



Young Families, Social Risk and the Role of Government

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Presented to the Panel on the Role of Government

14 May 2003

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Background

- This presentation was developed for a by-invitation research workshop held at the University of Toronto on May 14, 2003.
- The workshop was organized by the *Panel on the Role of Government* established by the Premier of Ontario and chaired by Dean Ron Daniels of the University of Toronto Faculty of Law.
- Michael Trebilcock of the Faculty of Law is the research director of the panel.



Families and Social Risk

- Families always face greater “risk” than childless and those with grown children because of the cost of raising children
- Now, existing and longstanding risks continue while new ones have appeared:
 - time stress
 - balance work and family
- Efforts to adjust those risks involve public policy
 - what and how?



What are the Challenges?

- Changes in family structure
- Declining fertility and, therefore, issues for family formation
- Polarizations of income and time
- Low-income intensity increasing
- Women's labour force participation and, therefore, issues of work-family balance
- Difficulties of young people (in their twenties) to achieve economic autonomy

These are socio-economic changes, based on individual circumstances and choices, but profoundly affected by role of government.



Analytic Categories

Three enabling conditions for good child outcomes:

- adequate income
- effective parenting
- supportive communities

Interconnected as well as autonomous; need to be understood in interaction.

Goal is to identify the *best mix* so as to generate healthy child development and support parental health.



Adequate Income

Principles:

- most will come from market income (75%)
- but some risks

Earlier assumptions:

- family responsibility - maintenance
- higher costs of child raising - child benefits
- clear distinction between “in” and “out” - UI for the “ins”; social assistance for the “outs”

→ legitimate reasons to substitute family and home care for employment

Now:

everyone (with rare exceptions) must be employed



The Norm is Work

But:

- Work does not keep a family out of poverty
- Labour force restructuring, skills gaps, etc., mean sometimes even two employed parents do not earn enough
- Single earner even more difficult
- High unemployment and low income concentrated in prime child-bearing and raising years



How to Ensure Adequate Income

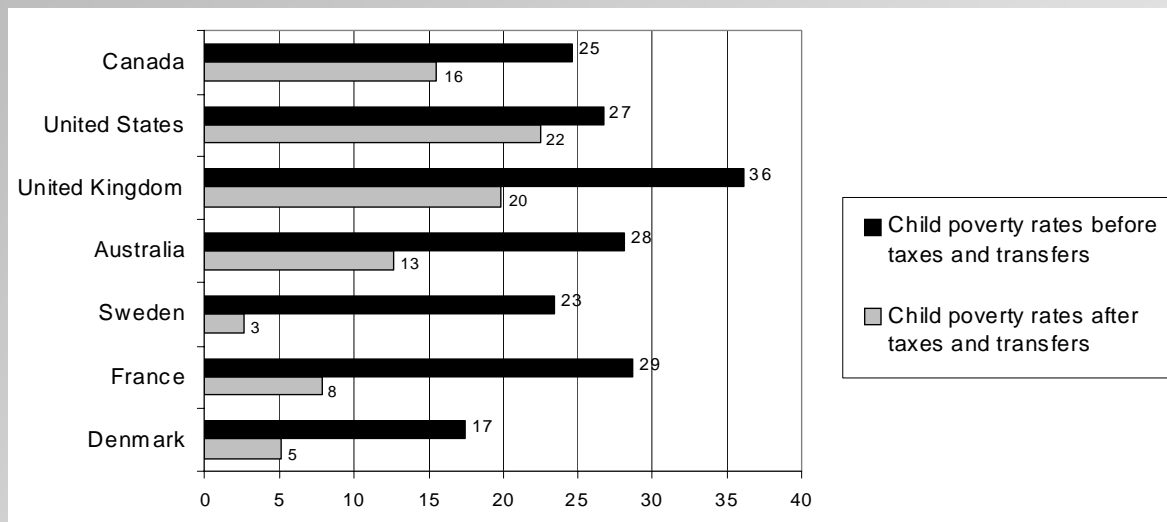
Instruments:

- child benefits
- social assistance
- in-work benefits
- **Canada** now relies on in-work benefits for families
 - e.g., Canada Child Tax Benefit **and** some provincial supplements
- **Ontario:**
 - in-work to age 7
 - claw backs on social assistance



Poverty Reducing Effects of Taxes and Transfers

Figure A-8
Child Poverty Reduction Effects, Before and After
Taxes and Transfers, Selected Countries*



*The poverty line in both cases is 50 percent of median post-tax and transfer income.

Source: UNICEF, 2000: 15.



Effective Parenting

Changing paradigm in some cases:

- **Family responsibility** for choices and costs
- While family is primary, there is a shared responsibility for good child outcomes:
investing in children

Selection of paradigm affects decisions about major issues, especially non-parental child care.



Helping Parents to be Effective

Child care is fundamental concern:

- Canada provides some support for parental care
- Canada and Ontario lag in provision of good quality non-parental care
- Ontario remains attached to the family responsibility paradigm and, therefore, accepts higher levels of informal care:
 - even for children most at risk
 - despite the overwhelming social knowledge about the importance of accessible, quality child care.
- Family leaves also a key issue



Supportive Communities

Support for parents and services in communities are important services for those in need

- community development
- housing
- to ensuring good child outcomes

Areas of risk:

Ontario has innovated with pilot projects around community mobilization, recreation services, and so on, but big gaps remain.



Biggest Challenges

Finding the **best policy mix to ensure Ontario is prepared** for the future of the new economy, with skilled, adaptable and flexible workers and parents.

- Adequate income - improving but still high levels of poverty
- Effective parenting - why mortgage the future with lower quality care? What about the well-being of Ontario in 2020?
- Supportive communities - how to extend successful experiments so they are truly supportive

The choice is Ontario's.



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