



SOCIAL POLICY, SOCIAL JUSTICE

SOCIOL 103

**Lecture 10: Children:
In control or out of
control?**

22 April 2008

Lecture outline

- Children, families and the state
- Why are children a key focus of recent policy?
- How does this focus highlight key tensions between rights/responsibilities and private/public issues? (DVD – *Close Up*)

Children, families and the state

- In New Zealand:
 - ‘Family’ problems traditionally regarded as a ‘private’ matter not a ‘public’ issue
 - Family autonomy protected by practices of minimum state intervention
- The state’s role in regard to children and families has always been a fraught one:
 - How to ensure adequate socialisation of children and protect the vulnerable without intruding in areas seen as the private realm of the family?

Why are children a key focus of recent policy in NZ?

- **Kids increasingly being seen as *in control***
 - Growing international emphasis on the *rights* of children: UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 (ratified by NZ 1993)
 - Growing awareness about child autonomy/wellbeing
 - Children seen as active agents, citizens with rights not as passive subjects requiring charity
 - Children have same rights as other human beings, but greater need than others for adults to take action on their behalf

BUT

- Children's rights still contested in public sphere – in particular because they limit parental rights and increase parental responsibilities



Examples of child-focused policy

- Agenda for Children 2002

- strategy aimed at improving the lives of *all* children, which includes:

- a commitment to ending child poverty;
 - a set of principles to guide government policies and services affecting children;
 - a programme of government policy and research initiatives to help achieve the vision;
 - a new "whole child" approach as basis for all child policy and service development to make sure the needs, rights and interests of children and young people taken into account by



Examples of child-focused policy

- Children's Commissioner 2003
 - Speaks out on behalf of all children to ensure their rights are respected and upheld
 - Statutory role to monitor implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
 - Inquires into any matter affecting children and young people in any service or organisation and investigates the actions of the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services



Why are children a key focus of recent policy in NZ?

- **Families/parents seen as increasingly *out of control***
 - General concern about the family as an institution
 - Greater diversity in form of families and of family functioning
 - Period of rapid change for families due to wider social and economic changes
 - Rapid changes in relationships within families
 - Growth in trans-national family ties
 - Specific concern about negative child behaviours e.g. Supernanny-type programmes
 - Specific concern about child abuse



