

PART V

POLICY IMPLICATIONS



A number of messages for policymakers emerge from the previous overview. The first is that there is little evidence of “moral hazard” (Wolfe, 1989), the notion that people are less inclined to care for family members if public provisions are available. Empirical studies have repeatedly failed to find that provisions of the welfare State crowd out family care. With regard to elder care, specialization emerges, with professional providers taking over the medically demanding and regular physical care and family providing the less demanding, spontaneous help (Brandt, Haberkern, & Szydlik, 2009). With regard to “downward” family support, monetary welfare provisions enable family members to respond to those with the greatest financial needs (Schenk, Dykstra, & Maas, forthcoming).

A second message is that interdependencies between generations and between men and women

in families are built and reinforced by the legal and policy arrangements in a particular country. Laws define the relationships of dependence and interdependence between generations and gender, whereas policies reward or provide disincentives for particular family patterns. A consideration of legal norms and public policies draws attention to cultural specificity. Countries differ in their understanding of “proper” intergenerational family relations (Saraceno, Keck, & Dykstra, 2009). Policymakers should critically examine the ways in which caring responsibilities for the young and the old have been allocated between the family and the collectivity. To what extent do country-specific institutional frameworks impose dependencies which limit the autonomy of individuals? To what extent do they support the choice to assume intergenerational obligations? Such a critical examination calls for a “holistic” approach to policymaking: a serious consideration

of the ways in which public family provisions (or the lack thereof) create differential opportunities for individual autonomy for young and old, men and women.

A third message is that national policies should seek to support intergenerational care regimes without reinforcing social class inequalities and gender inequalities. One of the issues is whether policies should involve payments for care, (paid) leaves, or the provision of care services. The policy measures have different implications that need to be considered carefully. For example, when public support is offered in money rather than in kind, trade-offs between using it to buy services or to keeping it for the family budget while providing care directly are different for families in different socio-economic circumstances (Saraceno, 2010). The strategy of staying at home to provide care is more likely to be adopted by members of the working class (in practice, working class women), reducing their ability to remain in the labour market and hence creating the conditions of old-age poverty for themselves. Another example pertains to a father quota in paid leave schemes. A

“use it or lose it” criterion promotes equal sharing of parenting responsibilities between men and women (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2007).

The fourth message is that women’s integration in the labour force has taken place without fundamental changes to the formal and informal rules associated with the breadwinner model, which served as the basis for the organization of the labour market and the welfare State (Esping-Andersen, 2009). The structural discrepancy between the role of the breadwinner model in the organization of paid work and unpaid care, on the one hand, and the increased labour force participation of women, on the other hand, is the source of tensions and stress, as witnessed in dropping fertility rates, marital instability, intrafamily conflict and even emotional burn out. To help resolve this discrepancy, policies should consider how to get men more involved with caring. Men should not be discouraged from taking care leaves, and men should come to realize that intergenerational responsibilities throughout their working life are the norm, not the exception.