OPTIONS FOR FUTURE WORK ON CHILD WELL-BEING AND CHILD POLICIES

3rd Expert consultation on Child Well-Being, Paris
25 November 2015

Olivier Thévenon, D.Phil
Social Policy Economist, OECD Social Policy Division
Substantial changes in family living arrangements over the past decades, resulting from the increase in women’s labour force participation and from changes in family and gender relations.

Changes in family life contribute to increase inequalities?

- Changes in family behaviour are associated with gains in household resources for families with highly educated parents, while they lead to losses in resources for children born to less educated parents.
- Need to look at consequences of key changes in demographic and intra-family behaviour, which vary with socio-economic status => increase inequalities?

Policy responses are diverse: work-family reconciliation policies, support to sole and “non-married” parents, child maintenance systems, practices regarding child custody, etc.

Whether and how these policies contribute to slow the increase in inequalities among children is still unclear.
**Former OECD work**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item 5</th>
<th>Working Party on Social Policy 26-27 November 2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

- **Family Database**
  - Trends in family living arrangements, household composition, parental work, child poverty

- **Doing Better for Children (2009), How’s Life for children (2015):**
  - Statistical portrait of Child well-being, but little focus variations by socio-economic status

- **Doing Better for Families (2011)**
  - Influence of early maternal employment on child development (Australia, Canada, Denmark, United Kingdom, United States)
  - Families poverty risk
  - Sole parents and child maintenance systems

- **Divided we stand (2011):**
  - Impact of assortative mating on income inequality (not the main driver of income inequalities), but:
    - have not look at the impact on child poverty or other child outcomes
    - Did not look at the influence of other demographic and family changes
• What we know from past cross-national studies:
  – Changes in demographic have overall contributed to reduce child poverty (esp. the aging of parents, and the increase in their educational attainment); while the increase in sole parenthood increase poverty risk.

  – Maternal employment strongly reduces poverty risk in both couple and sole parent families

  – Mixed impact of public income transfers

*Chen and Corak, 2008 – changes in poverty rates in the 1990s*
*Whiteford and Adema, 2007*
Child poverty: questions for future research (1)

- **Do changes in demographic behaviour affect child poverty?**
  - Changes in partnership formation
  - Changes in childbearing behaviour (drop of teenage pregnancies, postponement of motherhood, reduction of family size)
  - Rise in parental separation
    - Has the influence of demographic factors on child poverty increased over time?
  - Role of parental employment to protect children from poverty
    - Does the rise in in-work poverty affect the protective role of parental employment

- **How do policies child poverty trends?**
  - Cash family, social assistance and spending on basic social protection (healthcare, unemployment)
  - Key child-level services (healthcare, nutrition programs, childcare, preschool)
  - Family planning policies
  - Work–family reconciliation policies (in-work benefits, leave entitlements, childcare services)
    - How do these policies interact with economic development?

_Pooled time-series data on child poverty, demographic, employment and policy trends_
Child poverty: questions for future research (2)

- What are the « socio-economic profiles » of child poverty? Are their characteristics changing over time?
  - Household/demographic composition, income composition, parental employment status/intensity

- To which extent is income poverty linked to other aspects of child deprivation?

Include as much as possible the experience of “emerging countries”:
  - To analyse the relationships between policies and economic development and to look at how different policies interact

Household survey data
Family Settings and Child Outcomes

• How does family life affect child outcomes? :
  – Income (consumption goods and childcare) / Parental employment situation
  – Parenting activities (type, time and quality), including fathers’ involvement
  – Child interaction with sibling and step-sibling
  – Home environment
  – Use/quality of formal care services

• Do changes in family settings over childhood (as, for instance, due to parental separation then re-partnering) have cumulative effects on child outcomes?
  – Are effects persisting over time or fading out?
  – Differences by gender?

• Can early programmes of formal care eliminate or prevent adverse effects of changes in family environment?

Longitudinal child cohort data: Australia, Canada, Denmark, United Kingdom, United States....France (?); Ireland (?), Italy (?), New Zealand (?)

• Develop comparative information on families living and care arrangements and on their institutional context
Consequences of family dissolution and policy responses

• The « Costs» of separation depends on :
  – Solution adopted for child custody
  – Payment of child alimony by one parent to the other – non-payment rates are often high.
  – Child maintenance systems, and other Tax-benefit support to sole parent
  – Housing conditions of resident and non-resident parent
  – Indirect « costs » due to the effect of separation on employment situation of parents
  – Gender, marital status

• How do child support systems work?
  – Role of legal obligation, court decisions, child/parent support agencies
  – Rules applied to fix the amount of child alimony, and consequences of changing rules on the living standards of split families.
  – Country practices to enforce payment of child alimony

• What is the effect of parental separation on living standards of families?
  – Micro-simulation models to estimate the effect of child alimony payments/child custody arrangements on household living standards, and at the aggregate level on child poverty and/or on public spending on child maintenance benefit.
  – Short- and medium-term consequences of parental separation on split families living standards, as compared to « intact » families - using longitudinal data.
What are the important issues missing?

What should be (policy-relevant) research priorities?

What might be feasible, given data availability and limitations?
Thank you and further information

3rd Expert Consultation on Child Well-Being

OECD Family Database
http://www.oecd.org/els/family/database.htm

OECD (2015) How is Life?
www.oecd.org/howslife

@OECD_Social