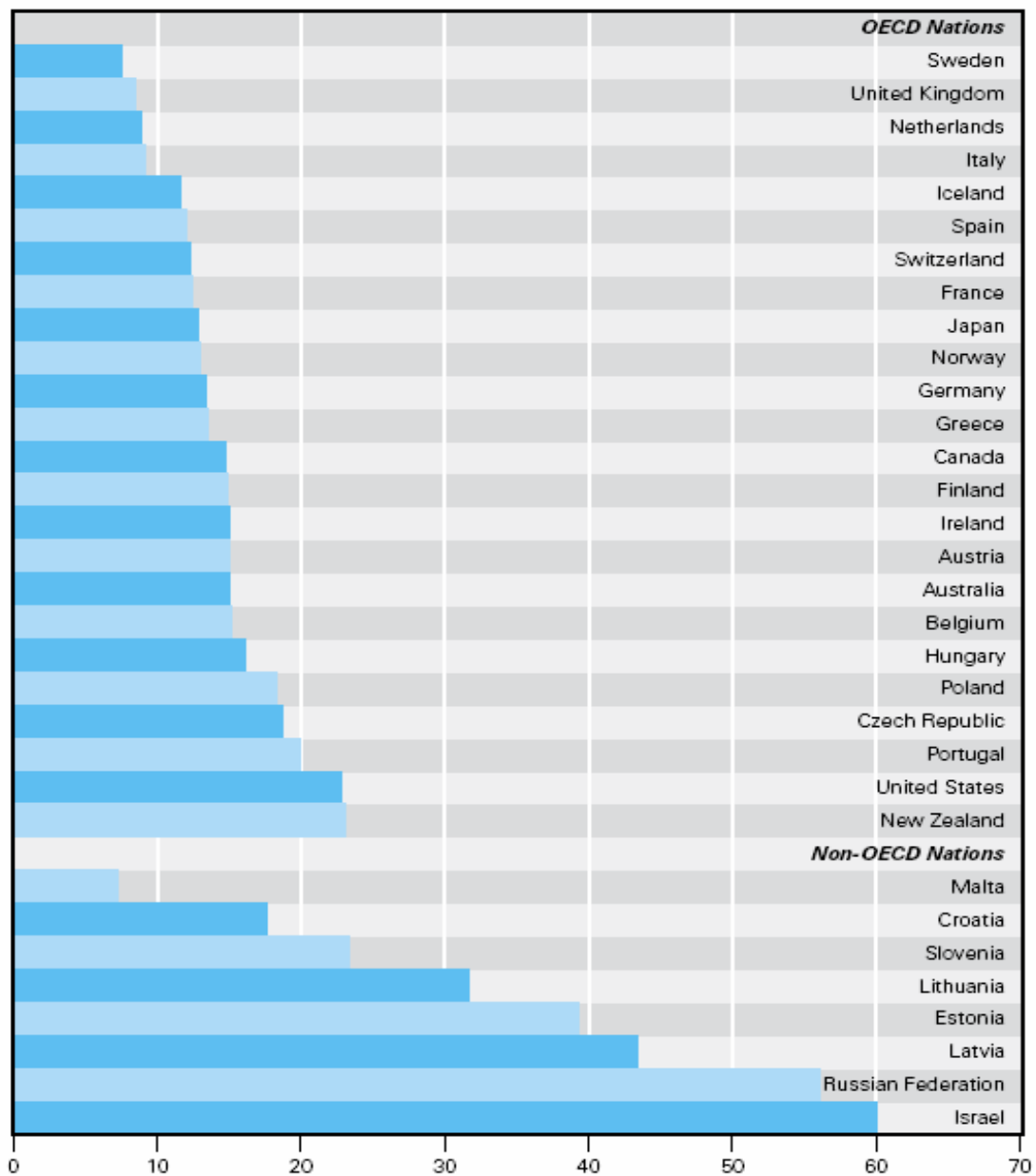
Table 7.1

Child maltreatment deaths for selected countries, 2000

Country	Average no. of deaths over 5-year period per 100,000 children under 15 years
Spain	0.1
Italy	0.2
Norway	0.3
Sweden	0.6
Australia	0.8
Denmark	0.8
United Kingdom	0.9
Canada	1.0
New Zealand	1.3
United States	2.4
Portugal	3.7

Source: UNICEF 2003, 4.

Figure 2.3 Deaths from accidents and injuries per 100,000 under 19 years
(average of latest three years available)



Date: 1993-1995 (Finland, Hungary, Iceland, the Netherlands, Norway), 1994-1996 (Poland, Sweden), 1995-1997 (Australia, Belgium, Germany), 1996-1998 (Spain, US), 1997-1999 (Canada, France, New Zealand, UK), 1999-2001 (Austria, Ireland, Italy, Portugal), 2000-2002 (Switzerland, Greece). Non-OECD: Israel (2003), Russian Federation (2000-2002) Lithuania (1995-97), Estonia, Slovenia (1994-96), Latvia (1993-95), Malta, Croatia (1992-94).

Sourced from
Unicef 2007:16.

Examples of policy challenging parental control

- **Strengthening Families 1998-99+** - provides intensive support to at-risk families to improve health status, educational attainment, ability to form positive relationships etc in children
- **Family Start 1999+** - an intensive, home-based programme providing early intervention assistance to 0-5 year olds facing significant difficulties
- **Social Workers in Schools 2000+** - social workers work alongside teachers to ensure at-risk children are encouraged and assisted to succeed at school

Examples of policy challenging parental control

- **‘Anti-smacking’ Bill 2006** – aimed to repeal Section 59 of Crimes Act, which stated that every parent is justified in using force by way of correction towards a child, if the force used is reasonable in the circumstances
- 14 other countries have abolished all corporal punishment of children but in NZ this Bill caused HUGE controversy
- May 2007 compromise: All uses of force for correction prohibited but police given the discretion to not prosecute complaints against a parent where they believe it to be “so inconsequential that there is no public interest in proceeding with a prosecution”.

Lecture summary

- The last decade has seen a growing interest in children and families:
 - At-risk children and families identified as having ‘needs’ that require state intervention
 - Children and families have emerged as new sites for ‘rights’ supported by the state
- These *recognitive* shifts have caused much controversy, highlighting how difficult it is to find the right balance between:
 - Child rights (and responsibilities?)
 - Parent rights and responsibilities
 - State rights and responsibilities
- However, *redistributive* issues like child poverty have received much less public (and state) attention