

Call for multidisciplinary contributions on:

“Childcare arrangements for young children:

from public policies to adjustments in daily family life”

For the March–June 2017 issue

This call for contributions is addressed to researchers in sociology, anthropology, demography, political science, economics, history, law, public health, and psychology.

Articles are due prior to **Saturday, 1st October 2016.**

The question of early childhood care is at the intersection of different disciplines. While economists measure such things as the cost of childcare, social scientists are interested in the professionalization of the early childhood sector; psychologists and doctors in the impact of different types of childcare on children’s well-being; and political scientists in the system of reference to policies and governance of early childhood. Demographers, economists, and sociologists deal from differing vantage points with reconciling family and professional lives.

The analysis of childcare is particularly complex because it involves bringing together several different levels of analysis and requires a multidisciplinary approach.

The *Revue française des affaires sociales* will assemble the most significant contributions on these themes in its March–June 2017 issue. More specifically, we will bring together different approaches which can rarely be found together in the same place because of the disciplinary and thematic compartmentalization that characterizes this field of research. **Qualitative as well as statistical research is welcome.**

The call for contributions is coordinated by the Youth and Family Office [*Bureau de la jeunesse et de la famille*] of the Directorate of Research, Studies, Evaluation and Statistics (DREES) [*Direction de la recherche, des études, de l'évaluation et des statistiques*] of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. This directorate is actively involved in the development of our understanding concerning childcare. In particular, the DREES has conducted a standard reference statistical survey of childcare and child reception facilities (MDG) in 2002, 2007 and most recently in 2013. This gives an overview of childcare solutions used by parents of children under 6 years, while deepening our understanding of the trade-offs made by families and the cost of each type of childcare. This survey is frequently referenced in publications produced by the DREES. Co-funded by the National Family Allowances Fund [*Caisse nationale des allocations familiales*] (CNAF), the survey is also available to the public statistical system as well as to the research community via the Quêtelet network, access point to data from official statistical surveys and from social science research. In 2013 the MDG survey device has also opened for the first time the possibility of doing qualitative post-surveys, whose results will contribute to a better understanding of the trade-offs which are difficult to analyse at the macro-sociological scale of a quantitative survey.

This call for contributions is therefore aimed at researchers of a wide range of disciplines: sociology, economics, statistics, political science, demography, history.... Various data sources can be mobilized: national statistical surveys (MDG [*Enquête sur les modes de garde et d'accueil des jeunes enfants*]; ELFE [*Étude Longitudinale Française depuis l'Enfance*]; Family, Employment, and Housing studies...), qualitative interviews, observations, etc. This call for contributions has four areas of analysis:

- Early childhood policies;
- Work-life balance;
- Early childcare professions;
- Development and welfare of young children in various types of childcare.

Theme 1: Public policies for early childhood: from the history of French family policies to European comparisons

Since its beginnings in 1932 until the early 1970s, French family policy toward the young child was especially designed as a support to the birth rate. It accompanied the “dominant” model of a working father and a housekeeping mother (family allowance device, single wage allowance). With a rising women’s participation rate in the labour market from the 1970-1980s, family policy also set a goal of conciliation. A childcare allowance for working mothers was established in 1972. A **genealogy of this history of different types of childcare in France** would be welcome as a reminder of the actors mobilized, the debates involved, and the social and economic context in which this question of childcare for young children arose. Understanding how childcare has gradually been structured and with what policy aim(s)

would also be one of the goals of this project. **A socio-historical monograph** could help to address the history of the various types of childcare.

