Managing the Risks of Childhood Poverty: Changing Interventions By the State

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Over the past century, Canada and New Zealand have created various programs to improve the health and well-being of low-income families. Initially, they focused on maternal/child health and income support for widows and deserted mothers but later included unemployment benefits, family allowances, improved social services and job creation. After the 1980s, programs were restructured to re-emphasize parental responsibility for children’s well-being. I argue that current policies to reduce child poverty focus largely on maternal employment and paternal child support, but neo-liberal political agendas and socio-demographic trends tend to counteract program benefits. Historical and comparative research illustrate that policy agendas change over time and differ with welfare regimes but that governments can reduce family poverty.

Governments, voluntary organizations and families have long recognized that growing up in poverty has detrimental consequences for health and well-being. Considerable research shows that long term poverty is associated with higher rates of certain ailments and disabilities as well as premature death. Children from low-income families also have a higher risk of learning problems, early school leaving, premarital pregnancy and delinquency. If children leave school early, they are more likely to experience unemployment and low income throughout their lives (Lipman, Offord & Dooley, 1996; Hobcraft & Kiernan, 2001). These negative outcomes provide challenges for families and communities but also for the state, as considerable public resources are spent on preventable illnesses, family income support, child welfare services, truancy programs, family counselling, juvenile detention centres, adult jails and social housing, which are all associated with growing up in poverty.

This paper discusses several historical shifts in state initiatives in Canada and New Zealand to reduce family poverty and its consequences. These two countries are chosen because they share similar social and cultural backgrounds, with some notable differences (Baker, 2001), and because they have been classified as ‘liberal’ welfare regimes (Esping-Andersen, 1990) with relatively ungenerous social welfare systems, a strong reliance on individual responsibility and with similar outcomes for family health and well-being. Policy developments are traced from the 1930s until the present, showing that both countries developed income security programs after the 1930s Depression, expanded support

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throughout the 1960s and during the 1980s and 1990s restructured social programs to reflect international economic changes, neo-liberal business practices and demands for lower taxes. The paper shows that poverty reduction policies have been shaped by shared ideologies, unique political responses to socioeconomic changes and international pressures.

Despite years of developing and restructuring family programs, both countries experience high poverty rates compared to the social democratic countries of Norway and Sweden, especially for mother-led families. Both Canada and New Zealand now expect most parents to earn their way out of poverty with minimal state support, but I argue that some of the earning problems of mothers with young children have been overlooked by focusing on children and families rather than gendered labour markets. Furthermore, the liberal states have permitted the effectiveness of poverty reduction programs to be counteracted by political agendas and socio-demographic trends.

In this paper, I use historical and cross-national comparisons to show that government priorities in poverty reduction have changed over the decades and that ideas are often shared among similar welfare states even when they lead to less effective outcomes. Comparative analysis also allows us to see that even though governments are faced with similar demographic, political and economic pressures, their policy solutions can differ, influenced by local circumstances and lobbying. Nevertheless, poverty can be substantially reduced through state programs.

Before discussing similar policy shifts in Canada and New Zealand, I briefly define the term ‘child poverty’, which tends to focus social programs on parenting rather than labour market conditions. I also note some international correlates with low household incomes.

**Child Poverty: Definitions & Correlates**

Both politicians and interest groups have gained politically from highlighting the consequences of child poverty because children cannot be blamed for their lack of employment skills or initiative. For years, Parliamentary committees and activists have made compelling arguments that the long-term costs of doing nothing about child poverty are higher than the short-term costs of reducing it (Baker, 1995). However, political consensus about how to reduce poverty seems more elusive now than forty years ago. Although most people agree that living in poverty is detrimental to children’s health and well-being, considerable debate continues about which policies are most effective, how to finance the required reforms and even how poverty should be measured.

‘Child poverty’ is often defined as the percentage of children in a particular jurisdiction living in low-income households with incomes less than 50\% \textsuperscript{2} per cent of the national median, after taxes and transfers.

