
Peter MOSS, Ann-Zofie DUVANDER & Alison
KOSLOWSKI (Eds.), Parental Leave and Beyond:
Recent international developments, current issues
and future directions

Barbara Moore



Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/irpp/2455>

DOI: 10.4000/irpp.2455

ISSN: 2706-6274

Publisher

International Public Policy Association

Printed version

Date of publication: 30 March 2022

Number of pages: 146-148

ISSN: 2679-3873

Electronic reference

Barbara Moore, "Peter MOSS, Ann-Zofie DUVANDER & Alison KOSLOWSKI (Eds.), Parental Leave and Beyond: Recent international developments, current issues and future directions", *International Review of Public Policy* [Online], 4:1 | 2022, Online since 01 April 2022, connection on 27 January 2023. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/irpp/2455> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/irpp.2455>



Creative Commons - Attribution 4.0 International - CC BY 4.0
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Book Review

Peter MOSS, Ann-Zofie DUVANDER & Alison KOSLOWSKI (Eds.),
Parental Leave and Beyond: Recent international developments, current issues and future directions

Barbara Moore

School of Education, University College Dublin

Parental Leave and Beyond: Recent international developments, current issues and future directions

Peter Moss

Ann-Zofie Duvander

Alison Koslowski

Moss, Peter; Duvander Ann-Zofie & Koslowski, Alison, Bristol: Policy Press, 2020, 377 p., ISBN 978-1-4473-3878-9. Hardback: £68.00; Paperback: £23.99; ePub: £23.99
2020

In Parental Leave and Beyond: Recent International Developments, Current Issues and Future Directions, editors Peter Moss, Ann-Zofie Duvander, and Alison Koslowski, draw together a broad collection of international contributions exploring the extensive, although not exclusive, range of policy designs for the provision of parental leave across the globe. This edited volume constitutes essential reading for those who wish to monitor, evaluate, and adapt leave policies over time; it is also a useful guide in the effort to align aims and design, a goal that has often been elusive. The book is relevant for academics and policymakers alike, and accessible for undergraduate students, providing a thought-provoking platform for everyone who is curious about the potential role that policies on parental leave may play in promoting a work-life balance for families and societies.

Despite increased scholarly and empirical interest in the subject, there are still considerable gaps between theory and practice. Leave policy in many countries is under-developed because not only is it complex and multi-layered, but it also straddles substantive fields such as work, welfare, care, gender equality, and family life. This edited volume argues the case for thinking more broadly and holistically about policies on parental leave that address diverse forms of care across the life-course, not merely child-rearing, applied equally to men and women, and moving towards a ‘universal caregiving’ model for living (Fraser, 1997). Such thinking is timely given the Covid-19 pandemic which has resulted in a societal revaluation of previously low-paid employment such as teaching, healthcare, and food retail services. The pandemic has created opportunities for the reconceptualization of the structure of social life, creating spaces for the consideration of alternative and progressive ways to improve quality of life, particularly in relation to changing family demographics, precarious employment, sustainable communities, and social cohesion.

This book is ambitious in its scope. Having said that, its weakness is that it pays less attention to lower income countries where leave policies are in their infancy, or do not exist at all. The editors’ motivation for compiling this volume is threefold, and the book centers on these pertinent and stand-alone areas of interest: the first section examines the influence of national politics on policy development or stagnation; the second section considers current and common issues in leave policy that extend beyond national boundaries; and the final section promotes thinking beyond the limits of current policy, for the purpose of imagining how to design more equitable and effective policy.

The first section (chapters two to nine) builds on Kamerman and Moss’s previous volume (2009). It explores leave policy through the lens of national politics and aims at understanding how political contexts contribute to shifting economic and social trends that facilitate or obstruct changes in parental leave in such diverse countries as Spain, Poland, the UK, Israel, Japan, China, Mexico, and the persistent outlier, the US. These chapters examine how competing political ideologies within these countries — conservative perspectives supporting heterogeneous ‘familialistic’ policy designs, liberal concerns for financial viability, and/or socialist ideologies underpinning rights-based gender equality policies — impact on the prominence, design, and outcomes of leave policies in these countries. A fruitful example is that of Spain (Chapter 2) where austerity measures in 2008 resulted in a retraction in leave policy. However, following a period of political instability, diverse political parties used support for policies on parental leave as a way to gain support with the voting public, consolidating their own position in public and political discourses. This section of the book revolves around the intersection of opportunity, resources, actor characteristics, and timing, factors that shape and reform the development of parental leave policies.

The second section (chapters 10 to 15) broadens the focus of the book by providing detailed cross-national analyses of current policy issues. Chapter 10 explores what is considered to be ‘good leave’ through a comparative study (International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) data) of 27 countries. Consecutive chapters illustrate research highlighting the long-standing problem of policy design failing to achieve policy aims. Examples of this include the persistence of gender inequality in caregiving and the low uptake of paternal leave. These are explored in chapters 11, 12, and 13, which draw on research from Nordic countries in general, and Norway in particular, as well as from Canada. Finally, chapters 14 (Germany, Italy, Sweden, and the UK) and 15 (Belgium, Croatia, and Germany) challenge preconceptions of eligibility for leave, often contingent on labour market engagement, to include societal care and gender equality as social rights. This second section highlights the importance of policy design in monitoring and understanding the consequences of policy implementation, and of research that ultimately aims at informing purposeful development of future trends in parental leave policy.

Indeed, the novel character of this edited volume centres on the ‘beyond’ aspect, which is part of the title. Its third section (chapters 16 to 19) is designed to inspire academics and policy-makers to explore creative considerations for the future development of leave policy and, in this way, it makes a significant contribution to the field. The recent technological revolution, neoliberal influences on the labour market, concerns for the ethical use of the Earth’s resources, and changing social demographics — longer life span, blended families, low childbirth rates — are forcing many countries to look at innovative ways of living, working, and providing care.

The authors’ pragmatic yet hopeful take on ‘Universal Basic Income’ (Chapter 16), the ‘time-credit’ system in Belgium (Chapter 17), and movement toward a ‘multi-active’ society in France (Chapter 18) is one of their strongest points. The book culminates in Chapter 19 where the editors offer pertinent critiques of existing leave policy designs, pointing to a vision of alternative ways of constructing future policy and society values. When this chapter was written, the authors could not have imagined how relevant their invitation to re-imagine society would become in the shadow of the current pandemic.

A significant challenge for post-neoliberal and post-Covid-19 societies will be to see whether our welfare regimes become ‘more oppressive or emancipatory’ (p. 344). Doucet argues that we stand on the cusp of an opportunity to do things differently, to re-imagine a society based on social protection that is linked to citizenship rights rather than employment rights. This paradigm shift will, in turn, require exploration of new parental leave policy designs to support this transition. This volume will make a significant contribution to that process.

Fraser, N., (2016). Contradictions of capital and care. *New Left Review*, 100, 99-117.

Kamerman, S., & Moss, P. (Eds.). (2009) *The Politics of Parental Leave Policies: Children, Gender, Parenting and the Labour Market*. Policy Press.