

THE IMPACT OF FAMILY POLICY AND CAREER INTERRUPTIONS ON WOMEN'S PERCEPTIONS OF THE NEGATIVE OCCUPATIONAL CONSEQUENCES OF FULL-TIME HOME CARE¹

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ABSTRACT: This article examines the role of family policy in shaping mothers' choice between work and care and the perceived occupational consequences of that choice. A central question concerns how parental/maternal leave and childcare policies affect the occupational consequences for mothers who spend time on full-time caring. Using comparative data from the second round of the 2004/05 European Social Survey, the analysis shows that the duration of career interruption due to care-giving and different care policies influence mothers' subjective feelings about caring for children having negative consequences for their careers. On the one hand, our findings confirm the hypothesis that long-term absence from the labour market due to full-time care has negative consequences for women's occupational careers. On the other hand, our findings show that countries with well paid leave schemes combined with access to high quality childcare reduce the perceived negative occupational consequences of the time spent on full-time care. This is the case independently of the duration of the career interruption due to care-giving.

Key words: work–life balance; family policy; parental leave; EU comparison; employment pattern

1. This article is written as part of the EU FP6 research project WORKCARE CIT5 Contract No. 028361.

1. Introduction

In comparative welfare research, social care and the way it is provided have become increasingly important issues. At the time when the male breadwinner model prevailed in Europe, there was no need for providing external care for dependent children and elderly citizens, and the conflicts between care and work responsibilities, therefore, were not high priorities on the social policy agenda. Since the early 1990s, however, the demand for maternity and parental leave as well as for external childcare facilities has been increasing throughout Europe. This is closely connected to the influx of women into the labour market.

This article examines how family policy affects the perceived occupational consequences of career interruption due to childrearing. It analyses how the variations in childcare facilities and leave policies in Austria, Denmark, Hungary, the UK and Portugal affect both the length of mothers' career interruption due to childrearing, and the perceptions of negative occupational consequences. The aim of the article is to examine how family policy, career interruption and the perception of negative consequences are connected.

The central issue concerns how family policy influences mothers' perceptions of the occupational consequences of full-time caring. The article assumes that family policy affects the perception in two different ways: (1) Family policy affects the length of women's career interruption consequently affecting subjective feelings; (2) Family policy also has a direct effect on the level of negative consequences which are not dependent on the length of the career interruption. Family policy that enables women to return to their previous job after maternity tends to decrease the negative consequences of full-time care.

The empirical compass of the article is two-fold. First, it will describe the connection between variation in family policy and duration of career interruption. Second, it will analyse how both family policy and career interruption affect the perceived negative consequences.

Contrary to other studies, this article does not deal with the actual consequences of leave policies for women's employment, income and career possibilities, but with mothers' subjective feelings of the employment consequences when they spend time on caring for children at home. This perception is considered an indicator of mothers' capabilities for realizing their employment goals in different family care regimes. By using the subjective variable to evaluate the effect of career interruption, we avoid making a normative assumption about what is good and bad for women in the labour market (Pascall and Manning 2000; Valentova and Zhelyazkova 2010). The perceived consequences measure how much mothers feel that they sacrifice when they take time off for care. The five

countries studied in this article represent different family policy regimes in Europe.

The article begins by outlining its theoretical perspective. Second, it describes the variation in childcare and leave schemes in the five countries. Third, the data and methods will be presented. Fourth, it examines how different leave policies influence the mothers' career interruptions as a consequence of caring for children. Fifth, it analyses how leave policies and time spent on caring influence the perceived negative occupational consequences of caring for children. Sixth, the article discusses how the institutional setting of family policy influences the occupational consequences of career interruption.

2. Theoretical perspectives

According to Esping-Andersen, family policy has a huge impact on women's life incomes in two ways. The first is the level of loss in income during the maternity interruption. The second is the level of deprivation in human capital and loss of work experience due to the interruptions (Esping-Andersen 2009).

Several studies have shown that family policy has a crucial impact on both the duration of employment interruption due to maternity leave and the economic consequences of the interruption (Stier and Levin-Epstein 2001). In the literature, childcare provision is often seen as a condition for women to combine motherhood with continuous employment (Knijn and Smit 2009).

