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Work-Family Tensions and childcare. Reflections on Latin American Experiences

(doi: 10.2383/34629)

Sociologica (ISSN 1971-8853)

Fascicolo 1, gennaio-aprile 2011

Ente di afferenza:

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Work-Family Tensions and childcare

Reflections on Latin American Experiences

by Rianne Mahon

doi: 10.2383/34629

Introduction

The issues raised by tensions between work and family life have been on the agenda in Western Europe and North America for several decades. Women's rising labour force participation, the increase in lone parent families, demographic challenges (falling fertility, ageing) have given rise to the need for policies and programs, like childcare, to address this. While demands for public action to deal with these issues have arisen in a context where states are under pressure to curb social expenditures, such pressures have also enhanced the importance of measures to facilitate work-family reconciliation. Thus, for instance, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has advocated measures to increase women's labour force participation as part of a broader move to reduce social assistance rolls, to "modernize" pension systems and to eliminate tax expenditures favouring the male breadwinner-female caregiver family [OECD 2005].

Work-family tensions are not, however, confined to North America and Western Europe. The issue is also of growing importance in the Global South. Noting that women's massive entry into the paid workforce is a near global trend, UNRISD launched a three year (2007-09) study of the political and social economy of care, with particular attention to countries of the South. This paper reflects on the results of

these studies in several Latin American countries¹ whose welfare regimes bear marked similarities to those of Southern Europe.² Particular attention is paid to changing childcare arrangements in countries that once relied primarily on families (i.e. mothers) for provision.

The first section provides a brief description of the welfare regimes of middle-income countries like Argentina, Chile and Uruguay, bringing out the parallels between these and southern European regimes. It will show how economic crises and the structural adjustment policies favoured by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank have undermined the old regimes in ways that exacerbate work-family tensions, not only for the poor but also for middle class families.

Just as the European Union and the OECD have helped to draw the attention of European and North American states and publics to work-family issues, so, too, have international organisations helped to shape policy agendas in Latin America. The second section accordingly examines the policy advice being tendered by the World Bank, which has become an important protagonist for the adoption of early childhood development (ECD) programs in the Global South. It argues that the World Bank's perspective on ECD treats childcare as just part of a package of measures focused on young children – and only those living in extreme poverty. In this it draws its inspiration from the liberal-residualist American social policy model, rather than the universalist approach advocated by the OECD.

The third section looks at recent childcare policy developments in the larger Latin American countries. It argues that none are slavishly following the Bank's advice, especially with regard to preschool education. Although there is a visible turn to non-formal childcare for younger children who are poor in some countries, in others – notably Brazil and Chile – important steps have been taken to establish the foundations for a universal early childhood education and care system. The paper concludes with reflections on “what is to be done.”

¹ The country studies, which can be found at the UNRISD site (www.unrisd.org/research/gd/care), included Argentina (2008), Chile and Mexico (2010), Uruguay 2010) and Nicaragua (2010). I also draw on UNESCO's [2006] study of early childhood education and care in Brazil.

² There is an important literature on this ‘fourth’ world of welfare regimes. See especially Ferrera [1996; 2005], Naldini [2003], and García and Karakatsanis [2006].

Conservative-Familialist Regimes in Latin America Under Pressure

The welfare regimes in existence by the 1980s in the middle-income countries of Latin America³ have been compared to the conservative regimes of southern Europe. As in southern Europe, these regimes “focused on supporting families by protecting the (male) breadwinner through occupationally stratified social insurance schemes and job protection” [Barrientos 2009, 89]. Yet Barrientos classified them as “conservative-informal” because, for the most part, such protections only reached those in the formal labour market. In some, however, the informal sector was small, whereas in others, especially those with a substantial rural population, it was more significant, leading Filgueira [2005] to distinguish between the “stratified universalism” of Argentina’s and Uruguay’s regimes and the “dualist” (stratified-exclusionary) regimes of Brazil and Mexico.⁴

While insightful, like Esping-Andersen’s original typology, these classifications paid little attention to the provision of care. To be sure, for the most part, in these years care was largely provided by the unpaid work of women in the home. Nevertheless, countries like Argentina had developed an extensive network of public health and educational services by the 1970s. Women (at least those employed in the formal sector) benefited from job protection during pregnancy, were eligible for paid maternity leave and, since the 1970s, were officially covered by legislation requiring employers to provide childcare – although the latter provision was not enforced [Faur 2008, 48]. In Mexico, too, from the mid-1970s, the Institute for Social Security (IMSS) and its public sector counterpart (ISSSTE) were authorized to provide childcare for working mothers in the formal sector [Staab and Gerhard 2010].

