

***Out-of-Home Childcare in Canada, Sweden, and Finland and  
Women's Health:  
The Intersection of Welfare State with Cultural Beliefs<sup>1</sup>***

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*This study considers how culture and the structure of public policies relating to childcare provision influence the choices both a society and women make regarding the provision and uptake of out-of-home childcare. This paper looks at how the welfare state and cultural beliefs of a society towards women's roles in Canada, Sweden and Finland shape these issues. Based on the welfare state models developed by Esping-Andersen (1990, 1999) and cultural models by Pfau-Effinger (2005) a three-way classification of family models is developed to consider the variations in uptake and attitude towards out-of-home childcare in Canada, Sweden and Finland. This paper argues it is not only public policy that influences the uptake of out-of-home childcare, but that culture is an important factor often overlooked. Moreover, based on the three types of care models the relationship between cultural values and out-of-home care arrangements are multifactorial and conclude that culture is an important driving factor in the development and uptake of welfare state policies.*

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Public policies relating to childcare and early childhood education are often presented solely as a welfare state issue. Engster and Olofdottersta (2011) suggest countries that provide support in the form of public policies for families with children are more likely to show positive effects on health. Childcare is a critical element of social policy in modern developed countries as there is overwhelming evidence that early childhood education and care policies influence the health pathways of parents and children (Gornick & Meyers, 2004; Raphael, 2014). According to the World Health Organization (2008), "investments in the early years, provides one of the

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greatest potentials to reduce health inequities within a generation” (p.3). Access to affordable, high-quality childcare is a factor that also directly impacts on a parent’s ability to return to and/or remain in the workforce.

National policies regarding affordable accessible childcare originate from the wider social contracts embedded within a country’s public policy approaches (Mahon, 2005) and are often influenced by political and economic forces (Prentice, 2007; White, 2012). Directing policies such as out-of-home childcare to all families is one way of striving for a more equal and equitable society, as balancing the responsibilities of work and home is an issue with which most parents contend (Gornick & Meyers, 2004). Traditionally, countries that are able to achieve greater gender equality not only provide childcare support but also promote dual attachment to the labour markets and encourage fathers as well as mothers to be part of care work (Gornick & Meyers, 2004). But it is not only public policies that need to be in place to encourage female employment; a country’s cultural ideology of childcare is also important.

This paper considers how recent research on the role of culture towards the care industry can help explain why parents maintain different attitudes towards out-of-home childcare arrangements (Pfau-Effinger, 2004, 2005, 2015). This is important since out-of-home childcare is an important social determinant of health for women and children as well as a benefit to society as a whole (Mikkonen & Raphael, 2010). These attitudes towards childcare not only influence public policy but they have an effect on the health and well-being of women and children.

### ***Theoretical Frameworks***

Four frameworks inform this article. The overarching one is a *feminist political economy analysis*. This approach identifies how social and political relationships are influenced by gender and provides a critical lens to examine how women are represented in the domestic and non-domestic spheres (Armstrong & Braedley, 2013). It examines the relationship between paid and unpaid work. It also shows how the sex and gender divisions of labour are central to the subordination of women. Goods and services produced within the home very often lack the compensation of monetary value (LaBaron, 2010). The feminist political economy framework highlights the relationship between institutions and gender to try to understand how power structures and inequalities are established and re-enforced through government policies. It advocates for policies that improve women’s economic situation and reduce oppressive traits attached to the dual aspect of women’s labour and domestic duties (Bezanson & Luxton, 2006). The political economy of care suggests that the high cost of childcare impacts women differently depending on economic status. Vincent and Ball (2006) suggest that childcare actions and choices are class related, with middle class working women passing the care of their children onto poorer women, who do so for low wages. Recognising the feminist political economy framework is particularly important in neoliberal economies as services that may have once been the responsibility of the state now fall to the individual (Benzanson & Luxton, 2006). Moreover, within the home this individual responsibility increases women’s unpaid labour.

A *welfare state analysis* identifies commonalities and differences between advanced capitalist countries in their approach towards social provision that includes out-of-home childcare. Esping-Andersen (1990) offers three initial classifications of capitalist welfare states; liberal, conservative/corporatist and social democratic. Social democratic welfare states provide strong social entitlements such as the availability of social welfare programs, work to reduce social hierarchy, and decommodify various societal supports such as out-of-home childcare.

