

Amplifying the Effectiveness of Family Policies for Societal Health

Forum: General Assembly

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Introduction

A commonly accepted definition of family policies would likely encompass “actions from the public and private sector that aims to promote healthy formation, sustainment, and disbandment of families.” Although the definitions suggested by each institution might be slightly different, the term “family policy” stands firm in its conceptualization that it aims to benefit families of diverse structures, eventually promoting societal health. Child benefits, free education, and paid parental leaves are some established examples of family policies.

Societal health – or simply the health of a society – largely depends on each family’s well-being, for families function as one of the most crucial components of society in various perspectives. According to a report by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), “Family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the state,” as claimed in article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

Furthermore, families also are key players in the education and development of future generations as they are the producers of the next generations’ children and the most significant factor affecting their growing environment. Therefore, maintaining healthy families undoubtedly directly related to bolstering a healthy social structure. And for such purposes, implementations of sustainable family policies are crucial.

Background

The need for family policies is clearly stated in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, known as UNSDGs. Target goal 3.1 aims to “reduce the global maternity mortality ratio to less than 70 per 100,000 live births,” and target 3.7 aims to “ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programs.” Such targets can only be achieved by governments of member states actively engaging in development of family-friendly policies – a unanimous engagement is certainly necessary if the world were to reach the aforementioned target.

Meanwhile, the situations regarding societal health are extremely disparate for all nations



Depiction of Family Policy by Family Policy Alliance

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in the world. This means that nations of distinct degrees of societal development require different family policies to be implemented. An article published by UNDESA in January 2020 highlights the disparity thoroughly. It is written that although the global fertility rate fell from 3.2 babies per woman to 2.5 babies from 1990 to 2019, the rate of change is significantly different depending on regions. The fertility decline in sub-Saharan Africa is occurring at a slower pace, and still occupy a high fertility rate of 4.6 births per women. Meanwhile, in Latin America, the rate fell from 3.3 to 2.0, and in East Asia, the rate declined down to 1.8.

The different numbers imply that a universal solution for constructing a healthy society cannot exist. While nations in East Asia and Central Asia necessitate policies to promote an increase in fertility rate and encourage people to bear offspring, sub-Saharan African states would require the employment of contraception and birth control to regulate the birth rate. Similarly, more developed nations would likely utilize child benefits – social security payments to parents and guardians of children to support their nurturing- to incentivize citizens to have babies. On the other hand, less developed nations would employ the same policy for a vastly different purpose – simply providing a better environment for the future generations to be nurtured in. And with states already instigating vastly different measures, the problems each country faces, and the solutions to those problems also will vary greatly.

Another implication of those statistics is that the societal context that must be considered in implementing family policies fluctuate as time passes. One example of family policies displaying different facets of its influence could be found in modern China. The Chinese government adopted “one-child policy” in 1980, as a measure to regulate the excessive population growth and concentrate the welfares on a reasonable number of children. However, after 35 years, as sex-selective abortion, abandonment of children, and anticipated decrease in workforce were observed, the government has abolished the policy and returned to its two-children policy. This illustrates how family policies must be ceaselessly revised and modified in order to address the societal situations effectively. Thus, policies that were adopted in the past, now, and will be adopted in the future, are all vastly different from each other.



One-child Policy of China

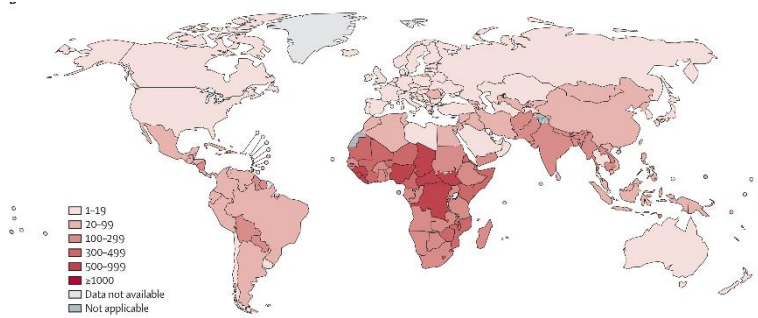
Furthermore, the suggested solutions accompany inevitable side-effects. For example, an increase in parental leave pays and durations inevitably put a burden on businesses and reported cases of people abusing the welfares have increased. Subsidies in education imposes a greater and unfair burden for taxpayers without children, just like how welfare for the elders overburdens the current workforce. In order to amplify the effectiveness of family policies, these problematic by-products must be handled as well.