During the 1980s, these regimes came under increasing pressure the IMF and the World Bank⁵ to implement structural adjustment policies, which led to increased reliance on women’s paid labour, as well as to the erosion of formal sector employment. Thus (urban) women’s labour force participation rates in Argentina rose from 38% in 1990 to 48% by 2002; in Uruguay, from 44-to 50%, in Chile from 35 to 42, and in Mexico from 33 to 45% [Abramo and Valenzuela 2005, 375]. Yet women were entering a labour market that was becoming increasingly informalised. By 1990, the percentage of non-rural men in the informal sector had ballooned to nearly 50% in Argentina (55.5% for women) while in Brazil, Chile, Uruguay and Mexico it

³ I am here referring to Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico and Uruguay but Costa Rica also boasts one of the most developed welfare regimes in the region, with a strong universalist cast.

⁴ It should be noted that while Argentina and Uruguay are predominantly urban societies, Brazil and Mexico still have a substantial rural population.

⁵ Brazil, however, resisted pressures from the IMF and the Bank to implement structural adjustment policies.

accounted for between 33 and 38% of the labour market for men and 40-47% for women [Abramo and Valenzuela 2005, 383]. A decade later informal sector employment for both men and women had dropped somewhat in Argentina and remained the same in Chile, but had continued to rise in Brazil, Uruguay and Mexico.

For men, the rise in informal employment can be directly attributed to economic liberalisation and the forced restructuring of economies based on import substitution. As Abramo and Valenzuela note, “the increase in informal employment among men was largely attributable to the disappearance of jobs in certain male-dominated industrial sectors and to the dropping off of employment in large enterprises that replaced many of their workers by capital equipment and technology” [2005, 384]. While women have benefited to some extent from the growth of service sector employment, they remain over-represented in the informal sector. Here domestic service employs as many as one-fifth of women in Uruguay and Brazil [Abramo and Valenzuela 2005, 385], a point to which we shall return.

The expansion of the informal sector and the rise of women’s participation in the paid labour force have in turn contributed to the reconfiguration of these welfare regimes, while generating new social risks, including the need to find new ways to meet provide care. As the UNRISD study of Uruguay noted, “the breakdown of the old social model placed women in a dramatic position, as the last resource for family income, as a continual bearer of care-taking, in an increasingly worsened labour market situation, with less stability in family arrangements and with a frozen landscape in terms of welfare policies, that neither acknowledged nor confronted the new economic and social conditions” [Filgueira *et al.* 2009, 17].

In other words, as in Europe and North America, women’s influx into paid employment is not a temporary phenomenon but rather “an ongoing process that has increased the conflicts between productive and reproductive work and the cultural tensions between female autonomy and dependence. This new situation requires comprehensive policies and a “reengineering of time”...since it cannot be resolved simply through individual contracts and monetary relationships” [ECLAC 2007, 67].

The World Bank: Early Childhood Development as Solution to Inequality?

There may be an increasing need for Latin American states to develop solutions to work-family tensions but it is difficult to do so under conditions of economic instability, rising inequality and deepening poverty, while grappling with the residue of the familism that assumes care needs are met by the unpaid work of women

and meeting the international financial organisations' demands for fiscal austerity. They do so in a context where the post-Washington Consensus World Bank has its own advice to tender. In contrast to the OECD and the European Union, however, the World Bank has seized upon ECD less as a way to promote work-family balance than as a means to tackle inequality – by focusing on inter-generational inequality. Accordingly, it largely ignores inequality in the here and now in favour of equal opportunity – for the new generation. In doing so, it eschews the kind of universal early childhood education and care programs recommended by the OECD [2006]. Rather, inspired by US “Head Start” and related programs, it favours ECD programs targeting the very poor.

