



Family Policies and Labour market participation :  
the situation in Quebec and Canada

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

This article examines the impact of family policies and work-family balance measures in Canada and Quebec on gender equality in the labour market and the family. Thus, we will first set out a few typologies of family policies, in particular that of Hantrais and Letablier (1996). Second, we will present a history of Canadian and Quebec policies regarding parental leave and childcare services while attempting to situate them in relation to this typology. It will be seen that recent developments and the change of federal government in early 2006 have made it difficult to classify Canada and Quebec in the same category, contrary to what might be expected.

Third, we will make use of available Canadian data on use of parental leave which show that the majority of users are still women, despite increasing participation on the part of fathers in childcare, and in play and educational activities. Although in Canada, the extension of parental leave to one year in 2001 was viewed by some as constituting considerable progress in terms of employment equality, this policy could very well further reinforce the role of mothers without having a strong influence on the participation of fathers and thus rather negatively affect the goal of professional equality. In Quebec, reduced-contribution childcare services were considered as significant progress (\$5 a day at the beginning and \$7 a day since 2003, versus approximately \$30 a day before government funding was introduced). State funding of these services was challenged under the reform envisaged by the current minister (new control methods and access to chains of private childcare centres) and following the election of a federal Conservative government in January 2006. However, the Quebec minister has reaffirmed the principle of reduced contribution, set at \$7, and unchanged since.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, as a result of the federal election on January 23, 2006, the Conservative Party took power. In its electoral campaign, this party proposed to give all families \$1200 per year for each child under 6 and let them have the “choice” between using this amount for one parent (guess which one!) to stay home and using it to have the child cared for in the childcare system.<sup>2</sup> This policy has now come into effect and there was concern in certain quarters that, without the transfer of federal funding to Quebec for maintaining childcare services, Quebec would reduce its funding and increase the contribution of parents, which is currently limited to \$7 a day (with a state contribution of approximately \$30 for each child per day). However, Quebec has reaffirmed its support for reduced-contribution childcare centres.

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<sup>1</sup> Parental contribution is limited to \$7 a day and the government meets the remaining cost of approximately \$30 a day per child for childcare services. The minister recently tabled a law which prohibits private childcare centres from charging more than the \$7 provided for public childcare centres.

<sup>2</sup> The Liberal Party, on the other hand, had proposed to expand the Quebec-style childcare system to all of Canada (a CAN\$5 billion promise increased to CAN\$10 billion during the election, but they lost the election, for reasons unrelated to this promise). Were they to return to power, the project might reappear on the political agenda.



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Recent federal policy orientations attest to a vision which differs greatly from Quebec's family policy goals and it is argued here that English Canada and the Conservative Party are pursuing a conservative or laissez-faire doctrine (based on Hantrais and Letablier's typology), whereas the Liberal Party tends to follow a policy aimed at alternating between work and family which is also a rather conservative position. On the other hand, Quebec, which has previously adhered to a policy of work-family balance (based on Hantrais and Letablier's typology) involving the combination of work and family and parental responsibilities, could today shift towards a greater degree of conservatism. However, in the case of Quebec, the situation is somewhat ambiguous because in January 2006, Quebec established a new parental leave plan on its territory, thus implementing a different policy from that of Canada, that is, leave is more flexible (either a shorter leave with a higher income replacement rate or a longer leave with a lower income replacement rate) and three to five weeks over the entire leave period of almost one year are reserved for fathers.

Since this policy has come into effect, Québec has noted an increase in births, which were up to 82 500 in 2006, in comparison with 76 250 the previous year. This is the highest increase (8%) since 1909. While it is clearly too early to attribute this increase to the new regime, especially since some parents may have slightly retarded their project of giving birth waiting for the new regime, the fertility rate nevertheless increased to 1,6 %, which is higher than the Canadian average, and up 0,1 point from last year.

Lastly, once Canada and Quebec's family policies have been presented, we will examine the issues of women's labour force participation based on a few survey data. Although these issues are too complex to make direct links between the policy and participation, we will seek to highlight the potential impact of the measures offered or of the lack of measures in a number of organizations on female and male participation rates.

Thus, this article will examine the development of policies related to families and work-family balance in Quebec and the way they are rooted in the main models defined in relation to family policy or the welfare state. Before classifying Quebec and Canada, we will set out some typologies of models, that is, drawing on the work of Hantrais and Letablier (1995, 1996), the work-family balance model and the conservative model derived from the laissez-faire state or, drawing on the work of Fouquet et al. (1999), the Nordic model, the island group, the continental European group and the Southern European group. This second typology is more specific to Europe and has the disadvantage of not taking North America into account, such that we will favour the typology of Hantrais and Letablier, based on the writings of Esping-Anderson on welfare states.

### **2. THE NATIONAL MODELS**

It should be pointed out that the methods of adjusting to the work-family relationship vary according to country and geographical region, with Northern and Southern Europe clearly holding opposite positions, as do the United States and Northern



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Europe. Work-family linkage takes on very different forms depending on the social, demographic and cultural context as well as the public policies in place, the latter being our main research interest in this article.<sup>3</sup> Most countries are linked to a model without perfectly fitting into it and this is also true of Quebec and Canada.