Liberal welfare states provide inadequate social entitlements which do very little to reduce social hierarchy, and commodify societal supports such as out-of-home childcare. Conservative welfare states such as France and Germany fall somewhere between liberal and social democratic, allowing a mix of governmental intervention and market forces. In a liberal political economy such as Canada, the role of caring for children is not valued as work and women are expected to take on employment alongside the role of providing childcare (Armstrong & Braedley, 2013).

A *cultural analysis* examines how different societies have different ideas with respect to childcare choices. Pfau-Effinger (2015) defines culture as a set of values and beliefs prescribing the ‘ideal’ behaviour of people in a society. Pfau-Effinger (2004) argues it is not just the political and economic system that dictates welfare state policies but that values and beliefs are equally influential and are often overlooked. It is important because the driving force of culture can influence change to welfare state policies (Pfau-Effinger, 2004). Cultural ideals can restrict or support the way people view welfare incentives, having an effect on family and work life. Family culture and often more specifically gender culture can influence the way home and work life are organised. Not only can this vary from country to country but also regionally and between social groups within a society (Pfau-Effinger, 2015).

Finally, a *social determinants of health analysis* provides a means of linking these issues to both women’s and children’s health and well-being (Bryant, Raphael, & Rioux, 2010). The social determinants of health are the living conditions and societal factors -- income, education, working conditions, early childhood development, health care services, gender equity and culture -- that shape individual and population health (Raphael, 2016). Health is adversely affected by the unequal distribution or lack of resources made available through public policy (Mikkonen & Raphael, 2010).

### ***The Development of Childcare in Canada, Sweden and Finland***

Burger (2012) identifies how childcare institutions have evolved in countries due to differing social, cultural and political contexts. The role of women and family is immersed in historical antecedents, resulting from political trajectories as well as the cultural ideologies of a country.

#### **Canada,**

Prentice (2006) maintains that in Canada childcare policy generally adopts a typical liberal welfare state pattern although this may not be the case in Quebec and in some of the Atlantic provinces (McGrane, 2014). The majority of childcare in Canada takes place in unregulated settings, in and out of the home. These include, informal parental care, care provided by extended family members and friends and care given by nannies and baby-sitters. More often than not, families are forced to turn to whatever means of childcare is affordable and available to them (Cool, 2004).

In 1966, funding for childcare was included under *The Canada Assistance Plan* (CAP) aiming to make Canada a more “just society” (Friendly & Prentice, 2009: p.74). Childcare was not the CAP’s primary focus targeting only low-income groups through eligibility testing (Friendly & Prentice, 2009). The *National Daycare Act* (1971) was the first federal report that called for a national childcare program (Friendly & Prentice, 2009). It was not, however, until the 1980s that the newly energized women’s movement gave a real voice to childcare issues.

Groups such as the *National Action Committee on the Status of Women* (NAC) and *Fédération des femmes du Québec* (FFQ) identified childcare as an important component of women's equality (Friendly & Prentice, 2009).

It was the uprising of the NAC and other feminist movements in the 1980s against campaigns such as the proposed Meech Lake Accord and the Charlottetown referendum that began to expose cracks in the unity of the group. The NAC played a central role in the "no" campaign of the referendum and special interest groups saw this as a direct assault on them. The women's movement and the organization began to lose support (Collier, 2014). The power of the NAC was now splintered and the growing diversity of Canadian women meant that the NAC was now fighting its own internal conflicts. At the same time, Canada's political future was heading into a period of neoliberal politics, fierce with national identity debates and talks of political reform. This resulted in the media coverage of women's issues changing significantly heading into the 1990s and by the end of the decade the NAC had entered into a period of invisibility (Dobrowolsky & Jenson, 2004).

Mahon and Collier (2010) suggest that along with the weakening women's movements, the Federal Conservative party in the late 1980s introduced a strain of family policies that was decidedly anti-feminist. The neoliberal language turned from placing the problem of poverty towards the child and away from a women's issue (Dobrowolsky & Jenson, 2004; LaBaron, 2010). This can be seen in the strong party declaration in 1989 to "eliminate child poverty by 2000" (McKenna, 2015: p.49). This statement neglects to acknowledge that if a parent is poor, then a child will be poor and this is more profound in single-parent families headed by women. The shift in cultural ideology meant that child development, including early education was encouraged and needed but that childcare would once again be normalized within women's domestic caring responsibilities (McKenna, 2015).

