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## Children and the Welfare State: The Need for a Child-Centered Analysis

### Cover Page Footnote

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# Children and the Welfare State: The Need for a Child-Centered Analysis

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*Variation in child well-being across rich Western nations suggests that the welfare state may play a role in shaping child well-being. However, welfare scholars have largely overlooked children in their analyses. This paper seeks to bring children to the center of welfare state analysis by examining how comparative welfare state theory can consider child well-being. The paper begins with an examination of Esping-Andersen's seminal work, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*, which has come to frame welfare state analysis for nearly three decades. Next, the paper explores the main critiques of Esping-Andersen's work, with special attention paid to the feminist critique and the construction of alternative feminist and family policy regimes. Finally, this paper extends and reworks Esping-Andersen's *Three Worlds* to offer a new framework for conducting child-centered welfare state analyses.*

*Keywords: child welfare, child well-being, child rights, welfare regimes, social policy*

## Introduction

Much has been written about the welfare state. Scholars of the welfare state have largely focused on social spending and services and their effects on the male breadwinner in rich Western nations. Over the last three decades, welfare state theorists have paid increased attention to how the welfare state affects women and gender relations. However, this evolving scholarship continues to suffer from an important omission: too few scholars have examined how the welfare state affects children. This paper critiques the inattention of welfare state theory scholarship to children and seeks to bring children to the center of welfare state analysis by examining how comparative welfare state theory can better consider child well-being.

Welfare state scholarship's inattention to children is particularly problematic when we consider the new risks faced by children in rich Western nations over the last 50 years. In the post-war era, ample job opportunities and good wages for male breadwinners coupled with stable families served to meet the welfare needs of most children. But this began to change in the late 1970s. Men's real wages began to decline as unions weakened and industrial jobs disappeared (Cohen & Ladaïque, 2018; Western & Healy, 1999). To prop up family income, large numbers of women entered the labor market and outsourced their care work to childcare providers, often at high cost, particularly in liberal welfare states (Gornick & Meyers, 2003). This shift was accompanied by an increase in divorce rates and births to lone or single mothers and significant declines in fertility rates across wealthy nations (OECD, 2011, 2020a, 2020b; Thévenon et al., 2018).

While children's well-being has greatly improved over the 20th century—children in rich countries now live longer, healthier, and more educated lives—the social and economic changes that emerged at the last century's end, coupled with economic shocks in the early 21st century (including both the Great Recession and the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020), pose new risks to children and new challenges for the welfare state (Bradshaw, 2014; Cantillon et al., 2017; Kang & Meyers, 2018). In the current Western economy, we find a growing gulf between the children who receive the resources they need to

thrive and those children who do not—a gulf that has only become more visible as the most recent economic shock due to COVID-19 unfolds (Van Lancker & Parolin, 2020). Today, poverty is increasingly concentrated among families with children and is particularly high among lone parent households (Hakovirta et al., 2020; Richardson, 2015; Van Lanckner et al., 2014). This poverty comes at a high cost to children. Child poverty is associated with a host of negative child outcomes including increased mortality rates, greater risk of injury and maltreatment, higher rates of asthma and other illnesses, and depressed scores on a range of developmental tests (Aber et al., 1997; Chaudry & Wimer, 2016). Child poverty also affects children's overall life chances. Research from the United States finds that child poverty is strongly associated with less schooling, increased pathology and criminal behavior, and lower earnings in adulthood (Danziger et al., 2005; Duncan et al., 1998; Haveman & Wolfe, 1995; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2019). European research has drawn like conclusions (Esping-Andersen, 2002).