\textsuperscript{2} Also 40\% and 60\% are used.
Relative measures are normally used because they are easier to obtain and more conducive to international comparisons than absolute measures assessing the cost of necessities in particular cities or regions. However, absolute measures sometimes show lower poverty rates. Nevertheless, researchers have found widespread public agreement about the ‘essentials of life’ and who is missing out because they cannot afford them (Saunders, 2006). Sociologists further argue that perceptions of ‘relative deprivation’ are important because they encourage resentment and anti-social behaviour.

International research indicates that child poverty rates are influenced by socio-demographic trends, labour market conditions and government policies. The 2005 UNICEF report concluded that child poverty increases when more parents separate and the children live with their mother, when unemployment rises, when wages fall relative to living costs and when governments cut social benefits and services or make them harder to obtain (UNICEF, 2005, p. 17). In contrast, child poverty rates fall as couples delay reproduction until they are older and then produce fewer children, when workers gain more education and skills, when more households acquire two earners, when the economy is booming and when wages rise relative to living costs.

Table I compares the child poverty rates in Canada and New Zealand with Sweden and Norway to illustrate the differences between one and two-parent households, the effect of parental working status and living in different welfare regimes. This table indicates that poverty rates remain relatively high in Canada and New Zealand, especially for lone parent households (largely led by mothers) outside the labour force. In contrast, child poverty rates remain low in Norway and Sweden where state transfers to families are more generous, many services are universally available, women’s employment rates are high, female wages more closely approximate male’s and governments protect and compensate the poorest in times of economic recession (OECD, 2005, 20). In Canada and New Zealand, state transfers and social services are usually targeted to families ‘at risk’ and neo-liberal restructuring has recently restricted access to income support while permitting low-wage jobs to flourish with minimal job security or other employment benefits (Baker, 2006).
Table I: Poverty Rates for Households with Children by Work Status of Parents in Selected Countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTRY</th>
<th>TOTAL SINGLE PARENTS</th>
<th>SINGLE PARENT, NO WORKER</th>
<th>SINGLE PARENT, ONE WORKER</th>
<th>TWO PARENTS, NO WORKER</th>
<th>TWO PARENTS, ONE WORKER</th>
<th>TWO PARENTS, TWO WORKERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>42.1</td>
<td>89.7</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>75.3</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>87.6</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>43.3</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>38.0</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>34.2</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD (24 countries)</td>
<td>32.5</td>
<td>58.0</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>41.6</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Extracted from OECD 2005, p. 57.

The next part of the paper examines policy shifts relating to family poverty in Canada and New Zealand, arguing that similar reforms were made during the same decades. Three periods are discussed, each with a different focus. From the 1930s to the 1950s, I argue that these countries placed a new emphasis on state intervention in the family and labour market and both introduced universal programs for family security and well-being. The social consequences of the 1930s Depression and World War II pushed governments into accepting this new emphasis.

**Focus on Universality: The 1930s & 1950s**

Although most family-related programs were developed after the 1920s, family programs date back to the 19th century in both countries. For example, both initiated compulsory education laws in the 1870s, requiring parents to send their children to school but also assisting them with the cost of education (Bradbury, 2005; Toynbee, 1995, p.170). State funding for children’s education was later expanded and by the 1950s, public elementary schools provided free milk to children as well as inoculations and other health and social services. The development of child protection laws also demonstrated state concern for children’s wellbeing and acknowledged that parents did not have sole authority over their offspring. Voluntary associations initially provided child welfare services but governments eventually took over some services and funded others (Swift, 1995; Dalley, 1998). In New Zealand, the private Plunket Society, established in 1907, heralded procreation and mothering as women’s life priorities but also offered health and social services to mothers and children (Coney, 1993, 64). Widows’ benefits were developed as early as in 1911 in New Zealand and 1916 in Canada (Baker & Tippin, 1999).
Birth rates declined after World War I but infant and maternal death rates remained high compared to Northern and Western Europe. Consequently, doctors, journalists and social workers expressed concern that colonial mothers were promoting health problems by their lack of childcare knowledge (May, 1997). During the 1920s and 30s, (male) professionals strongly criticised mothering skills and suggested that the worldly ambitions of the ‘new woman’ who desired education and paid work would lead to the deterioration of family life. Both the Plunket Society and the Canadian government promoted bottle-feeding and strict scheduling in infant care and established clinics for expectant mothers and babies (StrongBoag, 1982, p. 161; Kedgley, 1996, p.56.)

