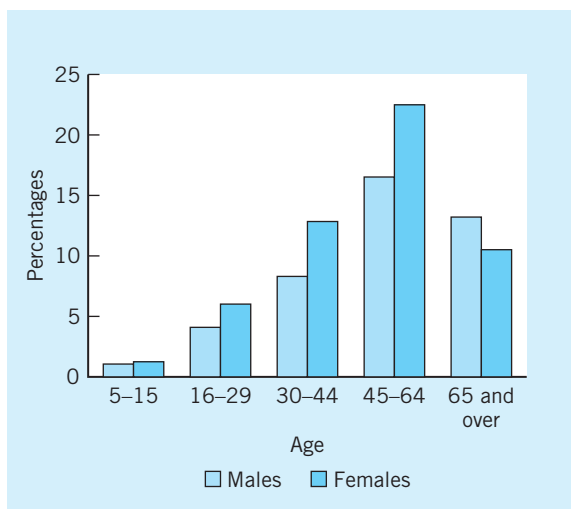
the right to all fathers to receive parental leave to care for their children, they often are not as generous as those for women. For example, paternity leave is a legal right for British fathers as is maternity leave for mothers, but only mothers receive payments from both employers (forced to by the state) and the government. This might be assumed to explain why many men do not take such leave from work, and why even in countries where such leave is paid, such as Norway, the majority of fathers still prefer to go to work. Many men are simply not aware of this right – over a quarter of men surveyed across the European Union claimed to be unaware of their right to parental leave (European Opinion Research Group, 2004), with the least informed Europeans being Irish and Portuguese men (only 57 per cent of both knew about parental leave). See Figures 5.2, 5.3 and 5.4 which show the rates of uptake, reasons for these rates and opinions of men on how to increase uptake.

Where men have been disadvantaged is in the same assumption that women are naturally more caring. Look back to what the F4Jsuperheroes are protesting about. They are protesting that they have no access to their children, no rights to determine which schools,

what activities their children attend. Women tend to win ‘custody’ of children, that is, unless they are lesbians (Charles, 2000: 181). So although British family law states that access decisions are to be made based on the best interests of the child, organisations such as Fathers 4 Justice claim that the courts are biased towards children remaining with their mothers. It is not just in the UK that such a movement exists; in the USA since the 1990s a men’s movement [Hotlink → **Political Science (Chapter 8)**] the Fatherhood Responsibility Movement mobilises around the issue of the need for fathers to be present in families (see World in Focus 5.3). Time now to turn to the area of family policy, but first stop and think.

### Stop and think 5.5

Think about the care you have experienced, this could be the care you received as a child as well as the care and support you both receive and provide now. Who provided care for you? For whom do you provide care? Make a list of all the care roles in your life and one of another person, one who differs from you in generation. Are there gendered elements in these roles?



**Figure 5.2** Carers by age and sex, England and Wales, 2001

Source: National Statistics Office <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/ccil/nugget.asp?id=925>