Thereafter, early childhood policies successively aimed in turn at professionalizing the sector, at diversifying the types of childcare available to parents, as well as serving as an adjustment variable in a difficult economic context. For example, the extension of the parental education allowance [*Allocation parentale d'éducation*] (APE) in 1994 to children of rank 2 resulted in the withdrawal of low skilled mothers from the labour market. In 2004, a paradigm shift took place encouraging these same mothers, whose difficulties in returning to work are now well known, to reintegrate quickly into the labour market. Thus, with the Free Activity Choice Supplement device [*Complément de libre choix d'activité*] (CLCA) of the Care for Young Children Allowance [*Prestation d'accueil du jeune enfant*] (PAJE), which replaced the APE, working time reduction was favoured over the interruption of activity. Moreover, the provisions of the recent Shared Children's Education Benefit [*Prestation partagée d'éducation de l'enfant*] (PreParE), which replaced the CLCA in January 2015, also reflected the policy concern for a more balanced sharing of parental tasks between mothers and fathers, also reflected in the former possibility of combining two partial APE in the parental couple, one for each member. **The interconnection of all of these dimensions of family policy**—fertility, women's participation rates, gender equality, universality of benefits versus targeting the poorest families, social investment—is complex. How do earlier goals link together or adapt to the latest objectives? **An analysis of this layering of objectives and constraints** would take stock of the logic of hierarchization.

Looking beyond the national context, it would also be useful to look at **how these policy aims are orchestrated locally**. This analysis would help us understand the differences and territorial inequalities, even while the recent implementation of schemes at the departmental level aims at ensuring better coordination of early childhood actors. How are decisions to

open or close certain local child care centres made? What are the criteria used by municipalities in deciding on new equipment for early childhood care in a financially constrained environment? How can parents needs in rural areas be met? In what context can childcare become a major political issue and be particularly involved in election campaigns, for example? How can we explain private sector development such as micro-crèches in some regions while such development remains sporadic in others?

The question is also part of a European context. During the last decade, the Barcelona European Council (2002) has set targets for development of childcare for preschool children for member countries of the European Union. Thus the 2000s were marked in France by the implementation of the PAJE, which in addition to a basic means tested allowance and the Free Activity Choice Supplement (CLCA) accompanying the cessation or reduction of activity by parents, includes a for Free Choice of Childcare Supplement [*complément de libre choix du mode de garde*] (CMG) to partially cover the cost of formal childcare. The implementation of a “Kindergarten strategic plan” included an increase in the allowed number of children per childminder; this led also to a growth in available childcare during this period. In the early 2010s, France occupied a unique place in the European landscape, combining a high fertility rate with a high overall women’s participation rate. **What is the contribution of available childcare and of family policy for early childhood on women’s participation rate and on fertility?** What other effects can childcare have on the functioning of the labour market and more generally: **what economic consequences** can we expect **from an investment in childcare for young children?**

Such analyses could be made of the French case, possibly with a **sub-national approach** or through an **international comparison**. A panoramic view or a comparison with some European cases would be welcome: what are the devices for conciliating family and work life that have been adopted abroad? Are parenting standards there different? How has the

women's activity changed? In particular, how is the question of childcare planned and organized? What is the logic of the most recent changes? To what degree have the expected effects of policy measures been realized? What are the possible obstacles? Germany, for example, at least in its western part, has historically been well below France in terms of the availability of childcare for young children and of female participation rates. During the 2000s, several laws led to a more rapid increase in the availability of childcare than in France, although this did not overcome the difference between the two countries.

Recent years have also been marked by the **financial crisis of 2008**. In this context, **what have been the effects of the crisis** and its impact on both the labour market and on budgetary adjustments, on family policy and the **use of childcare in the early childhood sector**? Once again, a comparative approach of the dynamics of several countries during the recent period would be valuable as the impact of the shock and consequent adjustments have differed greatly from one country to another.

Theme 2: Work and family life reconciliation: what are the conditions of sharing tasks between parents?

In France, as in many other countries, it is mostly women who care for children. When the availability of childcare is insufficient in accommodating young children, or is too expensive, women have to choose between children and work. Nevertheless, women's participation in the labour market and the maintenance of high fertility rates are two important questions in dealing with an aging population. Women's employment is also a key lever in achieving real gender equality and helps reduce the risk of poverty for households and for children. By developing childcare availability and by paying aid to families, family policies aim at

enabling parents to “freely choose” how their children will be cared for, either by others or by themselves.

