

Paper Proposal for the 8th ESPAnet Conference, Stream 13 “Family Policies and the Reconciling of Paid Work and Care: Changing Family Life and Challenges to Social Policy”, Budapest, Hungary, 2-4 September 2010

**Working Mothers and the State:
When Do Governments Change Maternal Employment Supporting Policies?**

Over the last years, a substantial change in traditional family structures has taken place, such as an increase in consensual unions, births out of marriage and lone parenthood. Interestingly, in all these family structures, the role of women is changing. All societies move – to a larger or smaller extent – away from the traditional male breadwinner model to a situation in which women strive to combine economic autonomy and lifetime employment with motherhood. To what extent enable existing welfare state policies the combination of work and care? Moreover, under which conditions do governments boost, or lower, policies supporting the employment of mothers? How do the different welfare states cater to this new social risk?

This paper addresses these pertinent questions by examining those conditions under which governments increase (or decrease) policies that support the employment of mothers. Using fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA), the paper presents an analysis of the changes in policies that support the employment of women, especially maternal/parental leave, in a comparative perspective. Specifically, it focuses on the measures taken by governments from 12 OECD countries between 1980 and 2003. Based on insights from current literature on maternal employment and critical mass theory, we propose and empirically show that welfare state regime type (e.g. social democratic or liberal), partisan composition of government, the degree of corporatism and union density, and the presence of women legislators (critical mass) are relevant conditions in this respect. The fsQCA analysis reveals that there is more than one path towards the outcome, i.e. change in maternal employment supporting policies. Moreover, the analysis finds that the presence of leftist governments and a high number of women legislators are necessary for generous maternal employment supporting policies, but only in combination with other conditions.

This study’s findings will clarify which conditions affect governmental decision-making in the field of family policy, thereby filling a lacuna in the literature. Additionally, the paper’s results will contribute to a better understanding of how modern welfare states develop relevant and updated ways to support families with children.

Contact information

Dr. Barbara Vis
Department of Political Science
VU University Amsterdam

De Boelelaan 1081, 1081 HV Amsterdam

The Netherlands

Email: b.vis@fsw.vu.nl

web: www.barbaravis.nl

The paper is co-authored with Karin Koole, VU University Amsterdam