Problems Raised

Maternal and Child Healthcare

It is already well noted that the process of pregnancy and giving birth is a physical and mental hardship for both the mothers and the children. Symptoms like nausea, chronic pains, and depression are commonly detected in pregnant women. Policies like paid leave for mothers, privileged seats in public transportation and parking lots, or postnatal care centers are already implemented to support the potential and new mothers.

Meanwhile, in Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs), high maternal and infant mortality rates bear greater problems. A report submitted to the United Nations Expert Group Meeting on “Family policies and the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda” in 2016 clearly explains the inequities of maternal



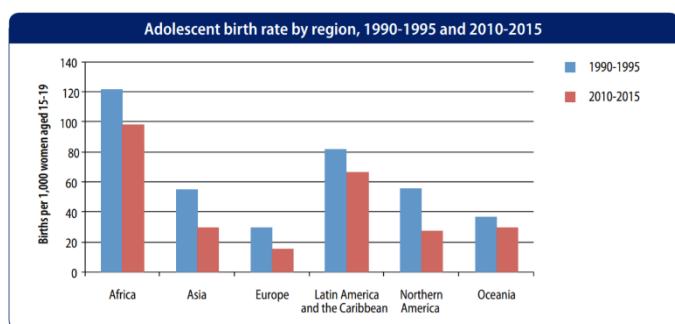
World Map of Maternal Mortality Rate

mortality worldwide. The map above, submitted in the report, shows how nations with a high maternal mortality rate are concentrated in the Sub-Saharan regions of Central Africa.

High maternal mortality brings on further effects other than the tragic deaths of mothers themselves. The children who are grown without their biological mothers in those regions are likely to lack nutritional support – through breastfeeding. Consequently, the global worldwide in the concentration of infant mortality correlates with the map above.

To mitigate the high mortality rates, governments take numerous measures, but they are not sufficient to fully achieve the goal of promoting societal health. One urgent problem to be fixed immediately is limiting the number of adolescent child bearings around the world.

According to the World Fertility Patterns data collected by the United Nations, the adolescent birth rate still remains high in many regions – especially Africa and Latin America. Premature



pregnancy and giving birth have a substantial correlation with maternal and infant mortality rates; therefore, policies regarding minimum age for marriage and protecting adolescents from sexual assaults must be strengthened.

Education Issues

Increasing complications regarding education are deemed problematic for both more and less developed nations. Regions that have not acquired proper and stable educational institutions have a lack of educational supplies to supply. Sexual education from young age is essential for the formation of well-planned and healthy families. However, it is reported worldwide that schools in both the more and less developed countries lack unbiased and practical sexual educations. Education for youths is important in growing sustainable amount of human resources that is required in developing the society. And most importantly, all individuals

must be granted access to the education that they wish to receive. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) asserts that “Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available, and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.”

Yet, in More Economically Developed Countries (MEDCs), the problem is dilemmatic.

First, it must be recognized that education costs in developed nations are comparably high and even burdening for most families. For example, the U.S. Census data shows that an average household needs more than two hundred thousand U.S. dollars for growing kids, excluding the expensive college tuitions. According to Forbes, the price of college education is increasing rapidly, eight times faster than that of average income.

Such burden on education causes numerous detrimental effects. Stress on the children for academic success, consequent disputes within families, and sense of inferiority could result in unhealthy disbandment of families, or even greater tragedies like suicidal incidents. Furthermore, anticipated stress from growing children disincentivize potential parents from having children, contributing to the low fertility rate problems that will be elaborated later.

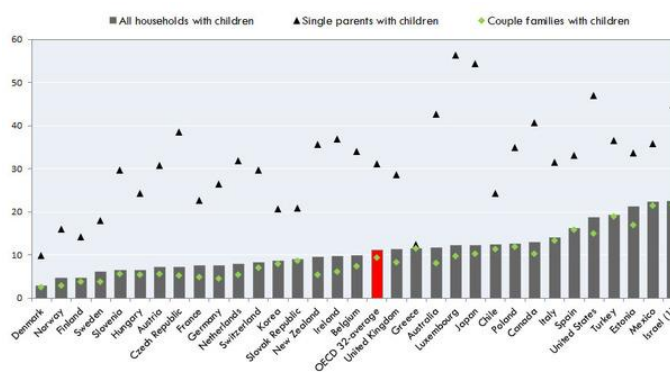
Increase in Abnormally Structured Families

As conceptions regarding marriage and reproduction have evolved over time, the structures of contemporary families are displaying an unforeseen level of disbanded members. These refer to divorced families, single-parent households, skipped-generation households, singles, Double Income No Kid (DINK) families.