While wealthy Western nations have experienced similar social and economic changes over the last fifty years, research finds significant differences in children's well-being across these nation states (Engster & Stensöta, 2018; OECD, 2020a). For example, child poverty, long used as a proxy for child well-being (see Bradshaw & Richardson, 2008), ranges from a low 3% in Denmark to a high of 20% in the United States (OECD, 2020a). If we examine other indicators of child well-being, we find more evidence of differentiation. In Nordic countries, infants are significantly less likely to be underweight at time of birth than are infants born in the United States or the United Kingdom (OECD, 2020a). The child mortality rate in the United States is more than twice that of Sweden (OECD, 2020a). Adolescent fertility rates range from a low of 4.7 births per 1,000 women aged 15–19 in Nordic countries to a high of 22.3 births per 1,000 women aged 15–19 in the United States (OECD, 2020a). Turning from health to housing, research finds that over 25% of all Austrian children live in what is defined as overcrowded conditions, while in Norway, Belgium, Ireland, and the Netherlands less than 5% of children live in such conditions (OECD, 2020a). Examination of other child well-being indicators, including educational

achievement, maltreatment, asthma, social exclusion, and social mobility finds similar differentiation (Aspalter, 2006; Esping-Andersen, 2002; Gilbert, Parton, & Skivenes, 2011; OECD, 2020a).

Variation in child well-being across rich Western countries suggests that the welfare state itself may play a role in child well-being, but few scholars have examined this (Engster & Stensöta, 2011; Skevik, 2003). Prior to the 1990s, comparative studies of the welfare state focused not on what welfare states do and for whom, but rather on what and how much they spend. Classical scholars of the welfare state (see Titmuss, 1958; Wilensky, 1975) assumed the welfare state to be a mechanism for making society more egalitarian and failed to consider that the welfare state might affect groups differently (Orloff, 1993). Examination of the degree to which these systems actually promote citizens' well-being and social equality only came to the forefront in more recent decades. Esping-Andersen's (1990) influential work, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (hereafter, *Three Worlds*), has changed how scholars consider the welfare state by showing that what the welfare state does matters. But in his analysis, Esping-Andersen fails to consider whom the welfare state serves best. Instead, *Three Worlds* focuses on how the welfare state protects laborers, predominantly males, against risks of the market. How the welfare state affects women and children is not considered.

Feminist scholars have levied numerous criticisms upon Esping-Andersen for his inattention to women (see Lewis, 1992; O'Connor, 1993; Orloff, 1993; Sainsbury, 1996). Their criticisms have led to a reworking of Esping-Andersen's power-resources framework to account for gender and have pushed mainstream scholars to re-examine their previous work. These re-examinations reveal new understandings of how the welfare state affects women and gender relations (see Esping-Andersen, 1999; Korpi, 2000; Lewis, 1992; O'Connor, 1993; Orloff, 1993; Sainsbury, 1996) and help us design systems of social provision that better respond to the needs of women (Esping-Andersen, 2009; Kang & Meyers, 2018). Attention to women and gender has brought an increased focus to how the welfare state affects the family; however, welfare state research on the family has been largely concerned with how the welfare state serves to help women reconcile work and caregiving responsibilities, not on

how the welfare state affects children directly (Skevik, 2003). This paper seeks to bring children to the center of welfare state analysis by examining how comparative welfare state theory can consider child well-being. To begin, I examine Esping-Andersen's seminal work, *Three Worlds*, which, despite much criticism, has come to frame welfare state analysis for nearly three decades (Arts & Gelissen, 2002). Next, I explore the main critiques of Esping-Andersen's work, with special attention paid to the feminist critique and the construction of alternative feminist and family policy regimes. Finally, I rework Esping-Andersen's power-resources framework to account for children and begin to explore how a child-centered welfare state analysis could be carried out in relation to child well-being. Just as bringing women to the center of welfare state analysis has revealed new dimensions of welfare state variation, bringing children to the center of the analysis can help us to better understand how the welfare state affects child well-being.

### Three Worlds: Evaluating the Framework

Building on the work of Marshall (1950) and Titmuss (1958), Esping-Andersen's *Three Worlds* employs a power-resources analysis to re-conceptualize and re-theorize what we consider important about the welfare state. He argues that what welfare states do, their emancipatory power, is more important than their specific social policies or expenditures.

Previous comparative work has examined states' commitment to the welfare state by measuring social expenditure. For example, when Wilensky (1975) found that levels of economic development, bureaucracy, and demographics (percentage of aged population) account for most welfare state variation (i.e., variation in social spending), he failed to consider variables such as class mobilization, how social spending affects different segments of the population (i.e., stratifying effects), and what the welfare state actually accomplishes. According to Esping-Andersen, the role of the welfare state is neither to tax nor spend—he argues that spending is a by-product of the welfare state, not its defining feature—rather, the role of the welfare state is to deliver on the social rights of citizenship.

