

Quebec's family policies benefit childbearing and work

Policy Brief No. 12

Summary

The uniqueness of Quebec in Canada, and its attempt to be in control of its own destiny, also applies to family policy. Specifically, Quebec family policies have helped to increase fertility rates, promote more favourable attitudes toward child care, led to more people using child care in Quebec than the rest of Canada, improved people's satisfaction with child care, and allowed more women with young children to participate in paid work than the rest of Canada. However, the child development indicators have not progressed as positively in Quebec when compared to the rest of Canada. This suggests that universal programs may make it difficult to focus on helping disadvantaged children, who would most benefit from early child care.

Key Findings

- Legislative and legal traditions in Quebec have made for larger differences between marriage and cohabitation, and higher proportions of couples cohabiting.
- Quebec's family policies have included more public support for child care and for parental leave. Parental leave provides more options, along with specific provisions for fathers.
- Family policies in Quebec have also contributed to increasing fertility rates.
- Child care policies in Quebec have brought more positive attitudes toward child care, increased the use of child care compared to the rest of Canada, and brought high levels of satisfaction with child care.
- Quebec's family policies have promoted higher levels of participation in paid work for women with young children, compared to the rest of Canada.
- The rest of Canada has seen more gains in child development indicators than Quebec in recent years.

Context

Quebec's unique history and its desire to be in control of its own destiny have contributed to the establishment of family policies that are different from the rest of Canada. A new study, conducted by Roderic Beaujot, Ching Jiangqin Du, and Zenaida Ravanera explored the effect of these different family policies on fertility, child care, women's paid work, and child development indicators.

The stated goals of Quebec's family policies are to allow parents to balance work and family obligations, and to create an environment that enhances child development and well-being (Quebec, 1997). Family policy in Quebec differs from the rest of Canada by offering higher child care funding, more options for parental leave from employment, higher replacement salaries for parental leave, and specific provisions for father's parental leave.

This study suggests that trends in fertility, child care, women's paid work, and child development are linked to Quebec's unique family policies. The links are demonstrated by analyzing various associated trends and making comparisons with the rest of Canada.





Childbearing

This study argues that Quebec's more family-centric policies are contributing to increasing fertility levels in Quebec since 2000. Even though Quebec is not the only province with increasing fertility levels, its social and economic circumstances differ markedly from another province that has seen similar increases in fertility since 2000 – Alberta. Unlike Quebec, young families living in Alberta have the security of good job opportunities.

Although Quebec is not an employment rich province like Alberta, this study suggests that its fertility rates are similar to Alberta's because of Quebec's family policies. "Fertility has increased most in Alberta and Quebec, that is, in provinces where young families have had the security of either good job opportunities or supportive social policy." The authors argue that job opportunities and supportive family policy help to offset the risks that young adults face in childbearing.

Table 1. Total fertility rate, Canada and provinces, 1996, 2000, 2009

	1996	2000	2009
Canada	1.63	1.51	1.67
Quebec	1.61	1.45	1.74
Rest of Canada	1.64	1.53	1.65
Newfoundland and Labrador	1.31	1.30	1.59
Prince Edward Island	1.74	1.57	1.69
Nova Scotia	1.52	1.41	1.50
New Brunswick	1.46	1.42	1.59
Ontario	1.61	1.49	1.56
Manitoba	1.90	1.82	1.98
Saskatchewan	1.90	1.83	2.06
Alberta	1.75	1.66	1.89
British Columbia	1.55	1.40	1.50
Yukon	1.71	1.63	1.66
Northwest Territories	2.23	2.01	2.06
Nunavut	3.38	3.16	3.24

Child care

The study also found that Quebec's family policies have contributed to more favourable attitudes toward child care and higher levels of child care use in Quebec compared to the rest of Canada.

For example, of those using child care in 2006, fewer people from Quebec than the rest of Canada would prefer to be using a different form of child care than what they were using (15.1% in Quebec and 24.4% for the rest of Canada).

Table 2. Preference for alternative type of care by actual care, respondents with children aged 0-4 who were currently using regular child care, Quebec and rest of Canada, 2006.