The consequences of leave policy are unclear because it both facilitates home care and the return to a previous job. The theoretical approaches to the role of leave policy fall roughly into two groups.

The first approach focuses mainly on the economic and societal consequences of parental leave. From an economic point of view, according to Fagan and Hebson (2005), leave entitlement creates an integration mechanism in two ways. First, it encourages women to enter the labour market up to the birth of the child in order to ensure an entitlement; second, women are not forced to quit and re-enter the labour market when they want time off for childrearing (Fagan and Hebson 2005: 39; De Henau *et al.* 2007). Others have argued that long paid leave can reduce women's accumulation of human capital because of their long absence from the labour market (Gornick 2000). Much literature has found that part of the wage gap between women and men is a direct result of women having longer career interruptions due to parental leave (Pylkkänen and Smith 2003; Gornick 2004; De Henau *et al.* 2007). Gupta and Smith (2002) found that the growth in men's wages is considerably higher than

for women in the childrearing years. According to Smith and Gupta, the explanation could be that women face statistical discrimination because employers expect a career interruption (Gupta and Smith 2002). The consequences of generous parental leave could thus be a weakening of women's earnings and promotion opportunities.

The second approach focuses on parental leave as a policy that provides parents with a right to time for care (Knijn and Kremer 1997). From this point of view, leave legislation guarantees citizens such a right, thereby valuating the unpaid care work (Knijn and Kremer 1997; Lewis 2005). By valuating the unpaid care work, parents get more options for choosing how to reconcile work and caring responsibilities. Others have argued that incorporating payment for care as a citizenship right could undermine women's claim to citizenship through equal participation in paid work on the labour market (Lister 2001; Daly and Rake 2003). According to Lister, the central dilemma is how to value care without reinforcing the gendered division of work (Lister 2002).

Some authors have thus stated that policies which value care have a tendency to reinforce the gendered division of work in the home and thereby affirm the association of care-giving as a feminine praxis (see Fraser 1994: 609). The gendered consequences of leave policies can then be that mothers are assumed to reconcile employment with their caring responsibilities, while men are not (Hobson *et al.* 2006). A generous universal parental leave policy might serve as a 'mommy track' which affirms women's interrupted employment pattern and reinforces women's responsibility for children (Fraser 1994: 608). The fear is that the consequences of paying women for child care will cement the gendered division of work and damage women's labour market position (Moss and Devon 1999, 2006). This article sheds light on how the variety of family policy influences women's ability to combine paid work with caring responsibilities.

3. Family policy regime

Understanding the interplay between family policies, welfare policies and the regulation of the labour market is crucial in explaining mothers' choice between work and care, and the perception of negative occupational consequences. Comparative research on national differences has categorised European countries into different welfare and care models (Esping-Andersen 1990, 1999; Lewis 1992; Anttonen and Sipilä 1996; Bettio and Plantenga 2004; Wall 2007). In order to analyse the consequences of different types of family policies in the EU, the article has selected five countries which represent different family policy models

in Europe using a typology of family policy models based on the work of Ejr n s and Boje (forthcoming). In this article paid leave is defined as the maximum length of paid maternal and parental leave a mother can obtain. Childcare coverage refers to the percentage of small children (0–3) who are covered by formal childcare. Table 1 summarises the differences in family policy between the five countries.

Denmark represents the *extensive family policy regime* which also includes other Scandinavian countries, Belgium and France. Denmark has a high level of childcare take up among children aged 0–3 years combined with the right to one year's parental leave with almost full compensation. The level of spending on family policy is high. The countries included in the extensive family policy model are, following Lewis's (1992) breadwinner-typology, classified as modified or weak breadwinner countries. In Denmark, there is a strong drive for women's integration into the labour force and towards women's social and economic independence. Danish mothers who have one child even have a higher frequency of labour market participation than non-mothers (Abrahamsen *et al.* 2005).