At the heart of Esping-Andersen's analysis is Marshall's theory of citizenship rights. In *Citizenship and Social Class* (1950), Marshall distinguishes between three core elements of citizenship in the modern welfare state: civil rights, political rights, and social rights. He argues that these rights evolve over time. First, citizens acquire civil rights—the rights necessary for individual freedom, including freedom of speech, thought, and faith. Next, they acquire political rights—the right to vote and seek political office. Once workers are granted political rights they can mobilize to further their interests and in doing so they can achieve social rights—"the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilized being according to the standard prevailing in society" (Marshall, 1950, pp. 10–11). Once citizens have achieved social rights, they can use those rights to leverage their relationship against the market. When social rights become strong enough, workers are *de-commodified*—achieving the ability to "maintain a livelihood without reliance on the market" (Esping-Andersen, 1990, p. 22).

Esping-Andersen's analysis seeks to understand how the welfare state meets the social rights of citizenship. He examines how the fulfilment of social rights varies across welfare states by examining three dimensions of the welfare state: (1) the relationship between the state, market, and family in providing welfare; (2) the stratifying effects of the welfare state; and (3) how social rights affect the de-commodification of labor. Using these qualitative dimensions, Esping-Andersen identifies three welfare state regimes or ideal types: *social democratic*, *conservative*, and *liberal*, each of which he argues are arranged around their "own discrete logic of organization, stratification, and societal integration" (Esping-Andersen, 1990, p. 3).

Liberal regimes most resemble what Titmuss (1958) describes as the *residual* welfare state and engender the lowest levels of de-commodification. Real type examples are the United States and Australia. Benefits are modest, the entitlement criteria are strict, and recipients are often means-tested and stigmatized. The state intervenes only when markets fail, and it does so minimally. Conservative regimes are characterized by their status differentiating welfare programs. Real type examples are Germany and France. In these regimes, most benefits are based on individual contributions and occupational status.



Welfare provision often mirrors existing social stratification and the family plays a crucial role in supporting the individual. Social policies are only moderately de-commodifying. Social democratic regimes, which most resemble what Titmuss (1958) describes as the *institutional* welfare state, are characterized by universal and comparatively generous benefits and score highest on Esping-Andersen's de-commodification index. The state plays a strong role in income redistribution, is committed to full employment and income protection, and citizenship serves as the basis of entitlement. While there is no pure type welfare state, Esping-Andersen classifies Nordic countries as social democratic, much of continental Europe as conservative, and the Anglophone countries as liberal.

### Feminist Critique of Three Worlds

Esping-Andersen's three-welfare-state typology has brought analytic coherence to comparative welfare state research, but it also generated much debate and criticism. Three main critiques of Esping-Andersen's typology have emerged that concern: (1) the range of countries examined and number of welfare regime types (Aspalter, 2006; Bonoli, 1997; Castles & Mitchell, 1993; Croissant, 2004; Ferrera, 1996); (2) the methodological limitations of his analysis (Bambra, 2006; Gilbert, 2004; Guo & Gilbert, 2007; Van Voorhis, 2002); and (3) the failure to examine how the welfare state affects women. While all three critiques warrant further investigation, the last is particularly relevant to this paper in that it asks that we examine what the welfare state does and for whom.

Feminist scholars argue that Esping-Andersen's three dimensions of welfare state variation do not adequately capture women's relationships with the welfare state (Daly & Rake, 2003; Lewis, 1992; O'Connor, 1993; Orloff, 1993; Sainsbury, 1996, 2001). They maintain that Esping-Andersen's focus on the state-market relationship and the typical production worker (i.e., male laborer) fails to account for women's unpaid work, the different ways the welfare state affects women, and how the welfare state serves to maintain or reinforce a gendered division of labor. Further, this focus fosters women's dependence on men (Daly &

Rake, 2003; Lewis, 1992; O'Connor, 1993; Orloff, 1993; Sainsbury, 1996, 2001).