A first type of contribution might look at **parental leave**. Many women reduce or stop work following the birth of a child, usually in the context of parental leave: to what degree is this done by “free choice”? What effect does such paternal leave have on a mother’s career? Paternity, however, has not had a negative impact on the men’s careers. What are the motivations and barriers to fathers’ usage of paternal leaves? The use of paternal leave—and reasons for its non-use—could be considered in relation to the fathers’ characteristics. How are these leaves accepted in the working world? Are there differences across industry sectors, according to company size? With the establishment of the Shared Children’s Education Benefit (PreParE), sharing parental leave between parents has been encouraged. Can we foresee or anticipate the initial effects of this reform on fathers’ activity? What are the characteristics of fathers on parental leave (age, type of employment, professional category ...)? Do they sometimes face judgments about their role as fathers and their absence from work? Contributions could deal with the short and long term consequences of mothers stopping work: what is the impact on their future professional life? On their role in the household? More generally, how is a decision made within the parental couple on the modalities of a possible parental leave following a birth? Why take a leave, why decide not to exercise this right, why the mother, the father, both or neither? For how long, full time, part time? The specific situation of unemployed parents or those in job training could be raised: to what degree do they resort to parental leave? What opportunities do they have to use formal childcare as part of their job search?

A second type of contribution could focus on the **situation of working parents**: how do they organize their daily lives, especially when they both work full-time? What negotiations take place within couples around the question of childcare? How do single parents function? Do

certain types of employment (working from home; predictable, and flexible schedules ...) facilitate the reconciliation of work and family life? Is there a difference between public sector employees and private sector? Articles may also deal with the role that employers may play—beyond their legal obligations—in helping their employees find a better balance between work and family (adaptable schedules, company day care services, financial aid, ...).

Do some types of childcare help in conciliating work and family life more than others?

Can childcare facilities offer flexible hours to meet families' various needs without damaging professional working conditions? Articles may also analyse the role of grandparents: in which cases do parents use their own parents for the childcare of their children? What do they expect from their grandparents? The situation of parents of disabled children could be a subject of special attention: do these parents encounter particular difficulties in terms of organizing daily life or of finding a suitable form of childcare?

Finally, contributions may **describe the practices and representations of both spouses on parental work and childcare**. While models of shared parenting time have evolved, in practice childcare remains a prerogative of women. How have fathers' involvement evolved and what elements favour this? How do parents distribute the various tasks? The impact on mothers' and fathers' schedules, as well as on gender relations, of the birth of a child or of the number of children could be focused on. What is the role of childcare in this process? Another question could be the logic that lead parents to choose a particular childcare solution. Indeed, parents are faced with objective constraints related to their work or to local childcare availability, but their subjective representations—for example, from the education they received—can also guide their choices. Is there a reproduction of parental patterns?

Overall, we would appreciate that the contributions here shed light on **the resources and obstacles faced by women (but also by men) in conciliating family and work life**.

Theme 3: Early childhood professions: from a search for legitimacy to a question of professional identities

Research on “early childhood professions” has been the subject of growing interest during the last twenty-five years. Although this group of professionals involves a multiplicity of functions and very heterogeneous working conditions, the common wisdom has for a long time seen this only through its feminine and maternal qualities and thus has discredited it. Social acceptance for these professions has taken a long time, including the fact that they require skills and a knowledge of working with young children which is both special as well as ordinary. The change in the appreciation of these professions is partly due to the growing interest in early childhood development (cognitive, emotional, etc.) and to the consequences of early learning on their future and especially on their future life in society. Therefore, attention to the early childhood professions can be thought of as an “investment” preparing the training of future collective human capital. It might be interesting to **revisit this search for the recognition of these professions, a search which one can suppose has not yet come to an end**: is this truer for some professions than for others (nursery assistants, professionals practicing in public and private collective facilities, etc.)? Who were the actors and what were their goals? How is this idea of social investment developed? And how has the question of legitimacy been taken up in a collective framework (unions, strikes, mobilizations), but also through public policies in support of early childhood? How do the different types of professional men and women take up this question in the more individual context of everyday relationships (parents, colleagues, supervisors, etc.)?