This is not to suggest that the Bank ignores gender equality. In fact, it is in the process of preparing the 2012 World Development Report, which will focus on gender and development.⁶ Moreover, its Latin American and Caribbean gender unit “is widely cited, internally and externally as the most effective of the Bank’s regional gender initiatives” [Bedford 2009, 44]. Yet for the Bank, the South’s “gender gap” has come to be seen as a measure of its backwardness [Bedford 2009, 30]. Bedford demonstrated that while the Bank’s work on Latin America recognised women’s unpaid care work, its solutions focused on getting men to ‘do their share’ by “fatherhood promotion, family strengthening and workshops for poor communities to raise awareness of the importance of gender equality” [2009, 62]. Moreover, while the Bank favours women’s incorporation into the labour market, Bedford’s detailed field work in Ecuador and Argentina showed that its projects were remarkably silent on the question of childcare.

Childcare does appear in Bank-sponsored programs, but not as a means of promoting gender equality. Rather, it forms part of the Bank’s investment in ECD. The push to highlight the “early years,”⁷ began in earnest in the 1990s and by the mid-1990s, ECD formed an increasingly important part in the World Bank’s post-Washington Consensus social programs. By 2010 it could proudly proclaim to have invested over US\$100 million in ECD programs for Latin America and the Caribbean.⁸ It has also entered into a joint venture – “Early Childhood Initiative: an Investment for Life” – with a foundation established by Colombian singer, Shakira, aimed at making ECD a priority in the region. The ECD/social investment frame may thus

⁶ See www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/IW3P/IB/03/000334955. Accessed 12.02.2011. For an assessment of ‘what will (and won’t) be’ in the report see <http://blogs.oxfam.org/en/blog/affiliate/11-01028/gender-equality-and>.

⁷ See Mahon [2010] for more detail.

⁸ [Http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/LACEXT/HAITIEXTN/0,,contentMDK.2278](http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/LACEXT/HAITIEXTN/0,,contentMDK.2278).

have opened a space for Bank funding of childcare but it represents only one part of the ECD package (and often the smallest), which includes prenatal, maternal and infant health and nutrition programs.

The Bank's perspective on ECD was developed by drawing on US-based behavioural and neuroscience science research [Young 1995; 1996; 2002] and ECD evaluation studies [Vegas and Santibañez 2010, chapter 3], beefed up by examples from the Bank's own field projects. While neuroscience identified the importance of the very early years – i.e. children from 0-3 as well as preschool children – as the critical period shaping the one's potential, cost-benefit calculations by economists like Chicago University's J.J. Heckman, made the utilitarian case for investing more in the early years than in adult training [Heckman 1999]. A corollary of this is the Bank's push to "rationalize" expenditure on post-secondary education – which is primarily seen to benefit middle-and upper classes – and redirect expenditures to primary education [World Bank 1995, 8].

In addition, citing evidence from US studies of programs like Head Start that concentrated on poor children, the Bank promoted a liberal social policy model, targeting the very poor. As the Bank's 2010 report notes, targeting ECD expenditure on the poor avoids the equity-efficiency trade-off, concentrating investment on the early years to create equal opportunity – for the next generation. Investment in young children also avoids the "moral hazard inherent in programs that seek to equalize outcomes in adulthood..." [Vegas and Santibañez 2010, xxiv].⁹ In a context of fiscal austerity, funding for such programs can be found in part by terminating universal preschool programs as middle- and upper class families can afford to pay for their children's education [Young 2002, 132].

Finally, the Bank commends the expansion of non-formal, community-based programs as less expensive forms of ECD capable of reaching the poor. Such programs are favoured because they offer poor women "employment opportunities" while contributing to competition and choice in childcare provision. Thus *Investing in Children* argued that "Mothers can be effective ECD providers in home-based programs...The women receive training and minimum assistance, on credit, to meet facility standards...Such efforts enable providers to benefit from public subsidies while also participating in a competitive, choice-based system of ECD programs" [Young 1995, 386-7]. Such programs may offer women jobs but only in the poorly-paid informal sector, with limited opportunities for skill development.¹⁰

⁹ Here, "moral hazard" refers to situations that insulate certain actors (adults) from risks by providing unconditional benefits and thus cushioning them against pressure to seek paid work.

¹⁰ See however Talcott [2004] for an example of how 'community mothers' in Colombia have organised to be recognised as workers with rights.