When the Liberal government regained power in 1993 it was anticipated that childcare policy would be thrust to the forefront of the agenda, however the concern surrounding the level of national debt at the time and the anxiety about Quebec separatism allowed this important issue to fade into the background. In 2005 Prime Minister Paul Martin agreed to roll out a childcare program over the next five years starting with Manitoba. With the 2006 election looming, the Liberal Government felt under pressure to act on promises from its election mandate. Unfortunately the provinces could not reach an agreement on what the accessibility and development of the system should be and therefore individual provincial agreements were the only option. When the Liberals lost the election in 2006 the new Conservative Government cancelled all outstanding bi-lateral agreements with the provinces. Once again a public childcare system was pushed to the background. The Harper Government abolished any talk of social childcare altogether, suggesting that parents did not want a universal system with limited choice but a taxable annual allowance (Friendly & Prentice, 2009) and introduced the Universal Childcare Benefit (UCCB). This provided \$100 each month of taxable benefit to parents for each child under the age of six and was expanded in 2015 to \$160 for children under six, and \$60 for children six to seventeen years (Government of Canada, 2015). This token amount of extra income does not even come close to paying childcare fees in most provinces.

White (2012) suggests that it is important for policy ideas to be paradigmatic, meaning that for social policies to be successful they must be accepted as part of the social norm. In order for childcare programs to gain governmental acceptance, a level of culturally accepted state intervention with regard to the family must develop (White, 2002). Children must be seen as the core aspect of public investment important from a social determinants of health perspective

(White, 2012). If there is ideological resistance to caring for children outside the home, then implementing a childcare policy is challenging (White, 2002). However, not all OECD countries possess the same cultural ideology regarding the family and child development.

In 2008 Canada received UNICEF's lowest ranking for quality and accessibility to early childhood care (Innocenti Report Card, 2008), and UNICEF's recommendation was that they take funding action on their childcare program (Innocenti Report Card, 2008). *Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development* (OECD) data highlighted that only 24 percent of children aged zero to two years were enrolled in a childcare program and 56.8 percent of children between the aged three to five years were enrolled. This is much lower than the OECD average of 31.2 and 75.7 percent respectively (OECD, 2011). UNICEF's low ranking for poor quality and access of early childhood education and childcare indicates that the Canadian government can no longer afford to ignore this issue.

White (2011) explains that while other liberal welfare state regimes are increasing funding to Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) programs, this is not the case in Canada. She argues that Canada faces both institutional barriers and ideological barriers. Institutional in that federalism in Canada poses a constraint not seen in other liberal welfare states such as the UK or New Zealand, and ideological in the lack of societal consensus of the need for childcare and the social norms surrounding the role of women. The perception in liberal welfare states is that public services provided for children aged zero to four are regarded as "care" services rather than "educational" services (White, 2011).

The rise of neoliberalism in Canadian society has become closely associated with the idea of "looking after number one" (Friendly & Prentice, 2009: p.102). Neoliberalism dictates that each person is responsible for his or her own actions and well-being, placing strong emphasis on individualism. It is a neoliberal society that works to reduce the role of government while increasing the level of individual responsibility; this ideology dictates that people are their own driving force. For the rich and powerful in society this concept works well as they do not need to rely on government-subsidized childcare and may resent paying for other families to receive it. However, for those families struggling to survive on a single wage who are unable to afford the high childcare fees, a neoliberal ideology may not seem ideal (Friendly & Prentice, 2009).

## Sweden

Though there is a variation among the social investments within Nordic nations, this group of social democratic welfare states are often seen as a successful benchmark by which to compare programs in liberal welfare states (Sorensen, 2011; White, 2012). The principles in the wake of the early childcare system in Sweden are built on democracy, equality, solidarity and responsibility (Gunnarsson et al., 1999). The Swedish childcare system aims to make it possible for both parents to achieve a work and family life balance. The purpose of the first infant crèche, opened in 1854, was to provide low-income mothers a safe place for their children while they work (Gunnarsson et al., 1999; Sorensen, 2011). As early as the beginning of the 20th century, Sweden promoted progressive principles, encouraging gender equality of education, professional practice and business ownership (Guo & Xiao, 2013).