In the past, we maintained that Quebec was working towards the Nordic model or the model of work-family balance (Tremblay 2004, 2005), given the developments observed in parental leave and the proposed work-family balance policy on which researchers and social partners worked for two to three years by participating in successive meetings with the minister, in personal consultations and online consultations, and by drafting numerous opinions on the issue. However, we will argue here that if the work-family balance policy were to be abandoned — a policy on which consultations with many social actors were conducted for two to three years and which was said to provide for the obligation for employers to take parental or family demands into account and eventually to develop municipal “ offices of times” for planning transportation, schooling and other social times at the local level, -- Quebec would perhaps draw closer to a conservative or Anglo-Saxon model.

However, the introduction of the new Quebec Parental Insurance Plan in January 2006 also confused the issue since this plan may be close to the model of work-family balance, but due to its long-term parental leave, it also favours alternating between the labour market and the family, which refers to the conservative model. We will therefore attempt to classify Quebec and Canada (not necessarily in the same category moreover) according to the various typologies of family policies by focusing more particularly on parental leave policies. We will describe the national models before presenting Quebec and Canada’s parental leave policies as well as other elements which will help to classify Quebec and Canada in this area. As has been indicated, we chose the typology of the three main institutional models identified by Hantrais and Letablier (1995, 1996) because it is more general (and non geographical) and allows North America to be taken into account.

### 2.1 The Work-Family Balance or Cumulative Model

In countries which draw on this model, the aim of public intervention is to balance the demands of family life and work, by allowing individuals, women and men, to remain employed while assuming their family responsibilities. In other words, it makes it possible to juxtapose family with employment without having to sacrifice one for the other. The **work-family balance** model or **cumulative model** (since it is possible to cumulate work and family) offers the best quality and the greatest variety of public measures for adjusting to the work-family relationship, that is, accessible and highly developed public childcare services, excellent working time arrangement measures, paid and flexible parental leave, etc. Moreover, in countries which draw on this

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<sup>3</sup> Elements of the typology presented in Tremblay (2004) will be used here; these, as well as those of Hantrais and Letablier (1995, 1996), can be consulted for more information on the various countries found in each of the models.



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model, greater importance is given to equal treatment of men and women than in countries which draw on other models. Laws and public policies related to work-family balance apply to both men and women in order to encourage a more equal sharing of work-related duties and family responsibilities. Measures related to parental leave, for example, provide for special incentives to encourage men's participation. Lastly, the principle guiding government action is clearly that of individual equality, equality of women and children as well as men. In other words, the policies are based on the notion of citizenship and not on the notion of family. The family policy is based on the notion of citizenship to the extent that it is first and foremost a policy of gender equality and a childhood policy since children are considered to be future citizens. In a nutshell, it is a policy of social integration (Hantrais and Letablier, 1995: 44).

### **2.2 The Work-Family Alternating Model**

Compared to the work-family balance model, the main aim of the work-family alternating model is not to juxtapose family with work or, in other words, to allow working parents to devote themselves simultaneously to both activities. In countries following this model, public intervention instead encourages employed parents, in general women, to opt for a strategy of entering and exiting the labour market in order to “balance” work and family, giving priority to one sphere over the other at different times. Stated otherwise, the state encourages women to leave their jobs or reduce their work hours in order to take care of their children, and then to return to the labour market later, most often on a part-time basis when the children reach school age. In our view, strictly speaking, this no longer means work-family balance, since the latter presumes that parents – or mothers in particular – manage to perform both tasks at the same time, that is, to remain employed *and* to assume their family responsibilities without having to neglect either one. We mainly talk about mothers because, although it is desirable that work and family responsibilities be shared more equitably by both parents, having a family rarely represents a real problem for fathers in terms of work-family balance. It is rare that fathers have to leave their work or reduce their work hours in order to devote themselves to the family. It is more often women who have to make these adjustments (Tremblay 2004, 2004b, 2002). Countries oriented towards the work-family alternating model share a conception of the family which is still based on the sexual division of roles, relying mainly on the mother's role in linking work and family. In addition, they share a “privatist” representation of the responsibility for raising children, in the sense that public intervention leaves families with this exclusive responsibility. The result is that women tend more to withdraw from the labour market—either totally or partially—as soon as they have children and then return to it in large numbers as the children grow up.

### **2.3. The Non-Interventionist Model**

Countries oriented towards this model are characterized by the virtual absence of any state measures for adjusting to the work-family relationship. Among these countries, a distinction should be made between those in which there is little or no state intervention due to insufficient resources as, for example, in some Southern European countries, and those in which state intervention is weak based on principle, as in the



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United Kingdom and the United States. Both cases result in a purely privatist conception of the work-family relationship, where this is left entirely up to the initiative of individuals and employers. In this latter case, it can be concluded that collective bargaining at the company level must compensate for the lack of public policy and state intervention. This third model is characterized by weak state measures for adjusting to the work-family relationship. Among the countries grouped under this model, a distinction should be made between those in which non-intervention by the state is explained by a lack of resources and those in which it is based on principle or philosophy. Some countries in Southern Europe (Spain, Greece and Portugal) can be pointed to as examples of the first case while the United Kingdom and the United States are generally cited as examples of the second case. Canada is often associated with the United States but, in our view, there are significant differences between the two, in particular with regard to the measure related to the one-year parental leave and, until the January 2006 election, a proposed national childcare program (already in place in Quebec). The effects of these models on women's participation in the labour market are as follows (Tremblay 2004, 2005):

- The *work-family balance model* yields the most positive results for women's participation in the labour market in terms of the rate of participation, stability and number of hours worked each week.
- The *work-family alternating model* also produces positive results for women's participation rate in the labour market, but causes more frequent interruptions in addition to reducing the number of weekly work hours – both of which factors have consequences for women's income, skills level, career opportunities and so on.
- The *non-interventionist model* yields more diversified results, depending on the context of the particular country: social gender relations, specific historical conditions and national economic situation, among other factors.