Latin America: developments in childcare policy

To the extent that Latin American countries follow the Bank's counsel, one would expect to see efforts to roll back universal preschool programs as the middle and upper classes are assumed to be able to rely on the market. For some this would mean hiring domestic workers, for others private childcare centres. For the poor, countries would turn increasingly to non-formal care arrangements that rely on low paid or "volunteer" labour of mothers to provide childcare. Such developments would, in turn, be consistent with the broader shift within the region from "conservative-informal" to "liberal-informal" welfare regimes. The latter represent a liberal turn to the extent that there is a weakening of the older stratified security systems and an increased reliance on markets, supplemented by new social assistance programs targeting the behaviour¹¹ of the very poor [Barrientos 2009].

To some extent, recent childcare policy and program developments in the Latin American countries being considered here do move in the direction favoured by the Bank. This is especially evident in programs targeting the youngest children (three and under). Not surprisingly given the declining efficacy of stratified social security systems, there has been little effort to implement and ultimately to expand the scope of earlier legislation that had made childcare a right for mothers employed in the formal sector. Instead, there has been a state-sanctioned expansion of non-formal, "community-based" forms of care, which frequently rely on the low paid or volunteer labour of mothers in poor neighbourhoods. This has not, however, been a universal trend, as we shall see: at least two countries (Brazil and Chile) have taken steps to develop early childhood education and care for very young children, with the aim of making this a universal program.

The expansion of non-formal care services is especially evident in Argentina and Uruguay. In 1985, Uruguay began to promote the creation of Early Childhood and Family Care (CAIF) centres providing non-formal care for children 0-4 [Filgueira *et al.* 2009, 49]. The majority of Uruguayan children three and under who are receiving out-of-home care in fact rely on these publicly funded institutions or on private care institutions. Even then, 75% of poor children have no access to childcare outside the household [Filgueira *et al.* 2009, 40]. Argentina has seen a proliferation of such childhood development centres and community crèches, especially since the passage

¹¹ Conditional cash transfers (CCTs), pioneered in Brazil (Bolsa Escola, started in key municipalities in 1995) and Mexico (Progres a and Oportunidades), have become the favoured form of social assistance. Typically they target mothers in very poor families, who are offered cash support contingent on ensuring children's school attendance and participation in child health programs. Such programs are counted as ECD programs even though they rarely include childcare. See Molyneux [2006] for a good analysis of the way such programs reinforce maternalist assumptions.

of the National Education Law in 2006, which formally recognised non-formal education centres. The latter do not require the presence of specialised personnel and in fact often turn to mothers themselves to “feed and care for the children” [Faur 2008, 88]. As in the country’s experiments with CCT programs, poor women are not treated as rights-bearing citizens but rather “as resources for the State’s social policy which, building on a maternalistic vision of assistance, incorporates women as mediators in the relation between the State and their children” [Faur 2008, 34].

While such programs in Argentina and Uruguay continue to rely on the unpaid care work of poor women, the Mexico’s Federal Daycare program for Working Mothers [2007], carried out under the auspice of the Ministry of Social Development (Sedesol) aims to mitigate poverty by encouraging the incorporation of poor women into the (informal) labour market.¹² It requires a co-payment amounting to approximately 35% of the costs. As Staab and Gerhard argue, this is in line with the state’s current poverty agenda “according to which beneficiaries of social services should not be mere recipients of state handouts, but shoulder part of the costs to be paid in money or kind” [2010, 19]. It is also limited to 14% of the population, thus does not include many low income families. The program also claims to have created jobs for women – but as self-employed workers not eligible for social security coverage. Thus,

rather than expanding the role of public institutions in the provision of care, the programme creates a “quasi-market” for home-based daycare services through supply-side incentives and demand-side subsidies. Thus Sedesol offers a lump sum of 35,000 Mexican pesos to individuals or civil society organizations interested in opening and running a daycare centre at their individual home or community centres....To qualify for the grant, the potential provider does not need any formal training or previous experience (except to have completed secondary school education). [Staab and Gerhard 2010, 10]