While deeply critical of *Three Worlds*, many feminist scholars find Esping-Andersen's power-resources framework useful as starting point to examine what the welfare state does for women. Building on his work, they have developed new conceptual frameworks for analyzing the gender content of social provision. Orloff's *Gender and the Social Rights of Citizenship* (1993) represents the most systematic effort to bring gender into Esping-Andersen's three-welfare-state typology. Orloff reconceptualizes Esping-Andersen's dimensions of welfare state variation by giving new emphasis to the *family* in the state-market-family nexus and reworks Esping-Andersen's stratification dimension so that it examines the pattern of gender stratification produced by entitlements. Orloff is critical of Esping-Andersen's use of de-commodification in that it presupposes social rights based on labor market participation. This conceptualization of de-commodification is problematic for women, because much of their work is uncompensated and occurs outside the labor market. Instead, Orloff supplants the de-commodification dimension with two new dimensions of variation: *access to paid work* and the *capacity to form and maintain autonomous households*. Access to paid work acknowledges that women must become commodified (i.e., have access to the market) before they can be de-commodified. The capacity to form and maintain autonomous households parallels de-commodification in that it frees women from dependence upon the male-breadwinner for maintenance.

#### *Through a Gendered Lens: Esping-Andersen's Re-examination*

The feminist critique persuaded Esping-Andersen to re-examine his previous work. In *Social Foundations of Postindustrial Economies* (1999), Esping-Andersen reconceptualizes the welfare state as a response to market and family failures. While his earlier work skirted over gender, in this work Esping-Andersen turned his attention to gender as he explored the welfare state's ability to reconcile work and family life. Esping-Andersen argued "that the 'real crisis' of contemporary welfare regimes lies in the disjuncture between existing institutional construction and exogenous

change" (Esping-Andersen, 1990, p. 5), namely the welfare state's ability to respond to an economy now characterized by post-industrial production, male and female labor, unstable families, and dual-earner households. He argues that the crisis of the welfare state, particularly the solvency of the welfare state and its need for increased fertility, can only be resolved by addressing the new risks that plague the household economy.

In this work Esping-Andersen re-examined the 18 rich countries studied in *Three Worlds*—all members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)—and expanded his study to include additional Southern European OECD countries (i.e., Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain). Here Esping-Andersen focused more on the family and less on gender or gendered power differentials. Bringing the family to the center of his analysis, he identified a fourth dimension of welfare state variation which he terms *defamilization*, that is "the degree to which households' welfare and caring responsibilities (i.e., traditionally women's work) are relaxed either via welfare state provision or via market provision" (Esping-Andersen, 1999, p. 51). He measured the degree of defamilization across welfare states by examining social policies that encourage defamilization, such as family allowances/tax deductions, childcare subsidies, and services. Much like Orloff's (1993) dimensions of welfare state variation—access to paid work and capacity to form an autonomous household—defamilization parallels de-commodification in that it promotes policies that reduce women's dependence on the male breadwinner.

In his reanalysis, Esping-Andersen found general support for his original three-welfare-state typology, however the levels of defamilization between social democratic regimes and all other regimes form what is better described as a bimodal distribution. Esping-Andersen found that the social democratic welfare regime constitutes a distinct world of advanced defamilization characterized by dual-earner households, gender equity, state provision of care services, and high fertility. These states promote gender equity in both the workplace and the home through provision of caring services and subsidies and by compensating caregivers for the work they do outside the market. On the other extreme are the southern European welfare and liberal regimes. Southern European regimes are highly familialized in that they

rely heavily upon the family for delivery of social provision. Governments invest little in family services, and the traditional division of labor prevails. Turning to liberal regimes, Esping-Andersen found high rates of female labor market participation, similar to those seen in social democratic states, but also large income inequities between men and women and little effort by the state to alleviate the family care burden. Conservative regimes receive a mixed assessment. While not overly familialistic, conservative regimes do little to support defamilization. They discourage women's participation in the labor market through inadequate levels of childcare support and tax credits that favor the traditional division of labor.