The question of the education and training of these professional men and women raises the question of the psychological dimension of the knowledge of the development and welfare of

young children. In what form is this knowledge provided and evaluated? How is it received and then mobilized in everyday working life? The purpose would be to reflect on this **integration of “psychological standards” and their use.**

Finally, while gender is central to most of the research that has been conducted so far on the childcare professions, less investigation has been done, at least in French studies, concerning other analytical view points such as generation or social class. Drawing up **biographical trajectories** of these women (since this mainly involves women)—in a qualitative approach as well as in a statistical perspective—could contribute to a deeper understanding of their commitment to their profession according to their generation, their social position, their geographical origin, etc. How did they enter their profession and why? Are the motivations different depending on the profession exercised (nursery assistants, professionals working in crèches, etc.)? More generally, how do they combine their family and work lives? How does their profession contribute in defining their identity? Looking at their trajectories could also open the opportunity of addressing the questions of quality of employment, of underactivity, of unemployment, of interruptions or terminations of work activity and of retraining. For childminders, attention could be paid to the high incidence of early dropouts from the profession shortly after obtaining accreditation. In the same perspective, a comparison with men in these occupations, certainly a minority, could be used to analyse gender issues in the social and professional trajectories of the childcare professions. In particular, how do men feel they are appreciated working as early childhood professionals? Do they feel that they are considered less competent by parents, institutions, etc.? Do they have the feeling of being “watched over”?

This call therefore raises questions not only about the different aspects of the **daily work performed in the early childhood sector** but also to take into account **more subjective dimensions that are part of the professional identity.**

Theme 4: Child development in childcare: concepts and measures of well-being of young children

The last agreement on objectives and management signed between the National Family Allowances Fund [*Caisse nationale des allocations familiales*] (CNAF) and the state not only sets a target of increasing availability for childcare but also sets a quality improvement objective for the individual and collective childcare available. Childcare services are designed to enable parents to balance family life and professional life, but they also set a goal of participating in childhood development, in its normal development and sociability. France does not regulate childcare by fixing formal limitation on the objectives, values, principles which should apply to ensure quality care. However, studies on a “curriculum” for childcare have begun, motivated by existing *curricula* in other countries such as Sweden and Denmark.

First, **how can the welfare of young children in childcare be defined? Can it even be measured?** A number of objective criteria may be put forward defining the quality of care: the environment and safety, the supervision rate, the experience and training of professional personnel, the proposed activities, and the presence of an outdoor space. But other, more subjective, criteria can be added, such as the focus on the child, or the individualized relationships with the family. Are parents satisfied with the childcare? And the children? How can their point of view be taken into account?

Second, the contributions could explore **how childcare facilities can contribute to the development and welfare of young children.** Shedding light on international innovations or methods used by our neighbours would be appreciated. Articles could also examine the impact of various extra-parental care arrangements on child development (cognitive, emotional, and social development ...) according to the duration of childcare, the children’s

characteristics (age, sex, temperament ...), or those of the family (level of education, socio-professional status ...). Based on several studies recently conducted in different countries in Europe, the European Working Group on Early Childhood Education Report [*Rapport du groupe de travail sur l'éducation et l'accueil de la petite enfance*] (October 2014) in particular indicates that “children in vulnerable situations benefit from education and childcare in structures in which social classes are mixed” and notes the positive effects for these children in areas such as language learning and concentration. More generally, contributions might study facilities set up to accommodate children with special needs (disability, difficult family context ...).

One last aspect that could be considered is that of **how children experience the move from one childcare facility to another, particularly at the beginning of schooling**. The French system is a “divided” one, with childcare for young children under 3 years old on the one hand, and the educational system on the other, with kindergarten starting from 2 or 3 years old. This division involves a change of environment for children, especially for those for whom school is the first experience of group life. For 2 year old children, who are at the crucial point of this age category, going to both nursery and kindergarten involves being considered simultaneously as among the “older children” in the nursery and the “younger” at school. For them, the place for the most suitable care is at the centre of debate. Better continuity between childcare environment and school environment could be considered, as is the case in countries with an “integrated” system, e.g. the Nordic countries. Experiments have already been implemented in this way in France, for example the creation of “bridging courses” [*classes passerelles*].

Our call for contributions welcomes **comparing the different existing systems and examining how children’s welfare can be measured and conceptualized**.

Further information on the content of the call for contributions can be obtained from **Marie-Clémence Le Pape, Bertrand Lhommeau, Emily Raynaud, and Sophie Villaume**, who will be preparing the issue, at the following addresses:

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Contributions should be sent **before 1 October 2016** to the following address:

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