

# Families and Public Policy Challenges in 2017



Third Annual Symposium of the Population, Work and Family Policy Research  
Collaboration, Ottawa Congress Centre: 13 December 2007

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# Outline

- Demographic trends
- Family policies and family forms
- Sandwich generation and the changing agenda and politics of care
- Family issues in 2017
- Some observations
- Research questions



## Demographic patterns in family life

- Aging population and growing number of seniors living alone
- Rates of disability increase steadily with age
- Declining birth rate and population growth through immigration
- Increases in blended, common-law, same-sex, and single parent families
- Increasing number of adult children living at home
- Delaying marriage and having or adopting first child
- Increasing ethno-racial diversity of Canada



# A crystallization of family policy

- Canada as a nation does not have a coherent and explicitly formulated policy with regard to families (exception Québec)
- Yet, governments at all levels have programs aimed directly and indirectly at families across various policy domains
- And, in some cases, program measures and policy reforms may be forming more definite and multifaceted approaches to families



## Changing focus on family forms

- In 2017, there will be greater public and policy attention to **extended families** – multigenerational networks of related members in diverse roles and situations
- Shaped by three societal developments:
  - Graying boomers and increased life expectancy
  - Immigration from visible minority groups
  - Aboriginal governance of family services



## Expanding definitions of family: EI Compassionate care benefits

### Original list of family member:

- Spouse or common law partner
- Parent
- Spouse or common law partner of a parent
- Child
- Child of a spouse /common law partner

### Expanded notion includes:

- Sisters/brothers
- Step sisters/step brothers
- Grandparents
- Grandchildren
- Uncles and aunts
- Nephews and nieces
- Current or former foster parents, guardians or wards



# The sandwich generation

- Middle age Canadians caring at the same time for one or more children and typically one senior, with most also working in the labour force
- Not a new phenomenon of course, but will increase in numbers over next decade
- In 2002 survey, about 712,000 “sandwiched Canadians” aged 45 to 64



## A shift in policy agenda: from child care to elder care to family care?

- Proportion of seniors receiving care, due to long-term health needs, through institutions has declined over last 20 years
- Proportion of seniors receiving care in private homes has increased
- In 2002, 1 million seniors received care: 45% exclusively from family and friends, and 55% from some formal care (and half of these received informal assistance too)



## Politics of care

- Growing social concern about elder care and to reconciling caring at a range of life course stages
- An intergenerational care debate
- Issues of the responsibilities and capacities of parent(s) toward their dependent children and of adult children to their parents, grandparents and possibly other relations
- Role of public programs, informal supports and private sector services



## Families in 2017 – multiple issues

- *Health* – ageing in community, home care, residential care and hospital care, end of life care
- *Social* – networks for care provision, housing
- *Employment* – balancing paid and unpaid work (earning and caring)
- *Legal* – personal safety, competence of elderly
- *Intergovernmental* – federal/provincial/territorial/aboriginal roles



## An influx of senior's poverty by 2017

- Increase in the poverty rate among seniors due to economic disruptions, trends to non-standard and non-union employment, declines in registered pension plan coverage since early 1980s, and increases in inequalities in retirements savings among Canadians by earning quintiles
- Will elicit general public attention because seniors seen as deserving and because boomers will raise the issue
- Within an extended family perspective, responsibilities of adult children (and other relatives) will figure as a solution alongside assorted ideas for government action



## Different choices and mixes of policy instruments for families

- Cash transfers
- Tax measures
- Direct services
- Legislation and regulations
- Governance reforms
- Information and knowledge
- *Families as targets of public policy and as places of economic resources and social provision*



## Some observations

- Family policy literature tends to focus on certain family forms: nuclear, one parent, dual earners, families with dependent children
- Literature also concentrates on the state's role in family life
- Important to connect child and family studies with gerontology and aging studies: common ground includes care giving/care receiving and work-life balances, gender issues
- Societal attention to extended families and to circumstances of seniors will grow by 2017



## Some observations

- Family policy development will become more society-centred addressing informal supports, role of self-managed care, workplaces, and community living opportunities
- I do not expect to see a strident intergenerational equity debate in Canada with claims that seniors are getting more than their fair share of public resources
- Rather a debate centred on interdependencies across and within age groups seeking mixes of policy instruments, obligations and rights
- “The family” is unlikely to emerge as a guiding paradigm of social policy given the diversity of family structures and the value differences among social and political groups



## Policy-related research questions on families

- How do child care and elder care compare as needs and practice domains for families?
- What constitutes care giving? How do Canadians understand formal and informal supports for family members or friends?
- What do we know of the daily life of senior women who live alone? How many are at risk of isolation or neglect?
- What are the consequences of the current gender division of caring (time committed and tasks performed) for seniors, children, grandchildren and great grandchildren?



## Policy-related research questions on families

- Research by Cranswick and Thomas (2005) shows that better educated seniors are more likely to receive some care and to obtain a mix of informal and formal care
- So, for seniors of 2017 who have limited fluency in English or French, how will they access formal care services and benefits they may require and for which they may be eligible? What service delivery and outreach activities might address this issue?
- What is the effect of extended families and or networks of close friends on seniors receiving care?



## Policy-related research questions on families

- What socio-economic indicators should be identified, tracked and analyzed in order to assess the directions and depths of poverty and inequality facing various types of Canadian family, including the seniors of 2017?
- What do we know about the allocation or redistribution of resources within and among families?
- What models of family are contained in existing fiscal, social and economic programs, and with what ramifications for family well being?