### *From Gender to Family*

The feminist critique of Esping-Andersen's work led both Esping-Andersen and other scholars to develop alternative worlds of welfare capitalism or to rethink the *Three Worlds* typology (Daly & Lewis, 2000; Esping-Andersen, 1999; Gornick & Meyers, 2004; Korpi, 2000; Lewis & Ostner, 1994; Sainsbury, 1996). Using a gendered lens, feminist and mainstream scholars identified what can be broadly described as *family policy regimes* (Kang & Meyers 2018). A family policy regime may be "defined as a distinctive set of policies for supporting families" (Engster & Stensöta, 2011, p. 85). These regimes vary in how they affect gender relations and in levels and types of support provided to families.

For example, Lewis and Ostner construct an alternative categorization of welfare state regimes based on the "traditional division of labor" that is breadwinning for men and home-making/caregiving for women (Lewis, 1992; Lewis & Ostner, 1994). Examining women's access to social security, social-service provisions, childcare, and women's position in the labor market, Lewis and Ostner distinguish between *strong, moderate, and weak male-breadwinner models* or *dual-breadwinner models*.

Similarly, Sainsbury (1996) constructs two contrasting ideal types: the male-breadwinner model and the individual model. Her framework examines the dimensions of the state-market-family relations and stratification, but emphasizes "the importance of *gender and familial ideologies* as a key variation" and "highlights whether *social rights* are *familialized* or *individualized*"

(Sainsbury, 1999, p. 4), that is, whether women qualify for benefits in their own right or as their husbands' dependents.

In Korpi's (2000) examination of the relationship between welfare institutions, gender, and class, he identified three broad family type regimes: dual-earner (encompassing), general family support regimes (corporatist), and market-oriented (targeted/basic security). Dual-earner regimes encourage women's labor force participation and the redistribution of care work in society and within the family by providing support for paid parental leave and childcare as well as low to medium cash and tax benefits to families with children. Real type examples are Sweden and Finland. General family support regimes presume a traditional gendered division of labor. They provide medium to high cash and tax benefits to families, but limited parental leave and childcare policies do little to support women's labor participation relative to dual-earner regimes. Real type examples are Germany and Switzerland. Market-oriented regimes offer families marginal support; cash and tax benefits are low, and paid parental leave and childcare subsidies or service are meager or non-existent. Instead, services are purchased in the market and market forces play a stronger role in shaping the gendered division of labor than in other regimes. Real type examples are the United States and Australia.

### *Extending the Framework to Children*

Mainstream, feminist, and family policy critiques refocus, reshape, and extend Esping-Andersen's *Three Worlds*, but none outright reject his original model. In fact, empirical examination finds strong support for Esping-Andersen's original typology (Arts & Gelissen, 2002; Gornick & Meyers, 2003; Korpi et al., 2013). As noted by family policy scholars Gornick and Meyers, "subsequent empirical efforts to establish welfare-state typologies that incorporate gender have largely confirmed Esping-Andersen's classification" (2003, p. 23). This suggests that relations of gender and class may be similarly affected by welfare state mechanisms.

Variation across welfare states provides a "natural experiment" of sorts, allowing scholars to examine the social consequences of public policies (Korpi, 2000). Esping-Andersen's *Three Worlds* and the typologies of others "serve as heuristic

tools for organizing and interpreting the wealth of information available in comparative studies" (Korpi, 2000, p. 129).

Feminist scholars have successfully expanded the scope of comparative welfare state analysis to include gender; in doing so, they have revealed how welfare institutions can shape gender relations, women's labor force participation rates, and fertility. Family policy regime scholars have brought the family to the forefront, highlighting how welfare state institutions support or reshape the gendered division of labor, but extant typologies tell us very little about how the welfare state affects *children* (Engster & Stensöta, 2011; Skevik, 2003). In the world of comparative welfare state research, children remain in the shadows, hidden behind their parents, embedded in the family unit as objects rather than subjects of social policy. As the old adage goes, children are neither seen nor heard. A child-centered examination of the welfare state is needed. Just as "placing women at the center of the analysis brings out aspects of welfare state variation that less-gender sensitive analysis have neglected" (Skevik, 2003, p. 423) placing children at the center of the analysis can reveal new dimensions of welfare state variation and help us to understand how the welfare state can better support child well-being.