Mothers cared for their preschool children at home in both countries, as they seldom worked for pay outside the home unless they were widowed or in serious financial need. From the 1930s to the 1950s, controversy continued about whether the state should subsidize childcare to enable lone mothers to accept paid work or whether the state should pay an allowance for maternal care at home. When daycare programs were first developed in Canada in the 1920s and New Zealand in the 1940s, they were viewed as a form of welfare to counteract the negative effects of child poverty and maternal neglect (May, 1997; Matthews & Matthews, 1998; Baker, 2001).

By the 1940s, New Zealand was considered a ‘model welfare state’ (ILO, 1949) but income security was derived largely from full male employment and wage regulation (Bryson, 1992; Castles & Shirley, 1996). In 1894, the trade unions pressured the government to create an industrial arbitration court to settle employment disputes, set the minimum wage and make compulsory awards for wages and working conditions (Shirley et al., 1997). By 1925, child welfare legislation was introduced and in 1926 the government developed a means-tested family allowance for mothers with three or more children to bolster the family wage and encourage reproduction. In 1935, the ‘family wage’ set down in law the minimum earnings required to support a wife and two or three children.

The election of the first Labour government in the 1930s and the passage of the Social Security Act (1938) were turning points for New Zealand. The Act established the ‘social wage’ or entitlement to a means-tested benefit for those in financial need who were unattached to the workforce or a male breadwinner. The New Zealand state also protected working conditions and provided free primary and secondary education, a community-based preventive health care scheme, a free public hospital system and state housing (Shirley et al., 1997). In 1946, the family allowance was converted to a universal benefit that effectively gave mothers a social wage for caring work (Cheyne, O’Brien & Belgrave, 2000, p. 37; McClure, 1998).

In Canada, the first mothers’ allowance was established in Manitoba in 1916 but only for ‘morally upright’ women with dependent
Children (Ursel, 1992). Other provinces soon followed in providing such benefits (Evans, 1992; Little, 1998). The 1930s Depression was also a turning point for welfare development in Canada, as several social programs were established by the early 1940s. For example, the Constitution was amended to allow for a national Unemployment Insurance program, which began in 1941 with contributions from the federal government, employers and employees (Guest, 1997). The federal government also offered loan guarantees for housing starts and provided enabling legislation for the provinces to become involved in low-rental housing projects (p. 101). In 1945, the federal government created a universal allowance for all families with children under 16 (later raised to 18). This was paid monthly to mothers, regardless of their household income or employment status and supplemented men’s wages at a time of labour unrest (Ursel, 1992). The Canadian government also offered a tax deduction to (mainly male) workers with a dependent spouse and children, increasing its value over the years (Baker, 1995).

By the early 1950s, both countries had developed several social programs to prevent or reduce family poverty, to support home ownership and improve children’s well-being. Table II shows that they initiated and later restructured these programs around the same time. In fact, policy options have always been shared among the liberal welfare states (Baker, 2006).

Table II: The Development and Restructuring of Family-Related Income Support Programs in Canada & New Zealand

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Widows Pension</th>
<th>Child Allowances</th>
<th>Benefit for Lone Mothers</th>
<th>Maternity/Parental Benefits</th>
<th>General Income Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1966 Canada Pension Plan includes survivors’ benefit</td>
<td>-1993 converted to income-tested tax credit (Child Tax Benefit).</td>
<td>-provinces provide social assistance to all low-income individuals and families (some pay lone mothers at higher rate).</td>
<td>-1985 entitlements for adopted parents.</td>
<td>-1941 (federal) Unemployment Insurance (contributory).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-beginning 1993, CTB contains a working income supplement (WIS).</td>
<td>-1990 parental benefits added.</td>
<td>-eligibility changed to include more part-time workers in 1997 and length of leave increased.</td>
<td>-substantially reformed in 1996.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-1997, WIS increased and paid per child.</td>
<td>-horizontal benefits for those in need and ineligible for unemployment insurance.</td>
<td></td>
<td>-province provide income support for those in need and ineligible for unemployment insurance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-1998 CTB and WIS combined to create the Canada Child Tax Benefit.</td>
<td>-eligibility changed to include more part-time workers in 1997 and length of leave increased.</td>
<td></td>
<td>-welfare payments are means-tested on family household income and additional payments are made for each child.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(1st child receives more money than subsequent children).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-several provinces have cut welfare benefit levels since the 1990s.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


-2001 flat-rate parental benefits for employees working for the same employer for 12 months.