Statistics sufficiently illustrate the trend. According to the data gathered by the European Union, the crude marriage rate decreased from 7.8 persons per thousand annually in 1965 to 4.4 in 2017. On the other hand, the crude divorce rate increased from 0.8 per thousand to 2.0 in 2017. People tend to marry less but divorce more – this is an undeniable trend that is occurring globally.

The result of increasing divorce is the increasing formation of single-parent households. Although a healthy and exemplary single-parent household is also common, the general statistics show that they are hidden behind the societal shades of poverty and mental disabilities. According to the article “Single mothers, poverty and depression,” the likeliness of mothers developing mental disability of varying severity was “more pronounced for single mothers, at 28.7 percent, compared to partnered mothers at 15.7 percent.” According to Karen Kornbluh, a reporter from the Atlantic, single parents were more likely to fall into poverty than partnered ones. The graph below from her article illustrates that. The Guardian also reported that children from single-parent households were twice more likely to develop mental disorders than children living with both parents.

As the number of single-parent households increases over time, measures to mitigate



Graph of Percentage of Households in Poverty according to the Household Structures and Countries

the negative impacts caused by their formation also must be taken. Yet, since the issue is relatively new and unrecognized, not much visible effort in family policies were made.

Below Replacement Fertility

As mentioned above, the number of marriages and births are strictly declining worldwide every year. The trend is most visible in more developed nations, and it becomes greatly problematic when it reaches “Below Replacement Fertility” – meaning the combination of birth rate and mortality rate that results in negative population growth. A birth rate lower than 2.0 children per women will most likely result in a below-replacement fertility. The reasons are various – from the burden, as mentioned earlier on education, to people’s increasing inclination towards independent lives and prevalent use of contraception.

In the report submitted for UNDESA’s expert meeting in 2016 regarding family policies and 2030 Sustainable development goals, it was claimed that 75 countries in 2015 had a below-replacement fertility. The number is projected to increase by 97 in 2030.

The dilemma with below-replacement fertility is unfavorable for many reasons. The most obvious and important reason is a decreasing number of labor force and skyrocketing burden for the current work force to support the elders – caused by evolvement of superaged society.

An aging society, resulting from below-replacement fertility, leaves significant economic burden for the working force through taxes and services that must be provided to the elders. As a consequence, people become reluctant to marry and have children, for they have aforementioned burdens, which leads to greater burdens for the newborns in next decades – catalyzing a fatally vicious cycle. Measures must be taken for countries to escape the swamp of this dilemma, but no government has yet made a laudable success in this aspect.

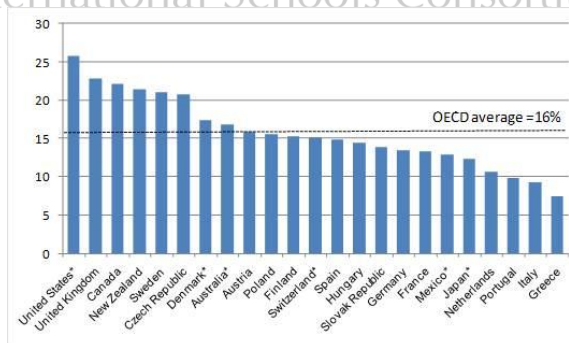
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Places of High Concern

United States of America

The United States of America deserves exceptional attention regarding the issue of family policies and societal health. It is the nation with the highest single-parent households with children, according to Kornbluh. Referring to the graph on the right, about one in four children live with only one parent. The government census reports that “between 1960 and 2016, the percentage of children living in families with two parents decreased from 88 to 69. Of those 50.7 million children living in families with two parents, 47.7 million live with two married parents, and 3.0 million live with two unmarried parents.”