Both the United Kingdom and The Netherlands are characterised as *short-leave, part-time regimes*. In the UK, leave is short and badly paid. There is a modest level of public childcare for children aged 0–3. The

TABLE 1. Typology of work and care policies

<i>Family policy regime</i>	<i>Part-time employment (woman)¹</i>	<i>Paid leave in weeks (woman)</i>	<i>Leave compensation</i>	<i>Childcare coverage 0–3 years</i>
Extensive Family Policy (Denmark)	32.5	50	100%	63.0
Short Leave Part-time (UK)	42.6	39	23.8%	39.7
Long Leave Part-time (Austria)	38.9	112	17.4%	10.5
Family Care (Portugal)	16.7	17	100%	43.6
Extended Leave (Hungary)	16.7	108	87%	10.5

¹Part-time employment as a percentage of the total employment for women, 2005. *Source:* Eurostat, Labour Force Survey.

Paid leave is in these article defined as the maximum length of paid maternal and parental leave for women 2006/2007. *Source:* OECD family database, <http://www.oecd.org/els/social/family/database>.

Leave compensation is the 'rate of allowance' is defined as the ratio between the full-time equivalent payment and the corresponding entitlement in number of weeks. *Source:* OECD family database, <http://www.oecd.org/els/social/family/database>.

Childcare coverage is the enrolment in formal care for children under three years old 2006. *Source:* OECD family database, <http://www.oecd.org/els/social/family/database>.

childcare take up is typically combined with women working part-time because childcare institutions have short opening hours and are often expensive. The UK is characterised by a market-driven labour market with low social protection and there are very few restrictions for employers employing workers on low wages and variable working hours. If employees are low paid or in part-time jobs, they are not eligible for social security and the employers are not entitled to pay social contributions (OECD 2005: 214). Furthermore, British women are often forced to take up low paid part-time jobs after maternity leave because of insufficient paid leave and lack of childcare facilities (Plantenga and Hansen 1999; OECD 2005).

Austria represents the *long-leave, part-time model* also found in Germany and Luxembourg, which in other typologies is characterised as the strong breadwinner model (Lewis 1992). Austria has long paid leave and the level of spending on family policy is high. For most mothers, the period of leave has traditionally been followed by a longer period outside the labour market caring for the children. In recent years, a growing number of women in Austria have taken up part-time work combined with caring for children, but their part-time jobs typically involve short hours in order to reconcile them with caring obligations. Problems of getting back into regular employment having been out of work for a long period seem to be more serious among mothers in countries within this model, primarily because of the extended period most mothers stay on parental leave. Another serious problem for mothers who want to return to work after parental leave is the lack of part-time jobs fitting into the operating hours of the childcare institutions, which are typically only open for a limited number of hours.

Portugal represents the *family care model* also found in the other South European countries. The family care regime is characterised by a short period of paid leave and insufficient childcare facilities. As a consequence of the short period of leave benefits and restricted provision of public childcare facilities, the spending on family policy is low in the countries included in this regime. In the family care model, we find a bi-modal employment pattern for women: either they return to the labour market quickly after a short period of maternity leave or they exit the labour market (Esping-Andersen 2009). The labour market in the family care model is divided into two sectors: a primary sector with stable and secure permanent jobs and a large informal sector with insecure temporary jobs. In both sectors there are relatively few women in part-time jobs. Portugal differs from the other south European countries because women's employment rate is higher and the provision of childcare is more adequate. However, Portugal still belongs to the family care model because of the high level of informal care provided by the family and relatives, the lack of rights to time for care in terms of flexible working hours and the provision of paid leave.

Hungary represents the *extended leave model*. This model is characterised by countries with very long periods of leave. Included in the cluster are the three Central European countries of Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic, and Lithuania. All countries in this model have low levels of take up of childcare and relatively few women in part-time work. In Hungary women are eligible to take up to three years of paid leave² with high compensation. Despite the fact that the policy is home centred and encourages mothers to stay home when the children are under three years old, women often return to the labour market on a full-time basis when the children reach school age. The economic situation in Hungary as well as other Central and Eastern European countries forces both the man and the woman in the household to contribute to the survival of the family's economy in order to maintain a decent standard of living.

3.1. Hypotheses and operationalisation

Based on the theoretical framework, the article outlines two different hypotheses.