### 3. THE SITUATION IN QUEBEC

In relation to these models of adjustment to the work-family relationship, the situation in Quebec can be considered to be half-way between the work-family balance model and the conservative or work-family alternating model. Although not all adopted measures meet expectations and much remains to be done in order to catch up with the situation in Nordic countries, Quebec nevertheless clearly stands apart from the rest of Canada in this respect, and even more so from the United States, where the model of non-intervention predominates.

#### 3.1 History of Policies

It must first be underlined that the Quebec government's interest in family policy can be explained by two main reasons. On the one hand, various socio-demographic indicators have changed considerably, that is, there has been a drop in fertility, a decline in marriage, an increase in marital instability and an increase in the occupational activity of mothers. Although these changes are not exclusive to Quebec, the pace of this change in Quebec represents a special case in Canada. On the other hand, the concern caused by the decline in Quebec's demographic load within



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Canada constitutes for several political parties a reason to intervene in order to encourage fertility (Tremblay 2004).

The 1960s were a socially determining period for Quebec. During this period, the government became increasingly interventionist and the significant social changes which took place are often referred to as the Quiet Revolution. Feminism became an important social movement and women's participation in the labour market increased markedly. Public policies gradually began to take this fact into account over the years. Laws and measures such as maternity leave and subsidized childcare centres came into being as a result of the struggles of the women's movement and popular movements. As regards maternity leave, the first interventions came from the Canadian government. In 1971, the eligibility criteria for the Employment Insurance Program were broadened to include a 17-week maternity leave, 15 of which were paid at 60% of insurable earnings – a percentage now reduced to 55%. This program, which still constitutes the only protection for many Canadian women, nevertheless contains important limitations which the new Quebec Parental Insurance Plan of 2006 is trying to address, as will be seen below.

From the 1980s onwards, the Quebec government began to take a close look at the transformations in the family and women's participation in the labour market. A great number of policy statements have been published over the years: a Green Book, *Pour les familles québécoises* (For Quebec families) (Government of Québec, 1984); a dual report by the family policy consultation committee, *Le soutien collectif réclamé par les familles québécoises* (Government of Québec, 1985) and *Le soutien collectif recommandé pour les parents québécois* (Government of Québec, 1986). An important statement on family policy (Government of Québec, 1987) was published in 1987 and was behind the creation of the *Conseil de la famille*, which became the *Conseil de la famille et de l'enfance* (Council of families and children). Three major three-year action plans followed: *Familles en tête*: 1989-1991, 1992-1994, 1995-1997 (Government of Québec 1989; 1992; 1995). All these endeavors attest to the importance of the review process, but the concrete measures were slow in materializing except for some support to childcare centres.

Then in 1997, the review process which took place in many government organizations (Conseil de la famille et de l'enfance, Conseil du statut de la femme and the ministère du Travail et de l'emploi), translated into the publication of a document called *Nouvelles dispositions de la politique familiale* (New provisions for family policy) published by the Parti Québécois government in January 1997. This document set three goals: (1) to ensure equity through universal support provided to families and increased assistance to low-income families; (2) to facilitate balance of parental and work-related responsibilities; and (3) to foster child development and promote equal opportunities" (Government of Québec, 1997: vii).



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To achieve these goals, the White Paper defined specific means, including: the development of early childhood education and childcare services and the creation of a parental insurance plan designed to provide income stability during maternity and parental leave.

These goals were made top government priorities but a number of years went by before concrete measures were proposed, except for support to childcare services and the Canadian parental leave program. The Quebec government asserted that it had to obtain federal government funding in order to proceed with the new proposed parental leave plan. An agreement was concluded in 2005 and in January 2006, Quebec was able to adopt its own Quebec Parental Insurance Plan. The work-family balance policy, on the other hand, did not require that funds be transferred, but it was put aside by the Liberal Government of Quebec, possibly because of employers' opposition, since a few employers' organizations were quite vocal in opposing any governmental intervention.

Although childcare services developed steadily with a network of childcare centres offering reduced-contribution childcare services (\$5 at first, in 1996 and then \$7 a day from 2003 on), the Quebec parental leave policy only came into effect in 2006.

### **4. LEAVE RELATED TO THE BIRTH OR ADOPTION OF A CHILD**

Leave related to the birth or adoption of a child includes maternity leave, paternity leave and parental leave which will be examined below.

#### **4.1 Maternity Leave<sup>4</sup>**

As regards maternity leave in Quebec, up until January 2006, the financial support provided to mothers who were expecting a child or had had a child came from three different income replacement programs. One falls under federal jurisdiction (Canada) and the other two fall under provincial jurisdiction (Quebec):

- *The federal Employment Insurance Program* is the main parental leave benefits program administered by Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC). Benefits are paid to parents after a 14-day waiting period. The allowance corresponds to 55% of insurable earnings. This leave, which used to last six months, was extended to one year in January 2001, and can be shared by both parents. However, unlike Sweden, incentive measures to encourage fathers' participation do not exist.
  
- *The Québec Maternity Allowance Program (PRALMA)* falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Employment and Social Solidarity (MES). Instituted in order to cover the 14-day waiting period imposed by

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<sup>4</sup> This section reproduces elements from Tremblay (AES forthcoming 2006)



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the federal Employment Insurance Program, this program offers a \$360 maternity allowance to mothers who are eligible for employment insurance.