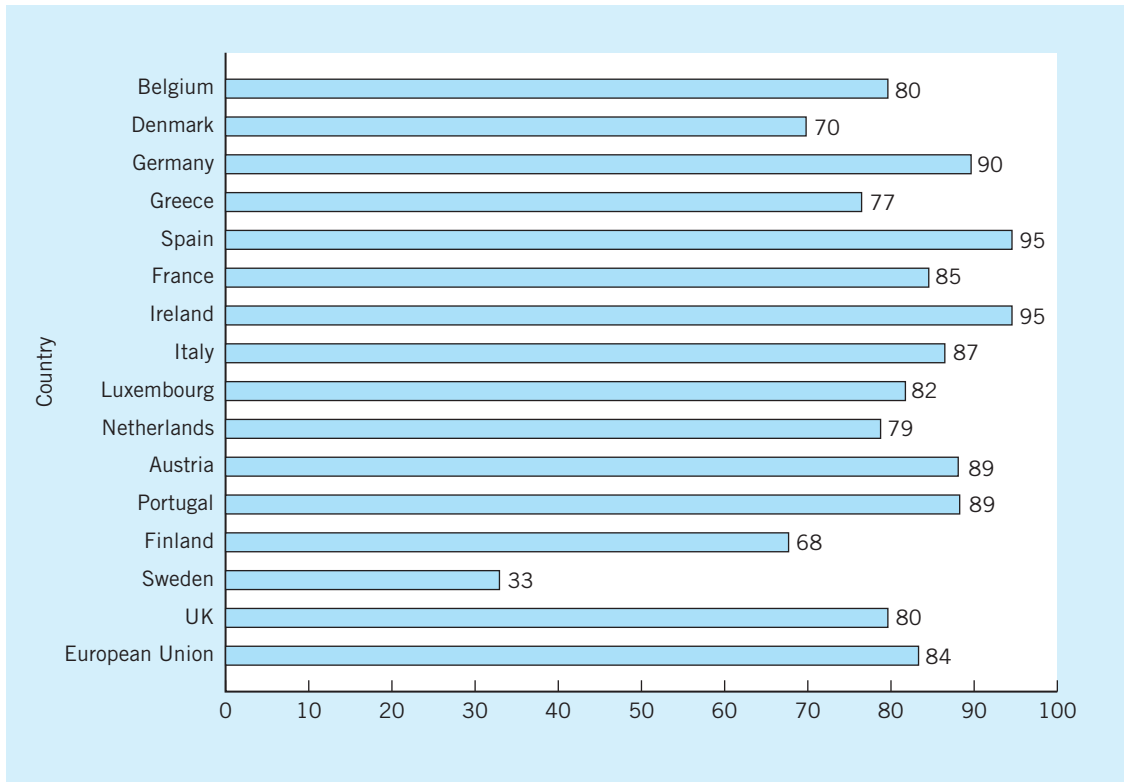
### World in focus 5.3

#### Fatherhood Responsibility Movement

Since the mid-1990s, the self-proclaimed FRM has managed to establish fatherhood at the center of U.S. national politics. This movement claims that fathers have become marginalised in the family, with catastrophic societal consequences. Increasing numbers of female-headed households as well as shifting conditions for work, family formation, and care have allegedly contributed to the redefinition of the family into ‘mother and child’. According to the FRM, fathers are thus marginalised and the family has become feminized.

(Gavanas, 2004: 248)

## Social policy



**Figure 5.3** Parental leave: Rate of Non Uptake by Fathers, Europe

Source: European Opinion Research Group, 2004

## The gendered family

### Stop and think 5.6

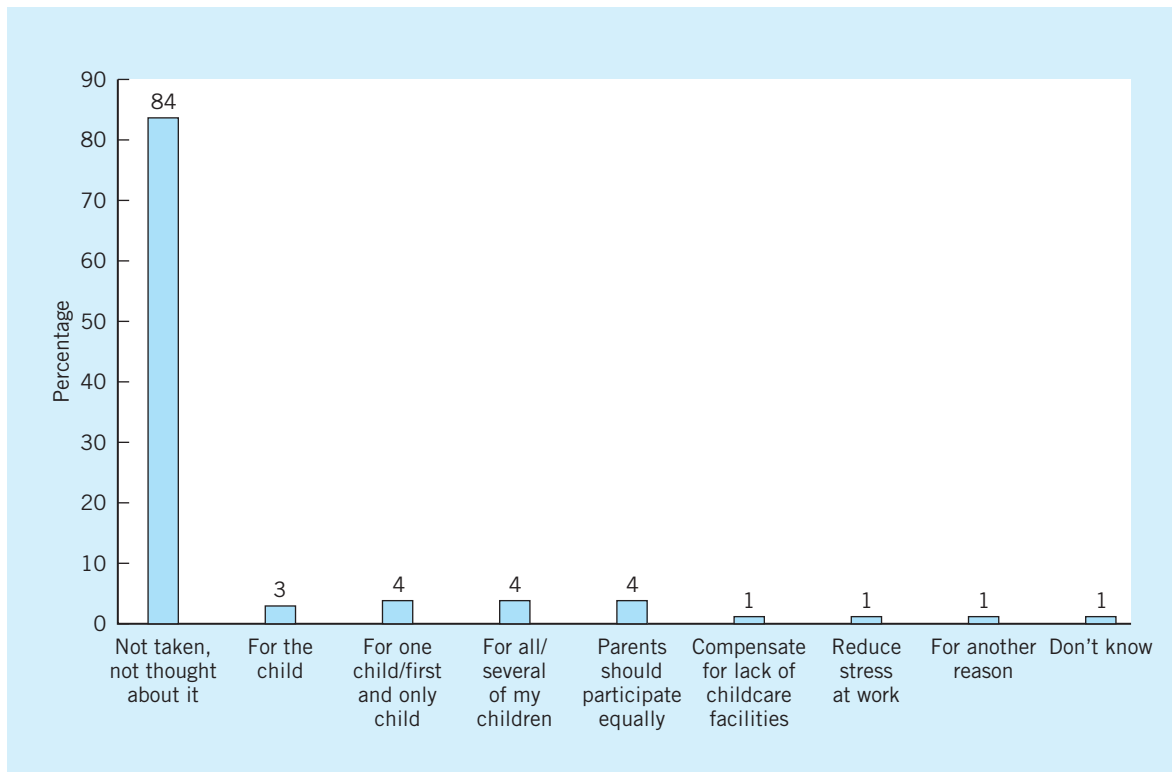
Which of these would you list under family policy?  
Family Allowances, Child Support Agency, Working Families Tax Credit, Marriage Laws, Immigration rules, Income Tax?