### Building a Child-Centered Framework

Feminist scholars have used Esping-Andersen's power-resources framework as a starting point to examine what the welfare state does for women and families by reworking the power-resources analysis to account for gender (Orloff, 1993). To understand how the welfare state affects children requires a similar reworking. However, applying a power-resources lens to examine the welfare of children is problematic for a number of reasons.

Power-resources analysts argue that capitalism oppresses the worker by transforming the worker's labor power into a commodity. However, if the worker is granted political rights, as construed by Marshall (1950), he and his fellow citizens can mobilize to further their interests and, in doing so, they can achieve the social rights needed for de-commodification. Here we stumble upon the first difficulty in applying the power-resources

framework to the welfare situation of children. For Marshall and other power-resources analysts, citizenship rights are granted to the citizen worker (i.e., adult laborers), not to children (Qvortrup, 2004). In *Three Worlds*, Esping-Andersen identifies three distinct worlds of welfare based on indices that measure the stratifying and de-commodifying effects of social provision to the typical citizen, that is to say the "average" industrial worker. However, as Orloff (1993, p. 308) noted, "because of prevailing sex segregation in occupations and household composition," the average industrial worker happens to be an *adult* man. Thus, both women and children are excluded from Esping-Anderson's power-resources analysis.

Second, power-resources analysts assume "that civil and political rights are equally available to all citizens to use in mobilizing to secure greater social rights" (Orloff, 1993, p. 308), but this assumption overlooks the uncertain position of children in society. While political revolutions in the West resulted in the recognition of citizenship rights for all adults, albeit delayed for women and minorities, for children full citizenship rights have yet to come. Lacking full citizenship rights, children are rarely the direct recipients of social provision; rather, the welfare state channels resources to the child through the family. This, according to Qvortrup, is:

the precarious status of childhood in modern society. It may well be an empirical reality that children have access to the most relevant available resources in equal manner with other groups, but their precarious situation is highlighted by the fact that their access to welfare measures is not one that is assured by the law...children are in principle more exposed to market forces than other groups in society. This is only exacerbated by their status as dependents under the almost exclusionary guardianship of their parents, making children by and large a private matter. (2004, p. 3)

A child-centered analysis of the welfare state requires a reworking of Esping-Andersen's framework. Analysis should examine how the state, market, and family work together to *support children*; how entitlements and social provisions, such as parental leave, child allowances, subsidized childcare and child tax benefits, contribute to patterns of *stratification within and across*

*generations*; and to what extent the welfare state recognizes the *social rights of children*—that is, to what extent does the welfare state guarantee an acceptable level of child well-being (i.e., well-being in the here and now) and well-becoming (i.e., well-being in the future), independent of one's family of origin.

While children may not hold citizenship rights as construed by Marshall, the 1989 United Nation's Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) makes clear that children are holders of social rights, including the right to both well-being and well-becoming (Bradshaw et al., 2006). Per the CRC, children have a right to an adequate "standard of living" (Article 27), the "highest attainable standard of health" (Article 24), education (Article 28), and safe housing and adequate food (Article 27) (UNICEF, n.d.). The CRC also makes clear that both family *and* state are responsible for the realization of children's rights. "Parent(s) or others responsible for the child have the primary responsibility to secure, within their abilities and financial capacities, the conditions of living necessary for children's development" (Article 27); however, states must also invest the "maximum extent of their available resources" (Article 4) to help realize these rights (UNICEF, n.d.).

In recent years, international organizations and scholars have taken up the task of evaluating the fulfilment of children's rights by indexing child well-being across industrialized nations, but few scholars have examined the relationship between fulfilment of these rights and the welfare state. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (Adamson, 2013) and the OECD's (2020a) indices of child well-being provide the most comprehensive and complete indices of child well-being across industrialized nations. Each index takes a multi-dimensional approach to gauge child well-being. Using similar dimensions, each index seeks to measure children's well-being and well-becoming, and whenever possible, uses the child, rather than the family, as the unit of analysis (Tables 1 & 2).