As another evidence to show that the United States is performing poorly with enacting family-friendly policies, the country occupies an unusually high rate of juvenile delinquency. Amongst all the developed nations without a major crime gang like mafias or cartels, the United



Percentage of Children Living with Single Parent by Countries

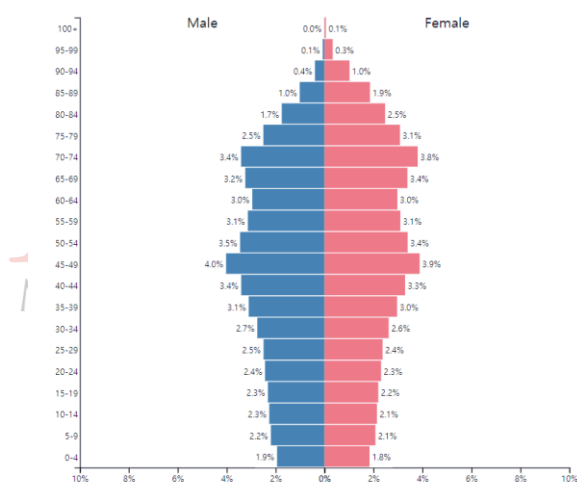
States occupy the highest juvenile crime after Honduras and Brazil, according to the Human Rights Watch. Also, the United States is one of the countries with the severest education disparity due to extraordinarily high college tuitions and system of legacy admissions, and prevalent admission corruptions in colleges.

Furthermore, high crime rates for a developed nation, weak system of binding education, and lack of welfare for families in poverty make the situation worse. Such unexemplary implementations of family policies and unhealthy formation of society is something to be mended urgently

Japan

Japan is one of the most commonly exemplified nation with a superaged society and extremely low birth rates. According to the World Bank, Japan's fertility rate has constantly decreased from 1971 and now displays an all-time low number of 1.42 by 2018. Scholars project that the current Japanese population of 120 million will continue to decline, reach 105 million by 2050 and 90 million by 2070.

As mentioned above, the problem with extremely low birth rates and an aging society is the increasing burdens on current generations. The population pyramid of Japan implies a lot.



Population Pyramid of Japan, 2020

The proportion of aged citizens – who are retired by now- is greater than 30 percent, while the underaged takes up about 20 percent. The taxations and services provided for these populations out of the workforce are extracted from the rest fifty percent, and the number will continue to decrease. Scholars predict that birth rates will also continue to decrease in Japan, catalyzing the demographic crisis even faster. Also, the Republic of Korea, Japan's neighboring country, holds the lowest fertility rate among all nations, with 0.98 babies per woman, deserving further attention as well.

Afghanistan

Afghanistan is a perfect example of a less developed country with a high maternal and infant mortality rate. Afghanistan has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world, with 638 women dying per 100,000 births, an article by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) reports. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) also reported that 60.3 children under the age of five die per 1,000 births in Afghanistan. Furthermore, only 42 percent of the live births are registered in governmental institutions, disabling government-level support in families that need aid.

Yet, Afghanistan is only one example of states requiring a vast amount of aid and funding to implement healthy family-friendly policies. In nations where child registrations are not occurring properly, a meaningful construction of policies that can promote a healthy society is not expectable. Nigeria, Niger, Somalia, Yemen, South Sudan, Central African Republic are some other nations that profoundly lack infrastructures and budget to support families.

Related Organizations

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is a United Nations Organization (UNO) under the United Nations General Assembly. The organization claims that it works “in the world’s toughest places to reach the most disadvantaged children and adolescents – and to protect the rights of every child, everywhere.” It operates in 190 nations worldwide and made meaningful contributions to supporting children’s’ health and education. More than 195 million children were vaccinated from 2014 to 2018, and 17 million children gained access to primary and secondary education in 2019. 4 million children were treated for severe malnutrition in 2019, and 37 million were able to acquire access to a sustainable drinking water source. The effort and positive impact the organization bears on the world is immense.



Ironically, the massive work of UNICEF rather implies that there are still many regions in the world where governmental actions of supporting children and families are insufficient. UNICEF's most desirable outcome would be that the world without the need for the organization is achieved.

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA)

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, abbreviated as UNDESA, bears responsibilities in promoting healthy family-friendly policies worldwide. The organization claims that it is “Rooted in the United Nations Charter and guided by the transformative 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and upholds the development pillar of the United Nations.”

The UNDESA department for family is an important player in the issue of family policies and building healthy societies. The organization published articles like “Family Policies for Poverty Reduction, Work-Family Balance and Intergenerational Solidarity” and “Men in Families and a Family Policy in Changing World,” which is often referred to in debates of different committees of UN.