The primary goal of Sweden's public policy was to alleviate poverty, and the out-of-home childcare system was a small but important part of this. In 1968 The *National Commission on Childcare* (Barnstugeutredningen) published a report stating a need for an expansion to Sweden's current childcare system (Gunnarsson et al., 1999). The social acceptance of women in employment gained momentum and fought for the same 'life conditions' as men (Sorensen,

2011). The Swedish government set policies that promoted gender equality, encouraging a *dual-earner* and *dual-caregiver* ethic in its social policy, striving for the equal distribution of power and resources. An influential report entitled “*The Pre-School*”, proposed that children benefitted from experiencing a pedagogical approach and that children’s thoughts and feelings were qualities to be developed and nurtured. This report has been highly influential in the way the universal childcare system is administered in Sweden today (Gunnarsson et al., 1999).

In 1975 the *National Pre-School Act* set out guidelines that required municipalities to provide every child under the age of six at least 525 hours of free pre-schooling per year (Gunnarsson et al., 1999). It was not until 1985 that the Swedish Riksdag<sup>3</sup> supported the Social Democratic Government’s plan. Rolled out over the next six years, an out-of-home childcare place was to be provided for all children aged eighteen months to six years, if their parents worked or studied. Tighter legislation in 1995 meant that the municipalities had to now provide both pre-school and childcare places for any child under the age of twelve years within a reasonable time frame (three to four months).

Swedish society over the last 100 years has shifted from agrarian to industrial. This more efficient and technologically driven society produced a larger demand for teachers, nurses, childcare personnel and health care workers and so the demand for women in employment grew (Sorensen, 2011). A more common dual-breadwinner family model meant that the demand for childcare spaces also increased (Hiilamo & Kangas, 2009). The Swedish government understood that in order to promote women’s employment, maintain a balanced family life and sustain the high fertility rate, the country needed a comprehensive social welfare system (Gunnarsson et al., 1999; Sorensen, 2011)

Four decades ago only 50 percent of women in Sweden were employed compared with 85 percent of men. By 1998 this figure was much more on par at a rate of 74 percent for women and 79 percent for men (Gunnarsson et al., 1999). Gender equity permeates many aspects of daily life in Sweden especially domestic chores and childcare. An explicit goal of the Swedish government is emphasizing the shared parental role. The childcare system that is observed in Sweden today is thought to have grown out of and been influenced by the demographic, financial and social changes that took place in Sweden (Sorensen, 2011).

There is a strong conviction in Sweden that children are valuable assets required for the success of the country’s future. Childhood is a time of important learning and development. The democratic values in Sweden reflect that children deserve respect as individual contributors to society. There is a societal belief that out-of-home childcare improves children’s welfare as the daycare environment can provide the pedagogical attention that is often not available at home (Kremer, 2007). In 1996 the Ministry of Education and Science assumed full responsibility for childcare, meaning that childcare was also viewed as an essential part of the early childhood education environment. Childcare is not regarded as separate from education as it is in many liberal welfare regimes (Gunnarsson et al., 1999). It is valued for developing solid pedagogical links between daycare centers, pre-schools and schools.

Culturally, childcare is viewed as an important part of the family support system in Sweden. An underlying belief is that both professional or career aspirations and family time are equally important (Krapf, 2009). Women are not expected to choose between having a family or a career; the belief is they can have both (Krapf, 2009). Families are not expected to raise and pay exorbitant fees for childcare. Childcare is considered a collective responsibility.

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<sup>3</sup> The national legislature and supreme court decision-making body in Sweden

Swedish culture and values adhere to the importance of gender equality and gender ideologies are an important political factor behind an out-of-home childcare system (Towns, Karlsson, & Eyre, 2014). A society's support for family policies is often a reflection of how a nation defines gender roles. Sweden may be among the most progressive countries in the world in terms of promoting gender parity, but it would be wrong to believe that complete gender equality has been reached (Towns et al., 2014). What is fair to say is that the Nordic nations overall express more gender equity, which is evident through high female employment rates, a low gender wage gap and the lowest income inequality worldwide (UNDP, 2011).