-1938 unemployment benefits (means-tested on household income). -eligibility tightened in 1990s and more focus placed on employability.

Poverty Prevention in the 1960s & Early 1970s

In both countries, the post-war period was marked by economic growth and prosperity as well as welfare state development. In Canada, the Liberal government developed a national health insurance program in the 1960s, after recommendations from royal commissions and considerable pressure from the political left. The Canada Assistance Plan was established in 1966 as a cost-sharing agreement in which the federal government agreed to match social assistance expenditures by the provinces if programs were based on financial need, offered an appeal procedure and allowed beneficiaries to move between provinces (Baker & Tippin, 1999). From 1971 to 1978, the Trudeau Liberal government provided direct grants to non-profit housing companies and co-operatives with 100 per cent financing and helped homeowners and landlords make repairs to comply with health and safety standards (Baker & Phipps, 1997). Several provinces introduced rent controls in the 1970s but many of these programs were later ended by the Conservative government.

In the 1960s, New Zealand experienced high male employment rates and male breadwinner families enjoyed one of highest living standards in the industrialized world (Shirley, et al., 1997). Home ownership rates were high, assisted by legislation such as the 1958 and 1964 Family Benefits (Home Ownership) Acts which allowed family allowances to be capitalized and paid in advance to purchase a home. Lone mothers first received the statutory right to state income support in 1973, enabling them to receive the Domestic Purposes Benefit until all their children reached adulthood (Baker & Tippin, 1999). In the 1970s, both countries expanded the rights of children, equalized the division of family assets after divorce and introduced equal pay.

Most New Zealand benefits were paid as social assistance rather than social insurance related to earnings, which was justified by high male employment rates and the family wage. However, the old age pension was universal and initially paid to individuals at age 60 (St. John, 1994; McClure, 1998). Tax benefits were also paid to the main income earner in the late 1970s to assist low-income families with children and combat child poverty (Shirley et al., 1997, p. 255). By the late 1970s, inflation increased and the unions sought compensation for the relative decline of the social wage while employers agitated for greater profitability and an end to ‘over full employment’ (ibid). The NZ government attempted to control prices and wages but production slowed and the state was down-sized in New Zealand as well as in Canada.

Retrenchment in the 1980s & 1990s

Since the 1980s, both Canada and New Zealand have amended their family programs to reflect new political priorities, socio-demographic changes and rising program costs. However, the neo-liberal restructuring initiated by the NZ Labour government in the 1980s and the social policy cutbacks by the National (conservative) government throughout
the 1990s were particularly swift and draconian (Kelsey, 1995). National cut the level of most benefits in 1991, including the Domestic Purposes Benefit (DPB). Several amendments were also made to DPB eligibility rules, including raising the qualifying age to 18 in 1991, introducing new employment expectations after 1995, a new abatement scheme in 1996 and new work tests after 1997 (Wilson, 2000).

In 1998, National initiated the ‘Community Wage’ program that expected beneficiaries to sign contracts promising to retrain, search for employment or perform organized community work in return for state money. After considerable controversy, lone mothers were exempted from paid work until their youngest child entered school when part-time work was considered adequate (Higgins, 1999). In 1998, the government also merged Income Support offices with Employment Benefit offices, renaming them ‘Work and Income’, which strengthened the message that beneficiaries were expected to search for employment. The Canadian Liberal government made a similar structural change in 1993 when they created Human Resources Development Canada (Baker & Tippin, 1999).

By the early 1990s, most Canadian provinces had also tightened eligibility rules for welfare but expected lone mothers to return to paid work at least when their youngest child entered school. Child support enforcement procedures focused on ‘making fathers pay’ and catching ‘dead-beat dads’ or fathers who defaulted on their payments (Mackie, 1994). In both countries, the rhetoric surrounding these reforms focused on ‘enforcing parental responsibilities’ and ‘reducing child poverty’ but public discussions seldom queried why mother-led families so often are poor or why some parents fail to support their children.