- The Quebec *Safe Maternity Program* – this provincial program is administered by the Commission de la santé et de la sécurité du travail (Occupational health and safety board, CSST) and allows a pregnant worker to stop working if her workstation or position poses risks for her own health or that of her fetus. During the first week of compensation, the employee receives her full salary from her employer. Subsequently, she receives compensation from the CSST through benefits that correspond to 90% of her net income. This program is still in effect in Quebec.

### 4.2. Paternity Leave

Paternity leave, in particular paid paternity leave, is not very common worldwide, although it is quite developed in some Scandinavian countries. In general, if paternity leave is considered, the tendency is to integrate it into general parental leave. In Canada, parental leave was extended in 2001 and it was then expected that parents could share the leave between them, but there is still no financial incentive or time reserved specifically for fathers under the Canadian program. On the other hand, in Quebec, since January 2006, fathers now have the right to take a 3 to 5-week paternity leave, based on the option chosen (longer leave with lower benefits or shorter leave with higher benefits). Combined with the leave which has been extended to one year, this measure may favour a greater sharing of the leave between mothers and fathers, especially given the additional incentive offered by Quebec (better paid leave that is not transferable to the mother), although some work on the take-up of parental leave in Europe tends to indicate that fathers take up essentially what is reserved for them, but little more, if any more (Moss and O'Brien, ed., 2006).

### 4.3 Parental Leave

Parental leave is in principle aimed at men as well as women although, in reality, it is mainly used by women. In relation to the goal of furthering gender equality, parental leave is supposed to play a key role, since it should help to distinguish between the physiological demands of pregnancy and childbirth on women, demands for which maternity leave was designed, and the care and raising of children. Given that the care and raising of children can be shared by both men and women through parental leave, this is what is at least provided for under Canadian and Quebec regulation

Ultimately, the role of parental leave is to allow *both parents* to balance their work and family lives. It is essential that men participate in the same way as women, otherwise parental leave will translate into a kind of extended maternity leave, thus reproducing the traditional division of roles and the economic inequalities between men and women. However, since Canada has not introduced any measures to encourage fathers' participation, the latter has not evolved greatly since 2001 (date when extended parental leave that can be shared by both parents was introduced). As



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women generally earn less than men, in Canada as elsewhere, and the arrival of a child generally represents considerable expenses, it is observed that since parental leave was extended in 2001, only approximately 10% of women's spouses or partners have been taking part of this leave, in general for apparently less than one month since on average women take approximately 11 months. The Quebec plan is designed to remedy this problem by introducing clear incentives, that is, a period reserved specifically for fathers.

### 4.3.1 The Canadian Provisions

In the case of parental leave in Quebec, benefits were governed by a single source, i.e. the federal Employment Insurance Program until January 2006, when the Quebec Plan came into effect. Under the federal program, benefits are paid to the father or the mother who can share the leave in order to care for a newborn child or to adopt a child, if both are eligible for the Plan. The allowance corresponds to 55% of insurable earnings and, since 2001, is now paid for a maximum of one year. However, as men generally earn more than women, this is another major obstacle to fathers' participation in the leave. In Canada as a whole, no leave period is reserved for fathers as is the case in Sweden with the "father's month," such that Canadian fathers do not participate to a great degree. Moreover, European data indicate that fathers participate to a greater extent in countries where the income replacement rate is high and to an even greater extent when a leave period is especially reserved for them and cannot be taken by the mother (*EIROonline*, 1997, No. 9712201, cited in Tremblay 2004; Moss and O'Brien, 2006).

In Canada, the debate on parental leave picked up again in January 2001 when the government extended parental leave to one year. In Quebec in particular, this policy was criticized. Criticisms touched on the fact, among other things, that the income replacement rate should have been increased (it is 55% of income up to a maximum of \$39,000 per year in the federal program) and access to the leave should have been given to excluded workers (self-employed workers in particular, who make up approximately 15% of the working population) before extending the leave period. This therefore raised the issue of political and economic choices between universal access to leave and the possibility of taking this leave based on income level, as opposed to extending the parental leave period for better-off parents.

### 4.3.2. The New Quebec Parental Insurance Plan

As was seen, since 1997, Quebec has been seeking to adopt a parental leave plan which is distinct from that of the federal government and requested that the sums needed for this purpose be transferred to it. Following an agreement reached in 2005, the new Quebec Parental Insurance Plan came into effect in January 2006. This new Plan has a number of advantages in terms of the population covered, flexibility in taking the leave and the income replacement rate, as will be seen below.

Since January 2006, the Quebec Parental Insurance Plan (QPIP) has replaced the measures under the federal program in Quebec. The new provisions do not change the provisions stipulated in the Labour Standards Act in Quebec, which specify the



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duration of maternity leave (18 weeks) and parental leave (52 weeks) for a total duration of 70 weeks without salary, and the rights and obligations related to departure from and return to work.

The new Plan introduces three major changes:

The first change provides for weeks reserved for the father that cannot be transferred to the mother, which is an innovation in Canada and even in North America. Some Scandinavian countries have weeks reserved for the father and this seems to have an impact on the taking of leave. Quebec fathers are now entitled to a 3 to 5-week paternity leave with higher benefits than was the case under the federal program, since the income replacement rate and maximum eligible earnings have also been increased. Indeed, the federal Parental Leave Program provides for a leave which can be shared by the father and the mother but Statistics Canada survey data indicate that this measure has not been enough to increase fathers' participation since mothers still took an average of 11 months off in 2004 and only 11% of fathers took part of the leave (Table 1 below). The data from 2005 indicate there might be an increase of fathers' participation to 14,5 %. In Québec, the percentage of take-up was apparently 22 % and with the new parental leave scheme, it appears to have increased to 36 %.