Table 1. Overall ranking for UNICEF child well-being organized by regime type, ranking by dimension, 1 ranks the best performing country

Dimensions of child well-being	Overall child well-being	Material well-being	Health and safety	Educational well-being	Behaviors and risks	Life satisfaction
<b>Social Democratic</b>	Average Rank: 7	Average Rank: 6	Average Rank: 9	Average Rank: 7	Average Rank: 6	Average Rank: 9
Norway	5	3	7	6	4	7
Finland	5	2	3	4	12	4
Sweden	6	5	2	11	5	11
Denmark	12	12	23	7	2	13
<b>Conservative</b>	Average Rank: 11	Average Rank: 9	Average Rank: 13	Average Rank: 10	Average Rank: 10	Average Rank: 12
Netherlands	3	1	5	1	1	1
Germany	9	11	12	3	6	22
Switzerland	10	9	11	16	11	8
Belgium	11	13	13	2	14	6
France	13	10	10	15	13	18
Austria	17	7	26	23	17	16
<b>Liberal</b>	Average Rank: 18	Average Rank: 18	Average Rank: 21	Average Rank: 21	Average Rank: 15	Average Rank: 18
Ireland	12	17	15	17	7	12
United Kingdom	16	14	16	24	15	14
Canada	17	15	27	14	16	24
United States	25	26	25	27	23	23

Notes: Countries grouped by regime type based on Esping-Andersen's three-welfare state typology. Missing data were excluded from the rankings. Countries with insufficient data were excluded from the table, including Australia and New Zealand. Source: Adamson, 2013

Table 2. Rankings by select OECD indicators of child well-being organized by regime type, 1 ranks the best performing country

Select indicators of child well-being	Child poverty (Percentage)	Low birth weight (Percentage)	Infant mortality (Per 1,000 live births)	Average mean literacy score (PISA)	Youth NEET (Percentage)	Adolescent fertility (Births per 1,000 girls aged 15-19)	High life satisfaction (Percentage)
<b>Social Democratic</b>	Av. Rank: 3 Mean: 5.8	Av. Rank: 3 Mean: 4.5	Av. Rank: 4 Mean: 2.6	Av. Rank: 6 Mean: 509.9	Av. Rank: 5 Mean: 3.8	Av. Rank: 5 Mean: 4.7	Av. Rank: 1 Mean: 44.4
Denmark	1 (2.9)	4 (5.0)	10 (3.7)	10 (499.8)	5 (3.7)	3 (3.4)	..
Finland	2 (3.7)	1 (4.2)	1 (1.7)	2 (526.4)	8 (5.2)	6 (6.2)	1 (44.4)
Norway	3 (7.3)	3 (4.5)	2 (2.3)	4 (513.2)	2 (2.8)	5 (4.6)	..
Sweden	4 (9.1)	2 (4.4)	3 (2.5)	9 (500.2)	3 (3.5)	4 (4.5)	..
<b>Conservative</b>	Av. Rank: 8 Mean: 10.5	Av. Rank: 9 Mean: 6.7	Av. Rank: 7 Mean: 3.4	Av. Rank: 11 Mean: 497.8	Av. Rank: 7 Mean: 4.6	Av. Rank: 6 Mean: 6.2	Av. Rank: 5 Mean: 35.9
Switzerland	5 (9.5)	8 (6.5)	12 (3.9)	15 (492.2)	6 (3.9)	1 (2.6)	3 (39.6)
Austria	6 (9.6)	8 (6.5)	4 (3.1)	16 (484.9)	9 (5.7)	8 (7.6)	2 (39.7)
Netherlands	7 (10.4)	7 (6.1)	6 (3.3)	7 (503.0)	4 (3.6)	2 (3.2)	8 (32.5)
Belgium	9 (11.0)	11 (6.8)	6 (3.3)	12 (498.5)	7 (4.3)	7 (6.6)	7 (32.8)
Germany	10 (11.2)	..	6 (3.3)	6 (509.1)	1 (2.5)	9 (7.8)	6 (34.0)
France	12 (11.3)	13 (7.6)	10 (3.7)	11 (499.3)	14 (7.4)	11 (9.2)	4 (36.6)
<b>Liberal</b>	Av. Rank: 12 Mean: 14.8	Av. Rank: 9 Mean: 6.6	Av. Rank: 10 Mean: 4.1	Av. Rank: 7 Mean: 509.1	Av. Rank: 13 Mean: 7.3	Av. Rank: 13 Mean: 15.1	Av. Rank: 7 Mean: 32.1
Ireland	8 (10.8)	5 (5.6)	9 (3.4)	3 (520.8)	15 (8.0)	10 (8.3)	..
United Kingdom	11 (11.2)	12 (6.9)	12 (3.9)	13 (498.0)	16 (8.7)	13 (14.4)	9 (28.3)
Canada	13 (17.1)	..	..	1 (526.7)	11 (6.7)	..	..
United States	14 (19.9)	14 (8.1)	14 (5.9)	14 (496.9)	12 (7.0)	15 (22.3)	5 (35.9)
Australia	..	8 (6.5)	5 (3.2)	8 (502.9)	10 (6.0)	12 (11.9)	..
New Zealand	..	6 (5.9)	..	5 (509.3)	13 (7.1)	14 (18.5)	..