## **Finland**

Finland also has an advanced welfare state system and also falls under the classification of a social democratic welfare state (Vivekanandan, 2012). The development of family policies in Finland began after the end of WWII and in 1948 a *Child Benefit System* was introduced. It was not until the 1960s that real developments occurred in the welfare state. The country witnessed a heavy migration of people from the countryside to the cities as Finland, like Sweden moved from an agrarian society to an industrial one (Kyronlampi-Kylmanen & Maatta, 2012). *The Act on Children's Daycare* (1973) stipulated that childcare for children under school age were the responsibility of local authorities. Every child under the age of six is entitled to receive childcare as this is seen as a public responsibility (Vivekanandan, 2012). In Finland, the *EduCare* system fulfills both childcare and the educational needs of children and is universally accessible and publicly funded (Vivekanandan, 2012; Repo, 2010)

While Finland and Sweden both follow the social democratic principals of providing an out-of-home childcare system, the implementation and historical formation of childcare arrangements are different. It was the former Agrarian Party, now known as the rural-based Centre Party in Finland that favoured a universal care system for all children. Finland demonstrates strong historical roots in the agrarian culture right up until the 1950s and was dominated by small-hold farming (Pfau-Effinger, 1993). Typically, this would be a family run farm with both men and women sharing the work which greatly influenced the social norms and values of the time. The geography of the country also influenced Finnish culture. "Finland was so sparsely populated that separate male and female cultures were not able to develop" (Pfau-Effinger, 1993: p.400). When industrialization began it was a natural extension of these societal norms that women work as labourers alongside men. In Sweden the initial idea of an out-of-home childcare system was opposed by both the Social Democratic and Centre parties: it was only sustained pressure from the feminist movement that brought truly universal childcare to fruition (Mahon et al., 2012).

Childcare is understood to be an important component of early childhood education and in the last twenty years the emphasis on the benefits of childcare have shifted from the needs of the mother to the needs of the child (Mahon et al., 2012). Globalization suggests that neoliberal tendencies are infiltrating both Sweden and Finland but it is in Finland where parents seem to be exercising their right to free choice when it comes to childcare. Finland appears to have more women staying home and raising their children. Although Finnish childcare policy can be argued as one of choice, it can also be viewed in reality as encouraging women to withdraw from the labour market for long periods of time (Mahon et al., 2012).

### *The Homecare Allowance*

What really sets Finland and Sweden's childcare policy apart is the uptake of the *Homecare Allowance* (HCA). The HCA was introduced in Finland in 1985, giving parents the option of an out-of-home childcare or receiving an allowance to care for their children at home. The Finnish Centre Party had enough public support and targeted this as a necessary for those residing in rural areas. A basic childcare allowance is accessible to all parents (approx. 338 Euros for one child as of 2016) with supplementary payments available for additional children, as well as a *care supplement* allowance via means testing (Kansaneläkelaitos, 2016).

The high uptake of the HCA does mean however that many children in Finland are now cared for at home, and as a result Finland has a larger proportion of female homemakers than Sweden (Ellingsaeter, 2012). In Sweden 92.2 percent of children under the age of two years use an out-of-home childcare, in Finland that figure is much lower at only 51.7 percent (Nordic Committee on Social Security Statistics (NOSOSKO), 2013).

In Finland, advocates of the HCA frame the argument as having a positive effect on children's well-being. This suggests that those children cared for at home by their parents boast better emotional health due to the warmth and security of home. Those in out-of-home childcare are subjected to cold, inhumane bureaucracy (Hiilamo & Kangas, 2009). Minor medical issues are argued to be more prevalent in young children in childcare, such as the occurrence of colds, influenza and ear infections. This discourse is used as a part of the 'children-do-best-at-home' in Finland whereas childcare in Sweden is promoted as beneficial for children's welfare and educational and emotional development (Kidd, 2012).

The issue of gender equality has not been as successfully promoted in Finland as it has in Sweden (Hiilamo & Kangas, 2009) and research suggests that 75 percent of mothers who identify as having 'low' education credentials take advantage of the HCA (Mahon et al., 2012). Those who are highly educated are still more likely to choose out-of-home childcare arrangements when they return to the workforce (Krapf, 2009).

Sweden introduced its own form of the HCA in 2008 when childcare was already widely in use. The Centre-Right government predicted that around 15 percent of parents would prefer the HCA to a universal childcare system. But the uptake was low and by 2011 stood at only one percent. The Swedish government criticized the HCA as "propping up the traditional, old fashioned family model" (Hiilamo & Kangas, 2006: p.20). This model was condemned for discriminating against women and violating gender equality. Sweden considers the HCA to be a way of forcing women back into the kitchen and increasing gender inequality (Hiilamo & Kangas, 2006).