Sedesol’s approach to establishing daycare centres also means that coverage is dependent on those willing to supply care to determine the quantity and spatial distribution of daycares. In contrast, Chile and Brazil have taken steps to establish the basis for a universal, high quality childcare system along the lines recommended by the OECD [2006]. During her presidency (2006-2-10), Bachelet developed a bold plan to provide guaranteed access to free crèches (84 days to 2 years) and intermediate (2-3 year olds) on a full day basis for all, beginning with the poorest 40% of the population and reaching 60% of the population by 2011. Unlike Mexico’s daycare program or the non-formal institutions found in Argentina and Uruguay, the crèches

¹² In addition to low household income and requiring that recipients are working or looking for a job or studying, one of the criteria is that the women do not have access to childcare via the major social insurance agencies, IMSS and the ISSSTE.

and intermediate centres are to be staffed by qualified personnel. The emphasis on universality and quality reflects the way the Chilean program is seen neither as day-care for working mothers nor as a service to help poor children but rather as “early childhood education and care” aimed at providing a fair start for all. As Staab and Gerhard note, this did not mean that gender equality was ignored, although, as in Mexico, its secondary status “goes to show how difficult it is to move away from maternalistic ideals in both countries where female labour force participation has historically been low and conservative forces, including the Catholic Church, strongly influence gender and social norms” [2010, 21].

In Brazil too out-of-home care for very young children has come to be officially recognised as part of the education system. As early as 1982, voicing the demand of feminist and children’s rights groups, the Brazilian State Council on the Status of Women argued for an integrated policy of children 0-6 in the context of growing recognition that a divided system contributed to class, gender and racial inequality. The participation of feminists and children’s rights groups in the struggle for democratisation had an impact on the 1988 Constitution which recognised the principle of an integrated early childhood education and care system [Rosemberg 2003, 287]. Although the 1996 reforms opened the way to the expansion of non-formal early childhood education, childcare and preschool were placed under the auspice of the Ministry of Education which in 1998 produced a curriculum structure for children 0-6 [Choi 2006]. A key step forward was made in 2001 when Brazil adopted a ten-year education plan that aimed to achieve 50% enrolment of children 0-3 0 and 80% of 4-5s by 2011.

Brazil’s achievements fall short of its ambitions, in part because responsibility for delivering childcare falls on the cash-strapped municipalities, which receive subsidies from the federal government but have not managed to secure technical and financial assistance required from state governments, struggling to handle new responsibilities for secondary and tertiary education in a context of fiscal restraint [Choi 2006, 32]. As a result, disparities between rich regions (and families) and poor remain, with the former able to turn to private centres, while in poorer, often rural, areas children lack access to such services whether under public or non-profit auspice [Choi 2006, 9].

As the Chilean and Brazilian examples suggest, when framed as education and childcare, there is a greater tendency to aim for universality than to adopt the targeted approach favoured by the World Bank. This is clearest in programs for preschool children. The ambition to achieve universal coverage of preschool children had begun to take root well before the World Bank had discovered ECD as the Brazilian example discussed above suggests. In Mexico, preschool coverage began to expand in the

1970s, only to stall in the wake of the first economic crisis in the 1980s [OECD 2004, 16]. Argentina, with a long tradition of universal primary education, had achieved a gross enrolment rate for children 4-5 of 49% by 1991 [Berlinksi and Galiani 2005].

Moreover, despite facing economic instability and crises, linked in no small way to the structural adjustment policies promoted by the World Bank, the middle income Latin American countries have continued to aim for universal preschool. Thus in 1993 Argentina launched an ambitious infrastructural investment program linked to the new Education Act's extension of mandatory schooling to begin with preschool for five year olds [Berlinksi and Galiani 2005; Faur 2008]. The 2006 Education Act established the goals of 100% enrolment for 5 year olds and the growing incorporation of three and four year olds. Uruguay's 1995 education reforms similarly laid the basis for universal preschool for the same age group. In 2002, Mexico made preschool mandatory for 3-5 year olds – the only country in the world to do so [Yoshikawa *et al.* 2007, 15]. The initial proposal, made by a Senator from the main opposition party, “framed the issue in terms of the right of all children to an education as set out in the Mexican constitution” [Yoshikawa *et al.* 2007, 14]. Included in the legislation was the requirement for all preschool teachers to have the equivalent of 4 years tertiary education. In 2004, a national preschool curriculum, based on a child-centred pedagogy, was developed for all preschools.¹³ These important developments – including a program to enhance education quality, partly funded by the World Bank – aim to improve equality of opportunity not by targeting, as the Bank would counsel, but by making the system universal and by aiming for high quality across the country, while respecting cultural diversity. Yoshikawa *et al.*'s [2007] assessment shows that this still remains more of an ambition than a reality as quality remains uneven. Nonetheless, Mexico's preschool stands out within the Americas for its bold ambitions.