The *first hypothesis* is that family policy determines the length of mothers' career interruption and career interruption influences the level of negative perception of occupational consequences. We then assume that a shortage of affordable childcare facilities combined with long paid leave encourage women to interrupt their career and this again increases the subjective feeling of negative occupational consequences of the time spent on full-time care. According to this hypothesis, the time spent on full-time care or career interruption is conceived as a mediating variable between the country variable and the perception of consequences. The effect of the country variable will be neutralised when we include the duration of career interruption.

The *second hypothesis* claims that the institutional setting of family policy in the five countries also has a direct effect on the perception of negative occupational consequences which is independent of the duration of career interruption. According to that hypothesis, countries which give rights to time for and to receive care reduce mothers' perceptions of negative occupational consequences. According to that perspective, the combination of paid leave and childcare service on the one hand prevents women from exiting the labour market because of childrearing responsibilities and, on the other hand, gives women the opportunity to take time off for care and return to the labour market after the period of leave has expired.

2. Two years employment protected leave with high compensation, and one year of flat rate childcare benefit which has a lower level of compensation.

4. Data and method

The article makes use of data from Round 2 of the 2004 European Social Survey. The article focuses on mothers with children having at least six months of labour market experience and being in paid work at the time of the interview. I use the data to analyse how long women interrupt their career because of full-time caring and test how different factors influence the mothers' perceptions of the occupational consequences of full-time caring.

As a measure of the duration of career interruption, I use responses to the following question:

- Including any time spent on maternity or parental leave, around how long in total have you spent full-time at home because you were caring for your child(ren)?

In the questionnaire, the respondents can choose between seven alternatives ranging from no time to more than 10 years caring for children full-time. In order to have sufficient numbers of individuals in each group, the variable was grouped into four categories which represent a short duration of interruption (0–6 months), medium duration of interruption (6 months to 2 years), long duration of interruption (2–4 years) and very long interruption (more than 4 years).

As a measure of the perceived negative consequences of career interruption, I use responses to the following question.

- Do you think that this (full-time care) has had negative consequences for your occupational career?

The question has four alternative answers ('Yes definitely', 'Yes probably', 'No probably not', 'No definitely not'). In order to use the variable in a logistic regression, the four point scale was merged into the broader categories of Yes and No.

The empirical strategy was to analyse the relationship between the country variable and perception of negative occupational consequences controlled for the length of interruption and other relevant control variables such as education, time spent on part-time leave because of care, age and attitudes towards paid work and family responsibilities. This article does not include the number of children in the model because it is assumed that it is connected to the duration of career interruptions. For the analysis of the perceived occupational consequences, I use a multivariate logistic regression model and report the odds ratio.

5. Description

In the following section, the article describes the country variation in the amount of time women interrupt their career because of care-giving and the perceived occupational consequences. Table 2 shows how long mothers in the five selected countries spent on full-time caring for mothers with children living in the household.

According to Table 2, in Austria and Hungary, 56 and 72 percent of mothers respectively spend more than two years out of the labour market caring for children. Danish mothers have a medium length of interruption. This reflects the fact that Danish mothers are only eligible for one year's paid leave and have access to public childcare facilities. In Portugal, 76 percent of women with children spent only up to 6 months at home because of caring responsibilities. The low frequency of women spending a longer time at home can be explained by the short duration of paid leave and low income level.

In Hungary, Austria, Denmark and Portugal there is a correlation between the duration of paid leave and the amount of time mothers spend on full-time caring. This indicates that policies concerning parental and

TABLE 2. Country, career interruption and perception of negative consequences

	<i>Short interruption 0–6 months</i>	<i>Medium interruption 6 months– 2 years</i>	<i>Long interruption 2–4 years</i>	<i>More than 4 years</i>	<i>N</i>
Portugal	75.8%	15.0%	6.1%	3.2%	371
Denmark	34.7%	40.4%	14.4%	10.5%	334
Austria	13.5%	30.2%	20.8%	35.6%	187
United Kingdom	20.9%	20.9%	13.4%	44.9%	246
Hungary	5.7%	22.0%	45.1%	27.2%	314
Total	31.5%	26.7%	19.3%	22.6%	1,452
Negative consequences of career interruption					
Austria		35.2%	330		
Denmark		13.8%	275		
United Kingdom		24.1%	162		
Hungary		20.2%	233		
Portugal		26.9%	249		
Total		24.6%	1,249 ¹		

¹Only respondents which have spent time on full-time care are included. This explains the differences in the number of respondents in Table 1.

maternal leave matter when it comes to how much time mothers spend on full-time caring – a relationship which does not hold for the UK.