Although not an active organization that dives into in-field applications of their ends, the organization offers important recommendations and guidelines for the global society to follow regarding family policies. One must not neglect to revere the resources of this organization to be better engaged in the issue.



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Save the Children

Save the Children is an internationally functioning Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) that aims to promote a world with better status for children. The organization officially claimed to obtain an ambition to create a world with all children surviving, learning, and being protected by 2030. Although such goal seems unfeasible for some, Save the Children's contribution is more significant than any other associations of similar end.



The annual report of the organization claims that it will work to inspire global actions to save more than 5 million lives from pneumonia by 2030. The organization was able to reach more than 38 million children, supporting 26 million of them with health and nutrition cares and more than 7 million with educational support. It spent more than 2.2 billion US dollars in 2019 for their contributions in 117 countries.

Possible Solutions

Paid Parental Leave

The most fundamental solution to amplifying the effect of family policies on society is simply increasing the welfare. The first suggestion made by UNDESA of a policy to be implemented was an increase in paid parental leave. It is estimated by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 2014, that 830 million female workers worldwide were “not adequately covered by maternity protection, including maternity leave.” Also, UNICEF has reported that almost “two thirds of the world’s children under 1 year old – nearly 90 million – live in countries where their fathers are not entitled by law to a single day of paid paternity leave.”

Paid parental leave is beneficial for both the families and the country's economy. Families can benefit by maintaining stable income at a time when infants are in need of families' attention. It was reported that in “high-income countries, each additional week of paid parental leave is associated with a 4.2 percent lower chance of single mothers living in poverty.”

The national economy could benefit due to continued employment and incomes by the mothers. Data from the United States displayed mothers' income rose for about 10 percent to 17 percent along with the number of hours and weeks worked also increased with the adoption of maternal durational maternal leave. Creating more sustainable industries, families, altogether will certainly benefit the national society. However, this solution remains challengeable due to the limitations on gathering money to pay for leaves, enforcing private businesses to do so, and preventing misuse of the policy.

Child benefits

An analysis indicated that roughly one third of households globally receive child/family cash benefits, varying from nine out of ten households in Europe and Central Asia, to less than three per ten households in Asia and the Pacific and about three per twenty households in Africa. “This means that the majority of children in the poorest countries, living in the poorest households, do not yet benefit from cash grants to support their development.”, according to an UNDESA report.

It was further estimated that about 250 million children under five in low-income countries are at risk of being disabled to display their development potential due to poverty. World Bank’s sample research also showed children who suffer from malnutrition lose substantial amount of potential earnings due to inferior labor productivity.

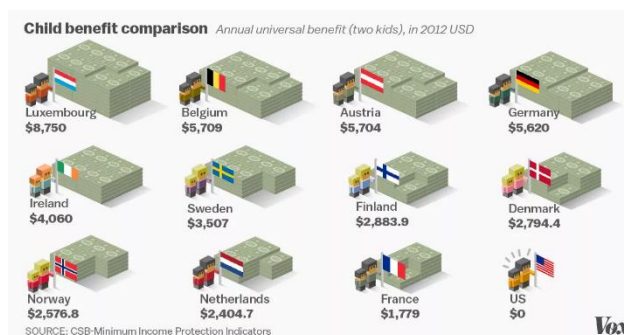
For these reasons, it is obvious that child benefits are an important measure to be taken to better uphold households in poverty. Yet, the need for child benefits are also emphasized in high-income countries, for promoting higher fertility rate and supporting families in educational burdens.

Glossary

Replacement Fertility Rate: According to the World Resources Institute, Replacement level fertility is the total fertility rate (the average number of children a woman gives birth to for her lifetime) at which a population can exactly replace the same quantity from one generation to the next, without considering net migrations. This rate is approximately 2.1 children per woman for most countries, although mortality rate may bring subtle alterations to the number.

Infant Mortality Rate: According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Infant mortality is the death of an infant before his or her first birthday. The infant mortality rate is the number of infant deaths per every 1,000 live births. More than being a key information about maternal and infant health, the infant mortality rate is an important indicator of the overall health of a society”

Parental Leave: According to the definition by Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), parental leaves are employment-protected leave of absence for employed parents, which is often supplementary to specific maternity and paternity leave periods. When it refers to mother, the term can change as maternity leave. For fathers, paternity leave.



Difference in Annual Universal Child Benefit in European nations and the United States of America

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