

The “production” of child care: How labor markets shape social policy and vice versa ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

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Abstract

This article examines child care policies in three countries—France, Sweden, and the United States—to explore the links between labor markets and social policy and to probe the applicability of the “varieties of capitalism” literature to the human services. Countries differ in the extent to which they subsidize early childhood care and education programs, reflecting, in part, the nature of the child care workforce. In liberal market economies such as the United States, a low-skill, low-wage workforce has enabled a private market of child care to develop, letting federal and state governments off the hook from having to subsidize these programs. In the more coordinated market economies of Western Europe, by contrast, higher labor market regulations, wages, and rates of unionization raise the cost of labor and impede the growth of a private child care market. As a result, governments aiming to promote women’s employment or assure the education of young children will feel pressed to provide extensive public subsidies for these services. While these differences reflect long-standing variations in labor market skill regimes, strong public sector unions also shape diverging trajectories in the “production” of child care services.

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