As of 2007, net enrolment ratios¹⁴ for preschool ranged from 47% in Brazil to 97 percent in Mexico [UNESCO 2009].¹⁵ While these rates, with the exception of Mexico, stop short of universality, they do place these countries – and, on average, the Latin American and Caribbean region as a whole [UNESCO 2009] – at the top for the Global South. Nevertheless, inequality remains an issue as services for those

¹³ The largest are the general public preschools but private preschools account for around 10% of places. The curriculum is also to be followed by the special preschools for the indigenous population, special programs run by CONAFE (Consejo Nacional de Fomento Educativo) providing an enriched experience for children in small villages (Yoshikawa *et al.* 2007, 11) and to preschool programs run by IMSS and ISSTE.

¹⁴ Net enrolment ratios are calculated on the basis of the number of children of preschool age in preschool over the number of children of preschool age (UNESCO 2009).

¹⁵ For the other countries gross enrolment ratios were 53% for Chile, 66% for Argentina and 72% for Uruguay. These figures compare favourably to Canada's (68%).

under four (and five for Argentina) remain at best patchy. More importantly, even when, as in Mexico, near universality has been achieved for 4-5 year olds, there are sharp differences in the quality of education and care. This is especially pronounced in systems where the private sector plays a significant role as it does in Argentina (31%), Uruguay (33%), and Chile (56%) [UNESCO 2009]. Moreover, the majority of preschools offer only part-day services. In poorer families, mothers (or siblings) are required to fill the care gap while better-off families can hire domestic workers (sometimes, as in Chile, migrant care workers – see ECLAC 2007, 89] to fill the gaps. Like the “community mothers” providing non-formal care or those providing care under Mexico’s new daycare program, domestic workers form part of the low paid, insecure informal sector.¹⁶

Conclusions

As we have seen, the World Bank views childcare – or early childhood education and care, as the OECD [2006] proposes – as a small part of the broader package of measures advocated through its campaign to promote “investment” in early childhood development programs. Such programs, it argues, should target the very poor as a way to tackle the inequalities that its structural adjustment programs have helped to deepen. To the extent that Latin American (and other Southern) countries follow such advice, however, they will contribute to the very inequalities – class, gender and racial – that the Bank claims to address, as it reinforces existing differences in access to quality childcare as well as familialist ideals of care,¹⁷ especially for poor women.

To some extent the childcare policies of key middle income Latin American countries conform to the course prescribed by the Bank. This is particularly evident in the official recognition and subsequent expansion of non-formal programs. Existing alongside better-financed programs provided for formal sector workers and private programs available only to a privileged elite, such programs simply serve to perpetuate the “unequal beginnings” the Bank claims to tackle. Moreover, while they may offer those providing the care improved welfare – in the form of modest income supplements or food for their children – like conditional cash transfers, they propagate “the notion of poor women as a nearly inexhaustible resource at the service of the State” [Faur 2008, 39]. Such programs rarely provide an entry point to formal

¹⁶ In Argentina and Chile, however, there have been recent gains in securing rights for domestic workers [Faur 2008; ECLAC 2007].

¹⁷ Kremer [2004] developed the notion of societal ideals of care to explain different childcare systems in countries where home-based care remains the ideal, and those where the norm has become centre-based care.

sector jobs. They provide, at best, a modicum of training, let alone skill certification.¹⁸ Even when such care provision is treated like “work”, as it is under Sedesol’s daycare program in Mexico, such jobs are not part of the formal sector and thus do not confer social security benefits. Even Chile’s new early childhood education centres, which require tertiary education, offer compensation well below the level of primary school teachers and many of the posts are fixed term [Staab and Gerhard 2010, 16].