Gender interacts with other social positions (Hill, 2016). It is well documented that socio-economic position is an important determinant of health. In addition, research suggests that income differences appear to have a greater impact on the health of women than that of men (Denton & Walters, 1999). Ellingsaeter (2012) claims that over 90 percent of the HCA benefit is paid to females. Critics of the HCA state that it is more difficult for women to re-enter the workforce after several years at home. This potentially creates greater spousal dependence (Hiilamo & Kangas, 2006). The 'dual earner' income model has been widely promoted in Sweden, while in Finland the policy mix of both the 'dual income' and 'male breadwinner' model is more widely accepted.

## DISCUSSION

I describe three care models to provide insight into the intersection of welfare state policies and cultural ideologies in a society. The feminist political economy framework argues that male dominance in families is often associated with the distribution of economic resources, and is part of the wider system of patriarchal economic power. In social democratic welfare states it is assumed that the provision of resources provided toward out-of-home childcare leads to the level of uptake by women. However the cultural values and beliefs regarding childcare are usually less considered (Pfau-Effinger, 2015). There are clear policy distinctions between liberal welfare states like Canada and social democratic states of Sweden and Finland. Yet there are cultural differences between the two social democratic states that have come to influence the form and uptake of these institutional approaches.

Table 1 presents these three childcare models to explain the development and uptake of out-of-home childcare in Canada, Sweden and Finland. The '*unpaid informal care work model*' can be referred to as the dominant model in Canada and is based on assumptions that women take on both employment and domestic roles. One issue that needs to be considered is that under this model many mothers in Canada work or study, giving families no choice but to take up unregulated childcare options. The second model is the '*paid formal care work model*', where both parents take equal responsibility for these roles and represents the dominant model evident in Sweden. Finally, the '*paid informal care work model*' is based on the assumption of choice and gives mothers the option of staying at home or returning to the workforce and is the dominant model in Finland. Both choices are financially supported by the State.

**Table I: Intersections of Culture with the Welfare State in Support of Out-of-Home Childcare**

	CANADA	SWEDEN	FINLAND
	Unpaid Informal Care Work Model	Paid Formal Care Work Model	Paid Informal Care Work Model
Welfare State Provision	No	Yes	Yes
Cultural Preference	No	Yes	No

### *Paid Informal Care Work Model*

In comparative studies, the social democratic welfare states of Finland and Sweden are often classified together. They are renowned for having generous family support systems that promote strong social determinants of health (Raphael, 2010). The *paid informal care work model* seen in Finland is based on the assumption that parents have the right to choose between a cash allowance and regulated childcare. Both Finland and Sweden endorse a paid childcare allowance scheme as well as regulated out-of-home childcare, however the homecare allowance is only widely accepted in Finland. The Finnish Government recommends the HCA as a vehicle to promote freedom of choice to families and is delivered on the notion that it is the best way for parents to decide the responsibility of care associated with their young children (Hiilamo &

Kangas, 2006). The feminist political economy analysis examines the dominant power within a society and therefore must question whom the HCA is really benefitting. This framework would suggest that the HCA has segregated a significant portion of women from the skilled labour market and is a setback from working towards equality (Hiilamo & Kangas, 2006). It could be suggested that reducing maternal involvement in the labour markets strengthens the patriarchal workforce while allowing for male domination and control of economic power (Armstrong & Braedley, 2013). The HCA simultaneously claims to promote gender equality through choice while increasing gender inequality through the division of labour (Repo, 2010). Allowing women time away from the labour market reduces their earning capacity and increases their dependence on men (Hiilamo & Kangas, 2009). Some argue that the HCA endorses the male career path, encourages women to downplay their progress in the workforce, and is dividing Finnish society (Ellingsaeter, 2012). Unlike Sweden, gender equality is not seen as a clear objective of Finnish family policy.

Choice is a phenomenon that is normally endorsed in liberal welfare states and it is personal choice that is considered the reward for market success. The rationale of liberal welfare regimes is that those who work hard can obtain the adequate financial means to make life choices. Ironically, the popularity of HCA in Finland can be seen as similar to the ideologies of choice promoted in liberal welfare regimes. The absence of mothers in the labour market for the first three years after the birth of a child can be regarded as both a choice on the one hand, and a form of gender oppression on the other. The literature review and OECD (2013) indicators imply that while the HCA has no significant detrimental effects on child poverty, it does have an effect on gender equality and the gender pay gap. Of the three countries in my study, OECD (2013) indicators highlighted that female labour market participation was lowest in Finland. Women in Finland were also the least likely to work longer hours, e.g. over 40 hours per week (OECD, 2013). The report found that 45 percent of women in Sweden were likely to work over 40 hours per week compared to 34 percent in Canada and 23 percent in Finland. Finland's statistics are unusual as the Nordic region is typically a front-runner in equality statistics. It could be suggested that the HCA is having an impact on the gender pay gap in Finland, as it is significantly wider than its Swedish counterpart and higher than the OECD average.