The second change involves the increased income offered by the Plan. In addition to the abolition of the 14-day waiting period stipulated under the federal Parental Leave Program (two weeks without benefits as is the case with Employment Insurance with which this program is associated), the new Quebec Plan increases the maximum insurable income to \$59,000 instead of \$40,000, as is the case with the federal parental leave.

The third change relates to the introduction of more flexibility in the Plan since parents now have two options: a basic plan (longer leave with lower benefits) or a special plan (shorter leave with higher benefits). The latter might interest those who need a higher income replacement rate (especially if their employment income is relatively low) or else who cannot afford to miss work too long for various personal or work-related reasons. Whereas the federal program provides for benefits corresponding to 55% of the maximum insurable income (\$40,000) during the 15 weeks of maternity leave and 35 weeks of parental leave (accessible to both parents, but with a 14-day waiting period in each case), the new Quebec basic plan offers benefits of 70% of the average weekly income for 18 weeks of maternity leave and 5 weeks of paternity leave. As regards parental leave, it offers benefits that correspond to 70% of income for 7 weeks and 55% for 25 weeks. Adoption leave can also be shared by both parents and provides for 12 weeks at 70% and 25 weeks at 55%.

The special plan provides for higher income replacement rates but for a shorter period. Under this plan, maternity and paternity leave benefits are equivalent to 75% of the weekly salary and are paid for 15 weeks and 3 weeks, respectively. Parental leave is compensated at 75% for 25 weeks and can be shared by the father and the mother. Under this special plan, the mother can receive benefits for a maximum of 40



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weeks (versus 50 in the basic plan). Adoption leave can also be shared by both parents and lasts 28 weeks at 75% under this second option.

Lastly, it must be underlined that the new Plan is more accessible and will allow more parents, including self-employed workers and students, to receive benefits since it no longer requires individuals to have worked 600 hours over the previous 52 weeks, but simply to have earned an insurable income of \$2000. The funding of this program is based on additional contributions that employers, employees and self-employed workers must pay into the Plan. Employers and employees of course continue to contribute to the federal Employment Insurance Program.

It is evidently still too early to assess the impact of this new Plan on fathers' participation in parental responsibilities. However, based on what has been observed in other countries which introduced the measure of a paternity leave period not transferable to mothers, it is likely that there will be an increase in the participation of Quebec fathers, at least for these reserved weeks, if not more. This is especially true since, compared to Canadian fathers, there seemed to be a greater number of fathers in Quebec taking advantage of parental leave and because the income replacement rate has been increased, making it easier to take the leave at a time when financial needs are considerable. Preliminary data from the Quebec government indicates that take up rate of fathers is some 36 % with the new regime.

We have up until now dealt with paid leave but it should be underlined that the Labour Standards Act was also revised in 2003 in order to take families' needs into account and to protect the part of the workforce that is not eligible for paid parental leave. Indeed, it should be pointed out that in Canada, 75% of mothers of a child under 12 months of age have insurable employment, entitling them to maternity leave and parental leave benefits (under the federal plan) (Statistics Canada data for 2003, 2004 and 2005 present the same percentage). Workers who do not have access to this plan nevertheless have rights under the Labour Standards Act which also provides for a number of rights related to departure from and return to work. Due to limited space, it is impossible for us to report on all aspects. However, it should be pointed out that since May 1, 2003, employees now have the right to miss ten days of work (instead of 5 days as was previously the case) in order to assume family responsibilities.

### **4.3.3 Use of Parental Leave by Canadian Women**

Since data on the use of parental leave under the new Quebec Plan are not yet available, we will examine the effect of the extension of parental leave to one year, under the Canadian program, in January 2001. Table 1 presents some interesting data, despite the fact that Statistics Canada's Employment Insurance Coverage Survey focuses mainly on mothers, since fathers are considered only as spouses who might take part of the leave. It is hoped that with the incentives offered to fathers in Quebec, more interest will be shown



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in them.<sup>5</sup> Table 1 shows that, in 2003-2004, three-quarters of women had “insurable” employment, entitling them to parental benefits; 65% of them received benefits, which means that 35% could not receive these benefits. The data indicate that 25% of them did not have insurable employment and 8% (in 2004) did not claim benefits. Among those who did not have insurable employment, 9% were self-employed (a situation remedied by the Quebec Plan since it makes self-employed or independent female workers eligible for the plan) and 16% had not worked in two years or more and were thus not eligible for the Canadian program. It should be pointed out that under the new Quebec Parental Insurance Plan, individuals are required to have worked 200 hours during the previous year and self-employed female workers are eligible.