Now, the former family allowances are paid as tax credits administered by the taxation department, with more money paid to parents with low or moderate earned incomes. None of the child support enforcement schemes allow mother-led households living on income support to retain any of the money paid by the children’s father and welfare programs encourage beneficiaries back into paid work as soon as possible (Baker, 2006).

**Paid Work as the Main Solution to Family Poverty**

Labour governments in New Zealand (in power since 1999) did not introduce major reforms to family-related programs until May 2004 when the ‘Working for Families’ program was announced. This program, which made similar changes to Canadian reforms after 1996, began in 2006 to provide more financial support to moderate- and low-income employed parents living with children. The maximum amounts of support and the in-work payment increased for families with incomes below $27,500, giving more support for the first child than for subsequent children. The program also includes higher accommodation allowances and

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3 At this time, NZ mothers on the DPB were permitted to care for the children at home until the children were 18 years old, later reduced to 16 and then 14 by the late 1990s.
childcare subsidies that pay a portion of fees (NZ Government, 2006; St John & Craig, 2004). Government spokespersons argue that this program will improve New Zealand’s relative poverty rates but they fail to acknowledge that other countries (including Canada) are making similar improvements (Baker, 2006).

Despite the need for two household incomes, no tax deductions are offered to employed parents in New Zealand and subsidies for low-income parents cover only a fraction of the cost. In contrast, Canadian governments offer two forms of support. The federal government offers a $7,000 per child tax deduction for employed parents and provincial governments subsidize childcare spaces for low-income families (Baker, 2006). Unlike other provinces, Quebec heavily subsidizes childcare for all parents who need it, regardless of income or work status, for only $7.00 per day (Albanese, 2006). Not surprisingly, full-time maternal employment rates are higher in Quebec than the rest of Canada and higher in Canada than in New Zealand (OECD, 2005; Statistics Canada, 2006).

Both countries have tightened work requirements for welfare recipients but research indicates that the effectiveness of ‘welfare-to-work’ programs varies with the type of beneficiary, their qualifications, wages, employment benefits, the strength of the local economy and the generosity of government services. Voluntary programs lead to a modest substitution of earnings for welfare and can be cost-effective in high job growth areas (Evans, 1996). Yet inexperienced workers with family responsibilities, such as lone mothers, have limited opportunities to move to higher-paid jobs or improve their incomes. When jobs are scarce, compulsory programs can create a pool of cheap labour and those who leave welfare for employment often remain poor (Edin & Lein, 1997; Lightman, 1997; Shragge, 1997).

Policy discourse in both countries has emphasized the importance of responsible parenting yet both countries offer relatively low levels of social support to families compared to some northern European countries (Korpi, 2000; Hantrais, 2004; OECD, 2005; Baker, 2006). Furthermore, full-time employment rates for mothers remain relatively low, especially in New Zealand, although rates in both countries have increased in recent years. Among mothers with children under three years old, only 43.2% of New Zealanders compared to 58.7% of Canadians were employed (OECD, 2005, p. 41; OECD, 2002, p. 77). Employed mothers sometimes accept part-time work while caring for young children. With two or more children, half of employed mothers in New Zealander but less than a third in Canada worked part-time compared to 5.3% and 3.2% of fathers in the two countries (OECD, 2002, p. 78). OECD statistics show that the more children women have, the less likely they are to be employed full-time, especially in jurisdictions such as New Zealand with costly childcare services and punitive discourses
linking maternal employment with child neglect (Baker & Tippin, 1999).

Nearly half of lone parent households in Canada and New Zealand are ‘poor’ after taxes and transfers compared to less than 10% in social democratic countries such as Sweden and Norway (OECD, 2005). If lone parents in Canada and New Zealand are outside the labour force, nearly 90% of their children are poor. If they are working for pay, the child poverty rate falls to 27.7 in Canada and 21.3% in NZ. This suggests that employment pulls many lone-parent households out of poverty but certainly not all, especially in Canada where low-wage work is more prevalent and women’s wages are lower relative to men’s (OECD, 2002).

