

## Transitions from Welfare to Work for Mothers

Anne Coakley  
Combat Poverty Agency and Dept  
Sociology NUI Maynooth

## Research aims and methods

- **Aims**
- To critically examine welfare policies that shape the pathways and transitions between welfare and work for mothers in a European welfare framework
- **Methods**
- Analysis of key research/policy documents
- Interview actors engaged in policy implementation

## Groups/Organisations Consulted

- Planning Unit, DSCFA
- OPEN
- INOU
- LES
- Childcare Committee Partnership Area
- Local Community Childcare Providers

## Transitions for Mothers; an overview

- The adult worker model shaped by socio-economic grouping
- Transitions from welfare to work a significant negotiated life course transition for mothers
- Labour market equality for whom?
- Work as a route out of poverty?
- What does childcare policy reflect?
- The needs of the economy or the priorities of mothers/parents?

## Introduction

- EU target of 60% female employment rate by 2010
- Motherhood in Ireland (Kennedy, Mahon)
- From careforce to workforce
- The Adult worker model; the 'new ought to be'
- Labour force participation rates
- Male 71.5% Female 50.8%
- (CSO 2005)

## Life-course Transitions

- The transition from home to work is a significant negotiated life-course transition
- Varies by social group and cultural/local context
- The 'rationality mistake'
- Obligation to care
- The mother/worker identity
- A minority of mothers view themselves primarily as workers (Duncan et al 2003)

## Work as a route out of poverty?

- The experience of working parenthood qualitatively different for poor parents than for better off parents (Dean 2001)
- Risk of growing divide between secure middle class families and poorer working families
- 'Family friendly' employment practices most likely to benefit 'valued' higher-paid employees

## Work as a route out of poverty?

- Russell et al (2002) Women Returners
- Higher education ; higher transition rates
- Majority of women returners enter personal service jobs
- In 1999 30.4% of returners earning less than the NMW
- 88% of returners working part-time '...these part-time hours cannot be seen as purely voluntary' (2002;114)

## The norm of the working parent and parental responsibility

- Divide between social/economic policy and the aspirations of parents
- Decisions on work for mothers centred on welfare of children, cost of childcare and finding work with flexible hours (Daly & Leonard 2002)
- The OPFP as a labour market strategy
- Combining paid work and parenting alone (OPEN 2004)
- CE programme most significant employment programme (NESF 2001)

## Childcare as a labour market equality strategy

- Aim of EOCP 2000-20006; to facilitate parents to participate in employment, training and education
- Childcare as a family support child development measure
- Community childcare; accessing employment and Recognition of its core family support role
- Well-resourced services for pre-school children to break the cycle of disadvantage

## EOCP grant beneficiaries (2002, 2003)

- Unpaid care is the dominant form of care
- Majority of children attend a sessional service
- Largest category of provision; preschool/playgroup rather than childcare
- Half of parents would prefer alternative form of care

## EOCP

- 'A lack of solid information linking childcare availability to employment participation' (DJELR 2003)
- Measure of success of programme as labour market intervention;
- 70% of mothers in employment, training and education
- (23% at home, 48% in employment)
- (DJELR 2003)

## Childcare Models in EU Countries

- Childcare centred on a child's right to care ;
- Sweden; every child 1-6 years has a right to childcare and extended to school-age children in 1995.
- Finland; all children under 7 has a right to a place in subsidized childcare provided by their local authority since 1996.
- France; childcare allowances for working parents and a childbearing benefit if either parent chooses to stay at home after the birth of a 2<sup>nd</sup> child
- 

## Conclusions

- Divide between the adult worker model, labour market equality strategy **and**
- Mothers' priorities; balancing welfare of children and economic security
- The priority of the mother identity
- Giving choices to families
- Mothers/parents negotiate transitions between care welfare and work

## Conclusions

- Low income mothers/parents; need for security overrides equality
- Low income families; part-time work and sessional pre-school care
- Research evidence; earning your way out of poverty is problematic for low income low skill workers

## Policy Implications

- Policies to reflect mothers/parents care responsibilities
- Childcare centred on a child's right to care
- Payment for caring
- (NWCII 2002)
- Models of best practise from other countries
- Sustainability of community childcare guaranteed by security in financial support
- Models for quality framework for childcare
- Partnership companies well placed
- 

## Policy Implications

- Lifelong learning and training supports for disadvantaged groups (Nesf 2004)
- DSCFA; regional employment supports/family services projects
- Secondary benefits; employment neutral payments based on family need
- CE as a social economy work model
- Family friendly work practises on a statutory basis
- Paid parental leave

## Further Research

- Models of best practise in lifelong learning, training, community childcare to be mainstreamed
- Evaluation and monitoring of sustainable family support projects at local community level