It is also interesting to note that, whereas the average duration of leave was 5 months before Canada extended its period of parental leave to one year, it is now 11 months and 62% of women take a 9 to 12-month leave, 16% take more than 12 months, versus only 8% and 11% from 0 to 4 months and 5 to 8 months respectively.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, even though the Canadian parental leave could theoretically be equally shared between the two spouses, or according to their wishes, women have extended their duration of parental leave while men have not made a lot of effort to take this leave. In fact, among spouses, only 11% of fathers took part of the parental leave, which is a lower proportion than that of mothers, since only 20% of mothers took less than 9 months of leave, such that the duration of paternal leave is most often probably one month or 3 months. Unfortunately, the survey does not provide specific data on this subject since the number of participating fathers is limited. However, in reply to our question, Statistics Canada indicated that, although the data are considered not to be totally reliable because of the small number of respondents, the percentage of participating fathers in Quebec was 22% (versus an average of 11% in Canada) in 2004, and appears to have almost doubled with the new regime. This trend remains to be determined in the coming years, but it can attest to a more open attitude of Quebec fathers who would like to participate to a greater extent in the family sphere (Tremblay 2003). The 2005 Canadian data indicate a 14,5 % participation rate and the more recent data from the Québec government on fathers’ participation in the new scheme indicate 36 %.

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<sup>5</sup> However, since this is not certain, we have undertaken a study, albeit more qualitative in nature, of some fathers in two workplaces, one predominantly male (police department) and the other predominantly female (nursing sector) in order to examine fathers’ use of parental leave and the impact of a predominantly male or female workplace on this use.

<sup>6</sup> The reasons for these different durations could not be provided to us.



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**Table 1**

<b>Eligibility of mothers for maternity and parental benefits and duration of leave</b>		
	2003 <sup>r</sup>	2004
Mothers with child aged 12 months or less	327,000	350,000
<b>As a proportion of total</b>		
<b>With insurable employment (%)</b>	<b>75.3</b>	<b>74.3</b>
Received maternity or parental benefits (%)	64.7	65.9
Did not claim or receive maternity or parental benefits (%)	10.6	8.4
<b>Without insurable employment (%)</b>	<b>24.7</b>	<b>25.8</b>
Not worked in two years or more (%)	16.0	16.6
Other (includes self employed) (%)	8.6	9.1
<b>Mothers who received maternity or parental benefits as a proportion of mothers with insurable employment (%)</b>	<b>85.9</b>	<b>88.7</b>
<b>Mothers with known return plans or already returned to work (paid employees only)<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>208,000</b>	<b>211,000</b>
<i>Average duration of planned leave (in months)</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Median duration of planned leave (in months)</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>0 to 4 months (%)</i>	<i>8.3</i>	<i>8.9</i>
<i>5 to 8 months (%)</i>	<i>13.5</i>	<i>11.6</i>
<i>9 to 12 months (%)</i>	<i>59.0</i>	<i>62.7</i>
<i>More than 12 months (%)</i>	<i>19.1</i>	<i>16.9</i>
<b>Spouse or partner claiming or intending to claim parental benefits</b>	<b>33,000</b>	<b>30,000</b>
<b>Percentage of mothers with spouse claiming or intending to claim benefits (%)</b>	<b>11.1</b>	<b>9.5</b>
<sup>1</sup>	Excludes mothers who have not worked in two years and self-employed mothers, since the survey does not provide information on their intentions to return to work.	
<sup>r</sup>	Numbers revised slightly	



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Since our aim is to classify Quebec in relation to the main models of work-family balance cited at the beginning, some elements of childcare services will now be presented

### **4.4 Childcare Services<sup>7</sup>**

Childcare services constitute another fundamental measure for balancing work and family. The number of daycare spaces, the operating hours of childcare centres, their geographical locations and their costs are constant issues of concern for employed parents. These aspects have a direct effect on time management problems faced by parents. An effective childcare system allows parents to better plan their schedules and can reduce tensions between family and professional responsibilities. Thus, we will briefly describe the situation in Quebec in this regard. Since the 1990s, a network of childcare centres was created to provide educational childcare services to children aged four or under.

Childcare centres and daycare centres provide reduced-contribution services (currently \$7 a day or around 5 euros a day) to children and babies. However, the number of daycare spaces is far from meeting the demand and needs. The number of spaces seems to be insufficient and the operating hours are too restrictive for many parents who work on non-standard schedules. The Bureau de la statistique du Québec survey (1999) revealed that 28% of parents would like services to be more easily accessible in the evenings, nights and on weekends. This proportion corresponds to the proportion of parents who work on a casual basis or on non-standard schedules. Moreover, school holidays and after-school hours represent care issues for a great number of parents. Despite these criticisms, Quebec parents are strongly attached to their network of childcare services and view negatively the proposal of the federal Conservative Party government elected in January 2006, which planned to cancel the contributions paid to Quebec for these services and offer instead \$1200 per year for each child under six to women who stay home to care for their children. The payment of the \$1200 amount was indeed confirmed by the federal government and the Government of Quebec is currently negotiating the maintenance of federal contributions. The Quebec childcare services network also took action to defend its gains, but it is difficult to know how this file will evolve in the coming months and years.

Researchers at the Université de Sherbrooke (Audet, Boccanfuso and Makdissi, 2006) recently conducted a preliminary analysis of the policy reform proposed by the Conservative government which involves replacing childcare services funding with an annual subsidy of \$1200 for each child under six, paid directly to parents. They assessed the impact that this policy would have on poverty and inequality, should the Quebec government decide to reduce current public funding of childcare services, which is effectively being envisaged by Quebec. According to the authors, although the effects on poverty and inequality in the general population are not highly significant, they increase in scale when the population targeted by these policies is considered, that is to say, couples with children and single mothers are obviously most affected. In the case of the latter, the authors predict that the poverty observed based on an index which captures all

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.



