

From conception to early childhood education: The
“under age three package” in a life cycle context in
OECD countries

Presentation for Wellchi Network Conference
8th-10th February 2006

by
Simon Chapple

Child Wellbeing Project ELS/SPD, OECD, PARIS



Aims

- Describe the different policy approaches that different OECD countries take policy interventions for the earliest part of the life cycle
- Period considered: conception to about three years
- Hence: The “under three years package”
- But as an expositional device, rather than a planned policy package
- Very much a first cut



Why?

- No-one else has done it (or I've missed it!)
- Fallen between the gaps of Social Policy, Health and Education areas at the OECD
- Evidence of lasting impact of early childhood circumstances from a variety of longitudinal studies
- Considerable interest amongst policy makers across the OECD in "early intervention"



Scope of policy interventions of under age threes

Life cycle stage	Prenatal	Birth	Postnatal
More universal policies.....	Prenatal care schedule Maternal health books	Hospital care at birth	Vaccination schedule Postnatal care schedule Child health books
to less universal policies	Prenatal maternal leave Prenatal parenting programmes Prenatal health and nutrition programmes Prenatal anti-tobacco, drug and alcohol programmes	Birth grants (cash or kind)	(Young) child cash welfare benefits Postnatal maternal, paternal and parental leave Breast feeding promotion Childcare/ECE provision Targeted home visiting Post natal parenting programmes Service coordination and referral Child protection services



Prenatal care

- care provided, largely to expectant mother
- multiple dimensions of care (amount, schedule, deliverer, timing, place, cost etc.)
- aim to change inter-uterine environment, or;
- aim to influence postnatal environment early
- 1st opportunity to screen for medical and social risks, and therefore intervene early in the life cycle
- most OECD countries provide free or heavily subsidised prenatal care



Prenatal: Prenatal care contd

- delivered by very different professionals (obstet., GPs or midwives)
- different places of care (surgery, clinic or home)
- some countries pay welfare benefits conditional on take up of care (e.g. FIN, DE, AUST, FR, HUN)
- Countries with high rates of no prenatal care include Turkey (19% of mothers), Mexico (12%) and Portugal (3%)
- A number of other countries have high rates of late (3rd trimester care), e.g. Ireland



Prenatal nutrition programmes

- Canadian Prenatal Nutrition programmes, social risk focus, 7% of pregnant women
- Special Supplemental Programme for women and Children (WIC, USA), social risk focus, 60% of low income population
- Healthy Start (UK), social risk focus



Prenatal paid maternal leave: Lots of variation

- None: Australia, US
- Maximum: 17 weeks in Ontario, Canada
- France: Minimum 4 weeks before due date, maximum 8 weeks
- Netherlands, Italy also have 1 month compulsory leave
- Germany and Greece also have lengthy compulsory periods of 8 weeks
- NZ: Maximum 6 weeks, no minimum

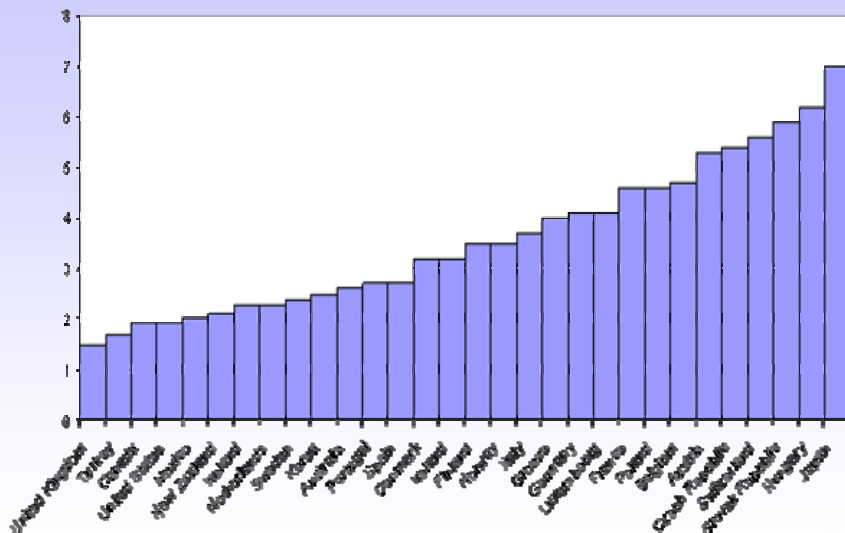


Maternal health booklets

- A number of countries have maternal health books provided to pregnant women
- e.g. Austria, Germany, France, Japan, Portugal, Korea and Belgium (also has one for fathers)
- Variety of possible roles
- Provide public health information to mothers, medical record of pregnancy, evidence of attendance at care for benefit access, service referral information



Average days spent in hospital following a normal birth



Birth grants

- Australia (@€2500) , Japan (@€2000) and Luxembourg (@€1740) pay considerable universal birth grants
- UK, Norway, Italy and France pay birth grants targeted in some way to disadvantaged mothers
- Finland offers a small birth grant (@€140) or an in-kind packages of necessities for a new born of considerably higher value



Postnatal: Child benefits and age of child

- Many countries pay a child benefit or tax credit, which may be universal or income-abated
- In some cases (Denmark, Portugal, Canada, Japan, France) more is paid for younger children (investment approach)
- more often child benefits increase with age of child (and even are paid into the twenties in some countries if the person is in education), e.g. Austria, NZ, Czech Republic, Australia (cost of child approach)
- other countries have age neutral child benefits (e.g. Germany, Greece, the US, Finland, Sweden)



Postnatal care

- Many OECD countries have a routine universal free physical health and child development checkups
- these may also have a parental education component (infant safety, feeding, sleeping)
- these checks may be clinic based (e.g. Sweden) or home based (e.g. UK, New Zealand, Denmark)
- in some cases check are associated with fulfilment of the free vaccination schedule
- some countries have a universal system of home visits cascading in intensity according to a social risk checklist (e.g. NZ)
- in other countries universal home visiting is not the norm, but exists for higher social risk parents



Child health booklets

- Some countries have universally provided child health books (e.g. NZ, France, Belgium, UK, Portugal)
- Some countries (e.g. Japan), combine the child booklet with the maternal health booklet
- some countries who have a maternal health booklet (e.g. Germany) do not have a child booklet
- variety of possible roles: chart physical health and development, motor and social development, provide information on postnatal schedule, public health information etc.
- where a direct comparison is possible, style and content vary greatly



Conclusions

- Clearly a work in progress
- lots of OECD variation, with little evidence to support different variations
- variations are probably consequences of local histories
- need to look at how different parental leave systems and child benefit payments may perpetuate inequality
- need to look at relationship between paid maternal leave and WHO breast feeding recommendations (6 months exclusive)
- early parenting programmes and early home visiting programmes
- how much do governments actually spend on this life cycle stage and on what, exactly?