No doubt you found it easier to place some of these under Family Policy more easily than others. However, the way a 'family' is viewed shapes policy more widely, from marriage laws to who is permitted to reside in the country and who can receive state support. [**Hotlink** → **Family (Chapter 11)**].

We have already pointed out that the British welfare state, and all others, is based upon assumptions

regarding gender and family form. Look back to the different models. It has been shown that for welfare systems to treat men and women equitably in terms of the division of labour and finances requires that the relationship needs to be between the state and the individual not the family. Yet, as can be seen, Britain is defined as a breadwinner state, as such even the system of social security – that is, income maintenance – becomes family policy. How does it do this? Well, in a welfare system that considers the access an applicant for income maintenance has to other resources, such as the earnings of a partner, an *implicit* family policy is automatic. What's more is that the implementation of policies such as cohabitation rules (whereby males and females are assumed to be economically intertwined if they live in the same place) reinforces not just heterosexuality but also a nuclear family form.





**Figure 5.4** Parental leave: Reasons for Uptake by Fathers, Europe

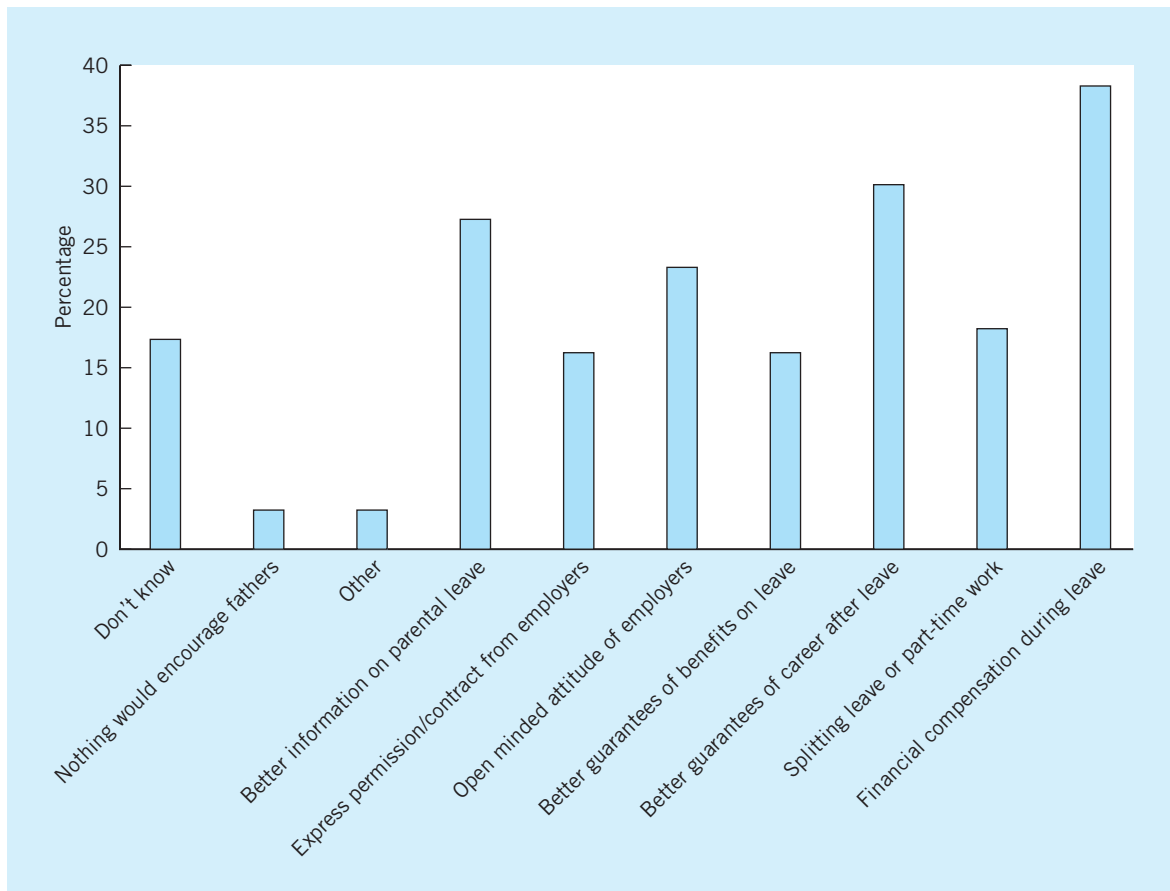
Source: European Opinion Research Group, 2004