Notes: Countries grouped by regime type based on Esping-Andersen's three-welfare state typology. Missing data were excluded from the rankings. Source: OECD (2020a)

The UNICEF and OECD indices find great variation in levels of child well-being across OECD nations (Tables 1 & 2). Examination of these indices suggests that, on the whole, children tend to fare better in welfare states classified as social democratic (Tables 1 & 2). For example, in the UNICEF index, social democratic welfare states such as Norway and Sweden receive top scores for overall child well-being and, on average, outperform both conservative and liberal regimes across all dimensions of child well-being (Table 1). Review of OECD child well-being indicators shows a similar pattern (Table 2). While the OECD index offers no overall assessment of child well-being, social democratic welfare states, on average, outperform all other regime types across a number of child well-being indicators (Table 2).

On the other end of the *Three Worlds'* spectrum, children in liberal welfare states tend to fare less well than their peers in other regimes. Liberal welfare states, such the United States and the United Kingdom, consistently receive poor scores across a range of child well-being indicators in both indices, ranking particularly poorly on indicators of poverty and material well-being. But alignment between Esping-Andersen's *Three Worlds* and the UNICEF and OECD child well-being indices is not perfect, suggesting more inquiry is needed to understand the relationship between the welfare state (e.g., benefits aimed at children) and the realization of children's social rights.

## Conclusion

The UNICEF and OECD indices tell an incomplete story of how the welfare state fulfils the social rights of children. These indices offer information about child well-being outcomes, but not the *way* to child well-being and becoming. Moreover, the aggregate nature of these indices masks critical differences within each country, telling us nothing about how child well-being is stratified within and across generations or how the welfare state responds to the needs of marginalized children (e.g., children living in chronic poverty, children of color, children living in out-of-home care). While review of these child well-being indices suggests a relationship between the welfare state and child well-being, establishing cause and

effect is a complex task that requires multi-variate methods or experimental design, neither of which is employed here. In recent years, a handful of family policy scholars have taken up this task (Engster & Stensöta, 2018). In general, they find that welfare states that combine high levels of support for paid parental leave, child cash or tax benefits, and subsidized childcare have lower rates of child poverty and infant mortality and greater rates of educational attainment (Bäckman & Ferrarini, 2010; Bradshaw, 2014; Engster & Stensöta, 2011; Shim, 2016), but more research is needed to understand how the state, market, and family work together to ameliorate or exacerbate inequalities within and across generations and how the welfare state responds to the needs of children during social and economic crises, such as the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. It may be the case that children benefit from the welfare state's decommodifying or defamilizing effects, but unless children are fully recognized as claims makers in their own right (i.e., holders of social rights), they remain more exposed to the vicissitudes of both the market and family life than the adults who are typically charged with their care. To date, little research has been done on how the welfare state works to fulfil the social rights of children; a child-centered welfare state analysis as a framework for future scholarships provides a beginning.

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