In the UK, the majority of women spend more than four years on full-time caring despite the short duration of paid leave. It seems that the low level of paid leave and poor childcare provision force a high proportion of British mothers to interrupt their employment for a long period and to engage in full-time caring in the childrearing years.

It seems that long paid leave policies and a shortage of affordable childcare for small children can prolong the mother's responsibility for taking care of children as we see in Austria and Hungary. The consequences of short paid leave are more dubious. On the one hand, a short period of paid leave may encourage mothers to return early to the labour market. This is the case in Portugal. On the other hand, short and poorly paid leave can force women to exit from the labour market and be involved in full-time caring, as is the case in the UK. The UK's and Portugal's patterns of care thus show that the impact of a short period of paid leave can go in two different directions. Mothers in Portugal return to the labour market while a high proportion of mothers in the UK exit the labour market and engage in full-time caring when the children are young. The difference in outcomes between Portugal and the UK will be discussed later in the article.

Table 2 also reports the frequency at which mothers state that full-time care has had negative consequences for their occupational careers in the five countries. The frequencies show that only 14 percent of Danish mothers state that full-time home care has had negative effects on their occupational careers, followed by Hungary with 20 percent. Austria has the highest proportion of women stating that maternity leave has had a negative effect on their occupational careers.

6. Analysing the perceived negative occupational consequences of full-time care

The central question is, then, to what extent the country variation can be explained by the variation in career interruption. Table 3, model 1, reports how the country variable affects the perceived occupational consequences without including other independent variables. In model 2, we test the country effects after including the different durations of the career interruption and several control variables such as years of completed education, age and career orientation. In model 3, we include the time spent undertaking part-time work due to care-giving.

Model 1 shows that the family policy regime affects the level of perceived negative occupational consequences of full-time care. Mothers in all countries are significantly less likely to perceive negative occupational

TABLE 3. Predicting the likelihood of perceived negative occupational consequences of career interruptions

	<i>Model 1</i> <i>Odds ratio</i>	<i>Model 2</i> <i>Odds ratio</i>	<i>Model 3</i> <i>Odds ratio</i>
<i>Country</i>			
Denmark	0.28 ***	0.42 ***	0.50 ***
United Kingdom	0.57 *	0.59 *	0.56 *
Hungary	0.46 ***	0.46 ***	0.68
Portugal	0.65 *	2.78 ***	3.27 ***
Ref: Austria	1.00	1.00	1.00
<i>Duration Career interruption</i>			
Medium: 6 months–2 years		3.80 ***	3.53 ***
Long interruption: 2–4 years		7.19 ***	6.29 ***
More than 4 years		12.96 ***	11.95 ***
Ref: Short interruption: up to 6 months		1.00	1.00
Years of education		1.06 *	1.06 *
Age		0.98 *	0.98 *
<i>Importance of promotion opportunities while choosing job</i>			
Very important, important		1.20	1.24
Ref: Neutral or not important		1	1
<i>Women should cut down paid because of care</i>			
Agree strongly, agree		0.99	0.95
Reference: Neutral or disagree		1	1
<i>Part-time work due to care-giving</i>			
At least some time spent part-time due to childcare			1.84 **
No time spent part-time			1
Constant			
Nagelkerk R^2	0.04	0.15	0.16
N	1,203	1,203	1,203

consequences of career interruption due to childcare than the reference Austria. Danish mothers are least likely to report that full-time care has had a negative consequence on their occupational careers, followed by Hungary and the UK. The central question is to what extent the country differences could be explained by differences in the length of full-time care among the selected countries.