Social policies can be used to shape family forms, this can be/is done via a system of rewards and penalties. For example, many welfare systems provide tax allowances and benefits/pensions for dependant spouses and for children. In some cases these can act to discourage family breakdown or even women's participation in the workforce. An example of this was the Dutch dependants' allowance which was payable to the father and included not just an allowance for a wife and juvenile children, but also for daughters who stayed at home to assist in the household to the age of 26 (Sainsbury, 1996).

When considering penalties the first areas to come to mind are those policies which operate to make the breakdown of the family costly, for example spousal support and child support, not to mention the legal costs. However, these are the penalties that affect the 'normal' family – that is, the family that fits with social

norms, rather than the average family. Penalties can operate to encourage the 'normal' family to remain that way but operate differently with other family forms. Likewise, what are rewards for the 'normal' family are, by their absence, penalties to other families. For example, in a system where marriage is supported by tax allowances, unmarried couples, heterosexual or homosexual, are financially treated as individuals and have a greater tax bill. Where the heterosexual couple has a choice, in the majority of welfare systems, the homosexual couple does not (as civil partnerships and gay marriage still only exist in a minority of countries [[Hotlink → Family \(Chapter 11\)](#)]). The privileging of heterosexuality is a gender issue, for it reinforces gender messages about appropriate masculinity and femininity [[Hotlink → Sex and Sexuality \(Chapter 15\)](#)], [Hotlink → Gendered Perspectives → Theoretical Issues \(Chapter 1\)](#)]

## Social policy



**Figure 5.5** Parental leave: Ways to Increase Uptake by Fathers, Europe

Source: European Opinion Research Group, 2004

## A critical look 5.3

### Being careful about gender

It is widely accepted amongst academics and other commentators that the British welfare state has had a strong gender order reflected both in policy and practice. However, policy makers have been careful to ensure that assumptions about men and women are not blatantly accepted into the text of policy. A shift is visible away from assumed masculine and feminine roles as seen in the Beveridge Report to more gender neutral terms. This is clear from the Child Support Agency. Set up in the early 1990s the Agency was

careful not to refer to 'mothers' and 'fathers' but to two new categories: 'parent with care' and 'parent without care'. This blurred the fact that in the vast majority of cases the former category consisted of women and the latter of men.

By the twenty-first century the use of gender neutral language has become less coy. Government sponsored TV adverts to encourage people to apply for Children's Tax Credit described how the tax credit worked. That is, working parents pay tax and an allowance is paid back to the 'parent with majority responsibility for care, we realise that in most cases this will be the mother'.