Pfau-Effinger (2012) argues that the amount of pay from the HCA is not generous. There is a higher uptake of the HCA by low-income parents which implies that using the HCA is not equal across Finnish society (Hakim, 2000). These findings suggest that it is not only an economic element that makes the HCA a popular choice in Finland, but also the cultural concept that bringing up children in the home is in their best interest. Swedish society on the other hand endorses a comprehensive childcare system and has little cultural support for an HCA.

To summarize, the *paid informal care work model* means there are public policies in place to support families. It is promoted as a form of 'choice' and it advocates for a breadwinner/caregiver model. It is the belief and uptake of the HCA that provides a means of income support directed towards care work. Some of the disadvantages of this model are that it is more favourable with the low-income population which does not work to reduce social inequalities. It keeps women out of the labour force, thereby increasing gender oppression that can result in a wider gender pay gap.

### ***Paid Formal Care Work Model***

Creating a parenting balance in Sweden is both a social norm and a cultural belief. It supports the idea that equality in society is achieved when mothers and fathers share

responsibility for work and caring for their children. The *paid formal care work model* in Sweden goes the furthest in providing incentives for men to share the caring role (Mahon et al., 2012), including incentives such as paid paternal leave. This is a period of paid leave for fathers to stay at home with children. If fathers choose not to take it, the benefit is lost and cannot be allocated to the mother.

Childcare policy in Sweden focuses heavily on mothers being able to participate in the labour market, creating equality between genders, and promoting the overall health and well-being of women and children. Due to the high number of female representatives in parliament, women activists and strong feminist organizations, Sweden empowers women as economic, political, and social actors that are able to advocate policy changes (Bergman, 2004).

Studies indicate Swedish parents believe that out-of-home childcare offers the most inspiring preconditions for children's well-being and development (Krapf, 2009). They see childcare as an institution for promoting and fostering equality and social justice and as an extension to the educational establishments for children. The idea of not placing children in childcare is considered as foolish as not placing them in school (Hiilamo & Kangas, 2006).

A critique of the Swedish system is that because of the universal policies in place, women feel pressured to gain employment and often do so at the cost of quality family time (Saraceno, 2011). Another point of contention with the Swedish childcare system is the cultural assumption that all mothers need and want the same kind of childcare services and that all women in Sweden wish to return to employment after childbirth.

To summarize, the *paid formal care work model* promotes full gender equality both in the home and in the work place. Out-of-home childcare is seen morally and culturally as a well established societal norm, resulting in high female employment rates and low gender pay inequality.

### ***Unpaid Informal Care Work Model***

Governments of Canada with the exception of Quebec have done little to counter the belief that childcare is primarily a family responsibility. The majority of childcare funding outside of Quebec comes from tax breaks given to working parents in the form of tax subsidies and any direct support is only sporadically available to low-income families. Regulated childcare spaces are in high demand across Canada and there has been minimal increase in the number of spaces available in the past 10 years (White & Prentice, 2016).

Canada can therefore be described as adhering to the *unpaid informal care work model*. What does exist is provincially funded, yet unevenly available. Women often take on what is described as the 'double burden', this means taking on both childcare responsibilities and paid employment (Friendly & Prentice, 2009; Budig, Misra, & Boeckmann, 2012). One by-product of this 'double burden' is that women's wages are forced down due to the time constraints of care work duties. The unequal time spent in the domestic setting by men and women means that women often face poor employment and educational prospects and this leads to restricted financial resources (Armstrong & Braedley, 2013). Feminist scholars argue that this ideology of "time poverty" is more evident in women than in men (Bryson, 2008) and even more so in lone-parent families. According to the latest Campaign 2000 report, because female lone-parents are forced to juggle unpaid domestic work alongside paid work, and one-third of female-led lone-parent families live in poverty (Campaign 2000, 2016). Canada's public spending and public policy support for families is below the OECD average of 2.14 percent of gross domestic product

(GDP) at 1.18 percent of GDP (OECD, 2017). The ideology of liberalism supports individualistic ideas that drive policies to be singly addressed (McKenna, 2015).

