A Comparative Analysis of Childcare Expansion and Social Investment in Sweden, France, Germany, the UK, Japan and South Korea*

Mi-Young An**

Abstract

This paper examines how a social investment approach can be applied in a comparative analysis of childcare arrangements. We compared changes in Sweden, France, Germany, the UK, Japan and Korea during the 2000s, focusing on four dimensions of social investment: activation, gender equality, quality of care, and the degree of state’s intervention in the family. We considered leave systems and the number of children enrolled in formal care and education facilities as indicators for labour market activation. For gender equality, women's position in employment is considered with respect to labour market participation rates, proportion of permanent employment, and wage-sex ratio. Quality of care concerns child-to-staff ratio and care provided with government quality control. The

* This work was supported by the National Research Foundation of Korea Grant funded by the Korean Government (NRF-2011-330-B00142).
** Associate Professor, School of Public Administration and Public Policy, College of Social Sciences, Kookmin University (myan@kookmin.ac.kr)
state’s intervention was measured as social spending on families as proportions of GDP and total social spending. Our analysis provides empirical evidence that Sweden and France are pioneers in this arena and that the UK, Germany, Korea, and Japan are path-shifters in their care paradigms, albeit to varying degrees. Is the social investment approach an adequate paradigm for care? In a normative sense, this approach has potential. However, the following issues remain unaddressed: gender equality should be achieved through an expansion in good-quality jobs, fathers should be encouraged to take on childcare duties, and families should have universal access to good-quality childcare services controlled by the government.

Key words: childcare, social investment, activation, gender equality, quality of care, social spending on family

1. Introduction

Recent welfare reforms in Europe and East Asia, particularly Korea, have legitimized state involvement. Normative ideals and pragmatic responses have changed, albeit to a different extent across countries. Daly (2011) considers that these developments are occurring along three lines. The first can be found in the literature on new social risks (Bonoli, 2005; Taylor-Gooby, 2004). Welfare policy reforms, referred to as ‘modernization’, are being enacted in response to new social risks associated with the transition to post-industrial society. The second is the adult worker model (Lewis & Giullari, 2005), which addresses assumptions held about men and women embedded in the welfare states and argues that social policy increasingly regards them as individual workers. The last line of the framework is a social investment perspective, which maintains that contemporary welfare developments are oriented toward children and the future, and that greater social spending is justified and should be targeted toward the enhancement of individual and social capital, mainly through activation (Giddens, 1998; Midgley, 1999; Jenson & Saint-Martin, 2003; Abrahamson, 2010; Jenson, 2012). I will