## Conclusion

In this chapter we have covered a number of areas: social policy has been defined and the gendered assumptions in both the practice and study of social welfare have been explained. We have presented summaries of different, traditional, approaches to social policy and shown where these have ‘missed the gender point’. Feminist work really opened up social policy to examine the ‘norms’ of systems and those who study them. By providing summaries of alternative models of social welfare and of the debates on two key issues it has been shown that social policy cannot be studied or practised without a deep understanding of the gender order and its variations across generation and place.

### Further reading

Diane Sainsbury (ed.) (1999), *Gender and Welfare State Regimes*, Oxford, Oxford University Press. A collection of work by leading researchers in this field which examines, explains and analyses the construction of gender in various government welfare schemes across a number of countries.

Julia O'Connor, Ann S. Orloff, Ann and Sheila Shaver (1999), *States, Markets, Families: Gender, Liberalism and Social Policy in Australia, Canada, Great Britain and the United States*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. Although this is quite an advanced text it is full of detail and clearly shows the linkages between the market, family form and government policies in a thematic and comparative way.

Jennifer Marchbank (2000), *Women, Power and Policy: Comparative Studies of Childcare*, London, Routledge.

Chapters 3 and 4 of this book detail the politics of care around the issue of public daycare in Britain historically and across the European Union and beyond contemporarily. Attention is paid to the ways in which the priorities of different states and discourses shape childcare policies.

*Critical Social Policy: A Journal of Theory and Practice in Social Welfare*, Sage. This journal is always useful for discussions of race, class and gender. Especially useful issues are: No. 87, May 2006 which is themed around issues of children, families, gender and has lots on masculinity; No. 22, February 2002 which contains articles on work, life, care policies from, amongst other countries, the Netherlands, Australia, the USA and Britain.

### Websites

Intute, <http://www.intute.ac.uk>

A wonderful gateway to many sources of information on all aspects of social policy.

UK National Statistics, <http://www.statistics.gov.uk>

This excellent site not only provides details of statistical returns of Government surveys but also links to useful publications, such as *Labour Market Trends*.

Robert Gordon University – An Introduction to Social Policy, <http://www2.rgu.ac.uk/publicpolicy/introduction/wstate.htm>

An award winning website which does exactly what it says – it provides an introduction, brief but accurate, to the main areas of social policy required in early undergraduate study.

EUROPA – European Commission for Employment and Social Affairs, <http://europa.eu.int>

An excellent source of information about the member states of the EU.

## End of chapter activity

### Multiple choice questions

- Decommodification means:
  - not able to live without having to perform paid work
  - able to live without having to perform paid work
  - not having many possessions
  - living on one's partner's earnings
- In a male breadwinner system the husband:
  - is viewed as the sole/main earner
  - is viewed as the sole/main carer
  - shares care and work roles
  - is a baker

## End of chapter activity continued

3. Defamilialisation means being able to maintain a socially acceptable standard of living independent of:
  - (a) family relationships
  - (b) state assistance
  - (c) paid work
  - (d) a lottery win
4. The term social policy means:
  - (a) legislation on social welfare matters
  - (b) the academic study of social welfare
  - (c) both
  - (d) neither
5. Feminists have made gender visible in social policy by:
  - (a) showing how social policy programmes are gendered
  - (b) emphasising the interconnections amongst family, state and market
  - (c) bringing gender into focus
  - (d) all the above
6. What percentage of men surveyed knew about parental leave rights in the European Community?
  - (a) 10%
  - (b) 25%
  - (c) 50%
  - (d) 75%
7. What does 'normal' family mean in social policy?
  - (a) average
  - (b) married
  - (c) conforming to social norms
  - (d) headed by Norman and Norma
8. Which Superhero is your favourite?
  - (a) Batman
  - (b) Robin
  - (c) Superman
  - (d) Spiderman

## Answers

Stop and think 5.4: High cost to the state, and therefore the tax payer, of servicing Universal Caregiver. Plus Universal Breadwinner can be presented as a gender equal system, i.e. all have to have 'male' work role. As such, the latter is usually less politically difficult.

Multiple choice questions:

1. (b)
2. (a)
3. (a)
4. (c)
5. (d)
6. (d)
7. (c)
8. Wonder Woman!