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the dimensions of poverty may increase by 60%. This may of course have consequences for women's labour force participation and fertility. They may lead to an increase in labour force participation, to the extent possible, but also to a decline in fertility.

### 5. Labour Market Participation<sup>8</sup>

In a France-Canada comparative study, we conducted a comparison between the two countries to determine whether or not the gaps observed in participation rates reveal greater difficulties in balancing work and family in France than in Canada. OECD data show that the fertility rate is higher in France whereas the participation rate seems to be higher in Canada (Table 2). OECD data for 2005 indicate that, in fact, women's participation rate is higher in Canada than in France (Table 3). This gap is particularly marked among the youngest (15-24 years old) and the oldest (55 to 64 years old) population groups. In relation to young people, the gap is markedly greater for women than men, while for the intermediate-age groups (25 to 54 years old), the situation for women (the participation rate is higher in Canada) is opposite to that for men (the participation rate is higher in France). These gaps may result from greater facility in balancing work and family in Canada than in France. Thus, to validate or invalidate this hypothesis, we conducted an in-depth comparison between the two countries.

The first stage<sup>9</sup> of our analysis involved bringing together the individual files of responses to France's Employment Market Survey and Canada's Labour Force Survey in 2003. The direct processing of these two surveys on the same categories of people as those distinguished by the OECD (2005) logically leads (the source data being the same) to results that are very similar to those published by this institution (Table 4). However, gaps that cannot be explained appear regarding the participation rates of young Canadians; these rates are higher in the OECD data (2005) than in our processing.

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<sup>8</sup> Excerpts of our article published in French are reproduced here: Cette, Méda, Sylvain and Tremblay (2006).

<sup>9</sup> The study will continue with an in-depth analysis based on the logit models.



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Table 2

### Participation Rates and Fertility Rates, in Main Industrialized Countries in 2003

	Participation Rates, Population aged 15 to 64, as a %			Women's Fertility Rates
	Men	Women	Altogether	
<b>Australia</b>	81.0	66.1	73.6	1.75
<b>Austria</b>	79.4	63.9	71.6	1.39
<b>Belgium</b>	72.6	55.8	64.3	1.61
<b>Canada</b>	83.1	73.2	78.2	1.52
<b>Denmark</b>	84.0	74.8	79.4	1.76
<b>Finland</b>	76.1	72.1	74.1	1.76
<b>France</b>	75.4	63.6	69.4	1.89
<b>Germany</b>	78.0	64.5	71.3	1.34
<b>Greece</b>	78.3	52.1	65.1	1.27
<b>Ireland</b>	78.3	57.6	68.0	1.98
<b>Italy</b>	74.8	48.3	61.6	1.29
<b>Japan</b>	84.6	59.9	72.3	1.33
<b>The Netherlands</b>	84.2	68.4	76.4	1.75
<b>New Zealand</b>	83.1	69.2	76.1	1.94
<b>Norway</b>	82.8	75.8	79.3	1.80
<b>Portugal</b>	78.5	65.6	72.0	1.42
<b>Spain</b>	81.1	55.7	68.5	1.26
<b>Sweden</b>	80.8	75.8	78.9	1.71
<b>United Kingdom</b>	83.9	69.2	76.6	1.64
<b>United States</b>	82.2	69.7	75.8	2.01

Source: Cette, Méda, Sylvain and Tremblay (2006).

Primary data source: Participation rates: OECD (2005): "Employment Outlook"; Fertility Rates: World Bank.

Table 3

### Participation Rates of Population Aged 15 to 64, in 2003, as a %

	Canada			France		
	Women	Men	Altogether	Women	Men	Altogether
<b>15 to 24</b>	66.4	68.3	67.4	33.3	40.6	37.0
<b>25 to 54</b>	81.1	91.6	86.4	79.4	93.7	86.5
<b>55 to 64</b>	47.9	65.3	56.5	34.5	42.3	38.3
<b>Altogether</b>	73.2	83.1	78.2	63.6	75.4	69.4

Source: Cette, Méda, Sylvain and Tremblay (2006).

Primary source: OECD (2005): "Employment Outlook".

These data are constructed based on the Employment Market and Labour Force surveys.



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Table 4

### Participation Rates of Population Aged 15 to 64, in 2003, as a %

	Canada			France		
	Women	Men	Ensemble	Women	Men	Ensemble
<b>15 to 24</b>	59.7	62.1	60.9	33.0	40.3	36.7
<b>25 to 54</b>	79.2	90.1	84.5	79.1	93.8	86.2
<b>55 to 64</b>	44.4	61.8	53.0	34.5	42.4	38.3
<b>Altogether</b>	70.0	79.9	74.9	62.7	74.3	68.4

Source: Cette, Méda, Sylvain and Tremblay (2006).