It is important to note, while Canada does not have a fully comprehensive national childcare system, a recent study discovered that there were some substantial policy differences in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) within the Atlantic Provinces (McGrane, 2014). This finding suggests that each Atlantic province adheres to a neoliberal or an inclusive liberal policy approach. The neoliberal policy approach means that under the ECEC system, childcare would adhere to the traditional model seen in Canada, in which childcare is seen as a private responsibility of parents with minimal involvement from the state. An inclusive liberal welfare state approach encourages a mix of for-profit and non-profit public daycare centers, as well as mandatory full-day kindergarten for five year olds in the public system (McGrane, 2014). Further research would benefit from monitoring parental views in provinces that have been framed as inclusive liberal and how this framework affects the cultural acceptance of an out-of-home childcare system. Additional research would be needed to fully understand if out-of-home childcare is viewed as a community responsibility.

Overall, one key difference between Canada and Sweden in their childcare policies is that Canada has not yet blended multiple policy areas into one. Education and health care are regarded as a social right in Canada, but sadly childcare is not given the same kind of cultural consideration. Countries that show stronger children's health and well-being indicators have childcare systems that are often managed under one ministry, usually education (Friendly & Prentice, 2009). Proposing a universal childcare system is not only important in order for the policy to be taken seriously by those in power but also so that it is taken seriously by those who will use it most, namely mothers. From a social determinants of health perspective building an out-of-home childcare system contributes to class parity and doing so "would lead to great social equity and social inclusion" (Friendly & Prentice, 2009: p.144).

### ***The Interaction of Policy and Culture***

When proposing policy changes the cultural, social and economic characteristics of a country need to be taken into consideration. It is the culture of a country that can be harder to quantify (Baldock, 1999). In Sweden the culture of childcare is seen as a combined venture between family and the surrounding environment. In Finland it is the rights of the child that are regarded as important (Campbell-Barr & Nygard, 2014). In Canada, there is an embedded cultural belief that children of the poor must be provided with childcare, but why should Canadians pay for the childcare of middle and high-income families (Cleveland & Krashinsky, 2003). A neoliberal attitude is prevalent, and there is still much belief that having and caring for children are and should be a private lifestyle choice. Cleveland and Krashinsky (2003) explain that there is a mindset that still exists in Canada where people believe that consumers are better off when the free-market is in control and that public funding is a waste of money.

It appears that politics and policies are as much about ideas and beliefs as they are about structural arrangements (Baldock, 1999). If using an out-of-home childcare system is deemed culturally acceptable then this will go a long way to fuelling its accessibility and uptake. The notion of culture is often ignored in a liberal welfare state because it cannot be measured in a nominal or statistical way (Baldock, 1999). In Sweden and Finland cultural values are usually regarded as more communal and social democratic. Families make choices about household structure, employment, and care arrangements in the context of broader economic and cultural frameworks. This paper has highlighted that the family models in a country can change

independently of policies. The importance of culture surrounding the welfare state institutions is often downplayed as the weaker element, which is very often not the case.

### CONCLUSION

The development and uptake of an out-of-home childcare system differs in Canada, Finland and Sweden. This is in part due to each country falling under a different welfare state regime as well as by a country's cultural ideology. Sweden and Finland, although classified as similar welfare states, have very different childcare policies. Childcare policy in Sweden focuses on promoting gender equality. The Swedish childcare system and parental leave policy promotes women's employment and encourages men to be equal and active participants in domestic care work. Finland on the other hand, does not use the term gender equality but gender choice. Due to historical pathways and cultural influences, women are encouraged to choose between receiving an allowance (HCA) to care for their children at home rather than returning to the labour market through use of the out-of-home childcare system.

While the HCA has not had a direct impact on the health of children, the HCA has compromised women's equality – as compared to women's situation in Sweden -- and therefore may have health effects for women. In Canada it is the combined barriers of Canada being a liberal welfare state and cultural attitudes towards the role of women in childrearing that makes its childcare policy so underdeveloped. It is therefore not surprising that Canadian women and their children's health and well-being lag behind both Finland and Sweden. The development and implementation of out-of-home childcare in Canada will not only reform public policy towards distribution of economic and social resources but also a sea change in public values and beliefs towards the role of women in Canadian society.

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