Governments in both countries have acknowledged that childcare subsidies are necessary if mothers with young children are expected to find and maintain employment. Although subsidies have increased, New Zealand parents cannot deduct their childcare expenses from income tax owed and most parents are ineligible for the small subsidy. It is widely expected that mothers should look after for their own preschool children and many care providers view their services as early education rather than employment-related care. Therefore, operating hours do not fully accommodate parental working hours. Even the Labour Government’s ‘free childcare’ that began in July 2007 includes only 3-4 year olds in educational centres for a maximum of 6 hours per day (NZ Government, 2006). In addition, children’s illness remains challenging for employed lone parents because many women are ineligible for paid sick leave because they have not worked for the same employer for six months (Baker, 2004).

In the late 1990s, the New Zealand (National) government promoted the idea (already prevalent in Canada) that paid work would sustain and improve family wellbeing, even for lone mothers with young children. Subsequent Labour governments perpetuated this argument, backing it up with policy reform. However, neither political party has guaranteed the services or employment protections necessary to enable employed mothers to raise their children without considerable sacrifice. Canada fares better than New Zealand with employment-related childcare programs, although the demand far outstrips the supply, but women’s wages are higher relative to men’s in New Zealand.

**CONCLUSIONS**

As labour markets and families have been transformed, public discourse has shifted about the justification for state support and the form it should take. Before the 1930s Depression, male breadwinners were expected to support ‘their dependants’ but tax deductions assisted them and trade unions helped keep male wages high, especially in the more unionized environment of New Zealand (Baker & Tippin, 1999).
Both countries provided income support to ‘deserving’ families with insufficient resources. During the 1960s and 1970s when domestic labour markets and the state expanded, governments in both countries helped create new jobs and developed social programs to prevent poverty, promote gender equity and encourage home ownership.

The willingness to provide long-term income support for mothering at home has now dwindled and time-limited ‘welfare’ has become widespread in Canada as well as in the United States (Baker, 2006). However, promoting employment among low-income mothers has been resisted in New Zealand because employment may improve income but it is considered to entail childcare and time-management problems (Baker, 2004). Nevertheless, mothers with paid jobs receive higher incomes than those on social benefits in both countries (OECD, 2005), and many beneficiary mothers are highly motivated to become self-supporting.

Since the 1980s, both countries have focused on economic reforms, freer trade and labour market de-regulation, under strong pressure from business-related interest groups. Now politicians emphasize the importance of increasing productivity, improving national competitiveness in global markets, developing a skilled workforce. Income support remains as a ‘safety net’ but both governments now pay this support to a smaller number of families with fewer children, as birth rates fall and more households contain only one parent. However, governments in both countries stress the importance of ‘good parenting’, view children as a ‘future resource’ and urge parents to earn their way out of poverty, although they downplay the importance of gender as a variable influencing earned incomes and caring work.

In the current climate of freer trade and global markets, many employers are minimizing payroll costs by hiring part-time or casual workers. These jobs might enable mothers to retain domestic responsibilities and care for their own children, but they seldom pay enough to support entire families. Although full-time high-paying jobs are harder to find, state income support in both countries is being restructured to shorten the period that beneficiaries can receive payments. Governments have also heightened expectations that former beneficiaries can earn their way out of poverty even though the transition from welfare to work can be risky as parents often forfeit income security and services when they move into employment. For political reasons, however, the social services accompanying welfare benefits cannot be more generous than those available to the growing percentage of low-wage workers, many of whom are women (Baker, 2006).

Cross-national research indicates that some governments (especially in Nordic countries) provide more help to mothers balancing paid and caring work, regulate wages and working conditions, develop tax
systems and government transfers that stabilize and supplement earnings and reduce poverty rates for families with children (Gauthier, 2001; Bradshaw & Finch, 2002; Hantrais, 2004; OECD, 2005; UNICEF, 2005; Baker, 2006). Canada and New Zealand continue to focus on moving beneficiaries into low-paid work, enforcing paternal child support after marital separation and paying modest child benefits while emphasizing the importance of children to the nation. These strategies, however, are often insufficient to enable parents to create strong and healthy families while earning a living in a low-wage economy with gendered work patterns.
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