Yet it would be wrong to conclude that these countries are simply following the Bank’s advice. This is particularly evident in their preschool policies, especially Mexico’s, where they have clearly deepened their commitment to universal provision. In Brazil and Chile, moreover, the ambition of providing universal early childhood education and care extends – at least formally – to cover all children from 0-6. This suggests that, in these countries at least, the World Bank has not managed to diffuse its preferred model. Rather, it has at most managed to spread the principle of “investment in the early years.”¹⁹ In other words, while the Bank may have helped to identify ECD – and with it, childcare and education – as a priority area, national political and state-structural arrangements determine the way such principles get translated into practice. The importance of such domestic political alignments is clear in Rosemberg’s [2003] analysis of childcare in Brazil, Filgueira *et al.*’s [2009] study of Uruguayan childcare policy and Staab and Gerhard’s [2010] comparative analysis of recent developments in Chile and Mexico.

Despite these important differences in national political state/political configurations, it does seem that when childcare is framed as “education”, it is easier to make the case for universality as this resonates with long-established commitments – at least in these countries – to education for all. This frame can open opportunities to challenge familialist ideals of care. On its own, however, it is insufficient to secure the kind of childcare arrangements to address the tension between women’s growing involvement in market work (formal or informal) and their ongoing responsibilities for unpaid care. Thus, for instance, the majority of preschool programs are part day. It is therefore critical that the issue is framed as promoting generational and gender equality. Staab and Gerhard [2010, 24-25] conclude with a critique of current policies – including the most ambitious, like Chile’s – which is worth paraphrasing here. First, care provided within the home needs to be shared more equally between men and

¹⁸Peru’s “Wawa Wasi” program apparently is, however, currently developing such a certification program for its volunteers [ECLAC 2010, 22].

¹⁹ See Weyland [2006] for a useful distinction between ‘model’ and ‘principle’ diffusion. He argues that the latter may be more successful for relatively straightforward programs such as pensions, but it more difficult in complex areas like health and education. The latter more typically involves ‘nudging’ states to adopt certain principles, in this case to prioritise investment in ECD.

women. This does not mean that it is enough to push men to “become responsible fathers”— a position of which Bedford [2009] is rightly critical for demonizing poor men while ignoring the state’s responsibility to develop policies that promote work-family balance. It does, however, mean measures such as the adoption of parental leave policies that provide sufficient replacement rates to make it economical for men to take their share of the leave, ideally backed by a quota system or “daddy months.” Second, the move to commodify care, in Latin America as in much of North America and Western Europe, has done little to challenge the idea that it is women’s work and hence of low value. Chile’s effort to raise staff qualifications goes part of the way to addressing this but pay levels and terms of employment remain inadequate. The struggle for equal pay for work of equal value remains as relevant as ever.

Third, the link between macro-economic, labour market and social policies needs to be made explicit. The best early childhood education and care policies will be hard to implement in a context where Finance ministries are focused on ‘getting the macroeconomic fundamentals right’ (or, fiscal restraint) and “flexibilised” labour markets that continue to generate a disproportionate share of informal employment will continue to generate levels of inequality “in the here and now” that make it very difficult to tackle equal opportunity for the next generation. As the background document prepared by ECLAC for the 11th regional conference on women in Latin America and the Caribbean argued, “a public policy cannot ‘save’ a generation at the expense of increasing care responsibilities and placing them exclusively on the shoulders of women” [2010, 27].

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Kate Bedford, Tracy Fenwick, Debora Lorpreite, Sonya Michel, Lisa Mills, Manuela Naldini and Cristina Rojas for their insightful comments on this paper.

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Work-Family Tensions and childcare

Reflections on Latin American Experiences

Abstract: The issues raised by tensions between work and family life have been on the agenda in Western Europe and North America for several decades. Work-family tensions are not, however, confined to North America and Western Europe. The issue is also of growing importance in the Global South. Moreover, just as the European Union and the OECD have helped to draw the attention of European and North American states and publics to work-family issues, so, too, have international organisations helped to shape policy agendas in Latin America. This paper reflects on the advice tendered by the World Bank and examines recent policy developments in several Latin American countries whose welfare regimes bear marked similarities to those of Southern Europe. Particular attention is paid to changing childcare arrangements in countries that once relied primarily on families (i.e. mothers) for provision.

Keywords: Childcare, work-family tensions, Latin America, World Bank.

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