Actual care type used	Quebec		Rest of Canada	
	N	Prefer different care	N	Prefer different care
1 Someone else's home,	60	25.0	334	36.9
2 Someone else's home, relative	41	15.6	233	18.8
3 Own home, relative	21	0.0	151	29.2
4 Own home, nonrelative	29	12.5	98	21.6
5 Daycare centre	204	12.4	404	18.7
6 Nursery school/preschool	25	22.6	43	10.0
7 Before, after school	120	20.0	129	30.8
8 Other child care arrangement	19	0.0	31	20.0
Total	519	15.1	1423	24.4

Also, recent research has shown that among respondents with children at ages 0-4, 72.6% of those in Quebec and only 41.2% of those in the rest of Canada actually use child care. In addition, more than 90% of parents in Quebec report being satisfied with child care costs and hours of service (Audet & Gingras, 2011).



Women's paid work

Beaujot, Du and Ravanera also connect Quebec's family policies to the higher level of participation in paid work for Quebec women compared to women in the rest of Canada.

Their study shows that 65.9% of married or cohabiting women in Quebec with young children (ages 0-4) are employed compared to 61.7% in the rest of Canada, even though total employment rates tend to be lower in Quebec than the rest of Canada for both men and women.

Also, these same Quebec women with partners and children between the ages of 0-4 tend to work more hours, on average, than similar women in the rest of Canada.

Child development indicators

These results suggest that Quebec's family policies have succeeded in accomplishing its first goal, to allow parents to balance work and family obligations.

However, this study also reports that these policies have not been as successful in achieving its second goal, which is to create an environment that encourages the best child development.

The authors report that children outside of Quebec are seeing more gains in their development than Quebec children. For example, mean standardized test scores (Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test) decreased in Quebec, while they increased in the rest of Canada between 2002 and 2006 (Haeck et al., 2012; Lefebvre et al., 2011).

Concerns are raised with regard to children who would not be in child care were it not for the policy (Kottelenberg & Lehrer, 2013).

Table 3. Women's employment and hours worked at all jobs in a week by marital status and presence of children, ages 20-64, Quebec and rest of Canada, 2006.

		Employed	Mean work hours
Quebec			
In union	No Child	67.6	36.2
	Child(ren) 0-4	65.9	35.9
	All children 5-	79.6	35.2
	Other	78.1	35.9
	Total	71.6	35.9
Not in union	No Child	75.0	34.7
	Child(ren) 0-4	65.8	32.7
	All children 5-	66.7	36.8
	Other	82.8	37.9
	Total	75.4	35.3
Rest of Canada			
In union	No Child	71.6	38.1
	Child(ren) 0-4	61.7	33.4
	All children 5-	79.6	34.8
	Other	78.0	36.2
	Total	72.5	36.3
Not in union	No Child	78.1	38.0
	Child(ren) 0-4	61.5	34.3
	All children 5-	72.3	39.0
	Other	77.6	38.6
	Total	76.8	38.0



Policy implications

One of the implications of this research regards the alternatives of targeted and universal social policy. In terms of child development, there are probably benefits to targeted child care funding that concentrates on children with high needs. On the other hand, universal child care promotes the work/life balance of couples, benefiting their employment and income generation and associated family welfare.

Quebec's unique family policies have helped achieve higher levels of participation in paid work for Quebec women compared to women in the rest of Canada, and higher participation of fathers in parental leave. These policies have also supported childbearing. In the rest of Canada, there is a greater orientation to turn to immigration as a means of addressing population replacement and labour market needs.

References

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About the Study

This Brief is based on "[Family policies in Quebec and the Rest of Canada: Implications for fertility, child care, women's paid work, and child development indicators](#)," by Roderic Beaujot (Department of Sociology, Western University), Ching Jiangqin Du (School of International and Public Affairs, Shanghai Jiaotong University), and Zenaida Ravanera (Department of Sociology, Western University), published in 2013 in *Canadian Public Policy* 39(2):221-239.

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