In model 2, I find that career interruption has the strongest impact on the perceived negative consequences. But the most interesting fact is that I still find clear evidence of the country effect after controlling for length of interruption, age, education and career orientation. However, the country

effects for Portugal have changed dramatically after controlling for the duration of career interruption. Portugal now has the highest odds of women experiencing the negative occupational consequences of full-time care, while mothers from Denmark, Hungary and the UK have significantly lower odds of mothers stating that full-time care has negative occupational consequences.

Duration also has a highly significant effect on the reported negative consequences. Mothers who interrupt employment due to childcare for a longer period are much more likely to report negative occupational consequences than mothers with shorter interruption. Model 3 shows that mothers that have spent at least some time undertaking part-time work because of care-giving are more likely to report negative consequences. After controlling for the variable 'at least some time spent on part-time caring', the odds of reporting negative occupational consequences increase for both Portugal and Hungary, where part-time work among women is very uncommon. Then we find no significant differences between Austria and Hungary in the odds of perceiving negative occupational consequences. The differences in the perception of occupational consequences between Austria and Hungary in model 2 could then be explained by the fact that mothers in Austria often return to a part-time job after the leave period has expired, while Hungarian women return to full-time jobs. Also using model 3, Danish mothers are the least likely to report negative occupational consequences. Surprisingly, mothers from the UK have relatively low odds of experiencing negative occupational consequences compared to the other countries after controlling for relevant variables. A possible explanation could be that the more flexible labour market in the UK could help mothers to have a smoother transition from care work to paid work with fewer occupational consequences. This will be discussed in the next section.

The finding indicates that variation in family policy does not only affect the duration of career interruption, but also has a direct effect on the perceived negative occupational consequences. Well paid leave and available childcare provision modify the negative occupational consequences experienced by mothers in the five countries when they spend time on full-time caring. This explains why Portugal has a relatively high level of perceived negative consequences despite the duration of career interruption being very short. The regression analysis confirms the second hypothesis that generous leave policies followed by available childcare provision give women more options in combining work and care and reducing mothers' subjective feelings of negative occupational consequences of spending time on full-time care.

The first hypothesis, suggesting that family policy has only an indirect impact on the reported negative occupational consequences, can not be

confirmed. Despite career interruption having the strongest effect on perceived negative occupational consequences, the country effect has not been neutralised but specified.

6.1. Discussions of the institutional explanation

This section provides a deeper discussion of how the institutional setting in the five countries explains the country variation in both the duration of career interruption and perception of occupational consequences.

In Hungary and Austria we find a clear tendency to show that a long duration of paid leave combined with lack of childcare facilities for small children encourages mothers to interrupt employment and stay home and care for young children over a longer period. When it comes to the perception of negative consequences, the odds of reporting negative consequences are significantly higher in Austria before controlling for time spent in part-time work due to childcare.

The parental leave system in Austria provides employment protection up to the child's second birthday. Thereafter, parents are able to take up an additional year of parental leave without the right to return to the same job. This, combined with lack of available childcare facilities, means that almost half of the women do not return to work at the end of the leave period. Fifty percent of those who do return to work change employer, often because of a lack of part-time opportunities at the original workplace (OECD 2003: 19). About 40 percent of mothers who return to the labour market after the leave period are employed in so-called marginal jobs with limited earnings (OECD 2003: 17). This could be an explanation of why so many mothers have stated that full-time care has had negative consequences on their occupational careers.

Mothers in Hungary experienced fewer occupational consequences than mothers in Austria, despite the fact that the Hungarian leave system has many similarities with the Austrian system. One explanation could be that Hungarian mothers more often return to full-time employment after three years' parental leave than do Austrian mothers, who often take marginal part-time jobs after the parental leave period has expired.

The cases of Portugal and the UK show that short periods of paid leave combined with a medium but insufficient level of childcare facilities lead to different outcomes when it comes to career interruptions. In Portugal, mothers return to full-time employment after a short period of leave, while mothers in the UK have a long career interruption due to childcare, and when they return it is often on a part-time basis.

When it comes to perceived occupational consequences, the analysis shows that after controlling for relevant variables, mothers in Portugal are

much more likely to report negative occupational consequences than in the UK. The differences in the outcomes can be explained by the differences in labour market, family benefits and economic situation. Portugal has a truly dual labour market system which is divided between a sector with secure and permanent jobs and a large informal sector of temporary jobs and the self-employed (Cousins 2000; Zambarloukou 2007).

Women who interrupt employment due to childcare are at risk of losing their job and returning to a temporary, marginal job. This could be an explanation of both the short career interruption and high level of perceived negative occupational consequences. A Portuguese survey also shows that caring for small children is not the most frequent reason for woman to interrupt employment. Getting fired from a job is a much more frequent reason for interrupting employment (Torres 2008). This explains both why the duration of interruption is short and why the level of perceived negative consequences is high after controlling for the duration of interruptions.

In the UK, the labour market is more flexible when it comes to working time and job mobility is higher for all employees (Ester *et al.* 2008). This makes it easier for women to interrupt their careers due to childcare for a longer period and return to the labour market either on a full-time or part-time basis. Studies in labour market transitions show that the liberal countries such as the UK outperform southern European countries when it comes to reintegrating non-working people into permanent jobs (Muffels *et al.* 2002; Muffels 2008).

The level of cash benefit reduction for families is also higher in the UK than in Portugal. According to 2005 OECD data, the public spending on family benefits in cash as a percent of GDP was 2.21 for the UK compared to 0.68 in Portugal (OECD family database). The higher level of spending in the UK gives women in the UK more opportunities to choose parental care which explains the longer interruption.

The probability of negative perceptions of consequences of caring work is much less in Denmark both before and after controlling for duration of career interruption and time spent in part-time work due to childcare. Denmark, which represents the extensive family policy model, is characterised by available and affordable childcare provision and one year's highly compensated leave. This policy reduces, on the one hand, the duration of career interruption because it enables mothers to return to the labour market after one year of maternity and parental leave. On the other hand, the institutional setting that provides fully compensated employment protected leave for one year and affordable childcare to every child when a child is more than one year old seems to reduce the negative consequences after controlling for the duration of career interruption.

Women in Denmark can, after parental leave, return to full-time work at the same employer, thus reducing the negative occupational consequences of full-time care.

7. Conclusion

This article has examined the variation and consequences of family policies in five different European countries. The article shows that practice and variation in leave arrangements and childcare provision do affect women's options to choose between work and care and perception of their occupational consequences of full-time care. It seems that the institutional context in which the family policy is embedded plays a crucial role when it comes to mothers' perceptions of occupational consequences.

The article generates two possible paradoxes. The first paradox relates to the impact of family policy on mothers' options to choose between work and care. On the one hand, the research confirms the hypothesis that policies offering parents time to care in terms of long paid parental leave can encourage women to stay home and care for young children as we found in Austria and Hungary. Long paid parental leave can then serve as a 'mommy track' and reinforce women's responsibility for children. On the other hand, insufficient leave provision and lack of available childcare facilities can force women to choose between an early return to the labour market or to exit the labour market and consequently become a full-time carer, as we found in Portugal (early return) and the UK (full-time or part-time carer).

When it comes to mothers' perceptions of career consequences of full-time caring, the other paradox emerges. On the one hand, the research confirms that the longer mothers are full-time carers, the higher their subjective perceptions of negative career consequences. On the other hand, family policy which gives a right to time for care and the right to receive care reduces mothers' subjective feelings of occupational consequences. Generous leave policies and available childcare provision give women more options to combine work and care and reduce mothers' perceptions of negative occupational consequences of taking time off for care. The argument that paid leave can serve as a trap reinforcing the gendered pattern of care and weakening women's position in the society has to be modified in several aspects. The case of Portugal shows that the lack of right to give and receive care forces women to return to the labour market after a short period of leave and at the same time experience a high level of occupational consequences.

The Danish case shows that the combination of well paid protected employment leave and high childcare coverage for small children enable

mothers to combine care-giving with paid work with fewer perceived occupational consequences than in the other countries. The right to time for care combined with the right to receive care provides women a smoother transition between work in the labour market and care in the home. This explains the lower perceived negative occupational consequences among Danish mothers.

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