Our comparison of participation rates by 5-year age group helps to characterize more precisely the gaps between Canada and France in participation rates of the population aged 15 to 64. This comparison led to the two following observations (Table 5):

- For all age groups in the 25 to 54 age range, the gaps in participation rates, for both sexes, are quite small (no more than 2.6 percentage points) and the participation rate is highest in France. For women, the gap in participation rates is small and tends to vary according to age group but never exceeds 1.7 percentage points. On the other hand, for men, the gap is always in the same direction (higher in France than in Canada) and significant. It is 2.6 percentage points for men aged 25 to 29 and even reaches 4 percentage points for men aged 45 to 49. Except for women aged 45 to 49 for whom the gap in women's participation rates between the two countries is insignificant (0.1 percentage point), women aged 25 to 29, 30 to 34, and 35 to 39 are the only three categories out of 12 in the 25 to 54 age range (6 groups x 2 sexes) whose participation rate is higher in Canada than in France. For the other nine categories, the participation rate is higher in France than in Canada. The direction of the gap in the three atypical categories, that is precisely the main categories where women have to balance work and family, attests perhaps to the difficulty in balancing work and family encountered by young mothers;
- For the two youngest and two oldest age groups (15 to 19 and 20 to 24; 55 to 59 and 60 to 64), the participation rates are always higher in Canada than in France and this applies to both sexes. The gaps are greatest in the very youngest and very oldest age groups: 15 to 19 (around 30 percentage points) and 59 to 64 (around 26 percentage points). For the two youngest age groups, the gaps are greater for women than for men whereas for the two oldest age groups, the gaps are greater for men. Here again, and in particular for women aged 20 to 24, the gap in participation rates observed between the two countries attests perhaps to the difficulty of balancing work and family. As for the oldest age group in France (59 to 64), their low participation rate is undoubtedly partly due to their being able to retire much earlier than in Canada (60 versus 65 years old). Perhaps the provisions of the Fillon Law on



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pensions in 2003<sup>10</sup> will, over the coming years, lead to a gradual increase in participation rates among older workers in France and a reduction in the gap observed with Canada.

Table 5  
**Participation Rates of Population Aged 15 to 64, in 2003, as a %**

	Canada			France		
	Women	Men	Altogether	Women	Men	Altogether
<b>15 - 19</b>	50.0	49.5	49.7	11.3	18.0	14.8
<b>20 - 24</b>	70.2	77.3	73.7	54.5	64.5	59.5
<b>25 - 29</b>	78.8	88.7	83.6	77.6	91.3	84.2
<b>30 - 34</b>	79.3	92.0	85.4	77.6	95.6	86.4
<b>35 - 39</b>	80.8	92.0	86.2	80.4	95.7	88.0
<b>40 - 44</b>	81.2	91.5	86.2	82.6	95.4	88.7
<b>45 - 49</b>	80.9	90.1	85.4	80.8	94.1	87.2
<b>50 - 54</b>	73.5	86.3	79.9	74.9	90.3	82.5
<b>55 - 59</b>	56.4	72.1	64.1	51.5	63.6	57.3
<b>59 - 64</b>	29.4	48.3	38.7	11.7	14.1	12.9
<b>Altogether</b>	70.0	79.9	74.9	62.7	74.3	68.4

Source: Cette, Méda, Sylvain and Tremblay (2006).

On the whole, at this stage of our research, it can be concluded that the participation rate of women aged 25 to 39 is higher in Canada than in France. For women aged 25 to 54 in general, this gap is, however, masked by a higher participation rate in France. Thus, various hypotheses were tested in order to explain the gaps. The unemployment risk, as measured by the unemployment rate, did not appear to provide a plausible explanation for the gaps observed in participation rates. On the other hand, the higher participation rates of young workers aged 15 to 24 and older workers aged 59 to 64 in Canada, as compared to France, are accompanied by a greater prevalence of part-time work. This higher prevalence of part-time work certainly allows young people to more easily balance employment and studies and older workers to progressively leave the labour market.

Moreover, it was noted that in both countries, the rate of participation in the workforce of women with at least one dependent child under six is lower than that for other women. This could attest to particular difficulties in balancing family activity and work activity with a child aged 0 to 6. The gap is more pronounced and clearly much more so in France

<sup>10</sup> The provisions of the Fillon Law which are most likely to raise participation rates among older workers in France are: an increase in the number of years of participation required to receive benefits at the full rate; the institution of an increase in pension benefits if the number of annuities is exceeded and conversely a reduction if the number of annuities is below the threshold for full-rate benefits; and, lastly the possibility for individuals to receive both wages and a pension. However, it must be pointed out that beyond participation, some provisions such as the exemption for the unemployed aged 57 or older from having to look for work are no incentive for these population groups to actively seek employment.



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than in Canada, with the presence of a child under 3. This could reflect both the greater difficulty in balancing work and family in both countries when the child is very young, and also the effect in France of mechanisms such as the Parental Education Allowance which is a financial incentive for parents (mainly mothers) of young children to leave the labour market.

This research will continue in order to further explain the differences, although these first indications are already of great interest. However, given the differences in policies between Quebec and Canada, it would also be worthwhile to compare Quebec with France, which we will do in coming months.

Also, we have looked into data on working hours, since previous research indicated that flexible hours and hours reduction are amongst the main measures desired by parents. Our data analysis has shown that Canadian parents of young children do not necessarily have access to better conditions than non parents, the offer of childcare, eldercare and other measures appearing to be more related to the type of organization than to the presence of children. (Tremblay, Paquet, Najem, 2007a,b, 2006). This is also one of the elements which clearly influences participation in the labour market, and while it would be too long to go into this here, we find it important to mention the important impact of working hours and the possibility of working arrangements on participation, beyond the impact of childcare and parental leaves.

### **CONCLUSION: WHICH MODELS DO CANADA AND QUEBEC CURRENTLY ADHERE TO?**

The effectiveness of the “Quebec or Canadian model” in the area of work-family linkage can be assessed by comparing its results with those obtained by the models in other countries, in particular in terms of women’s participation rates. An analysis of women’s participation rates in Quebec and Canada shows that these rates are increasingly high, in particular for women of childbearing age and women who have children. Currently, two-thirds of Quebec adult women are in the labour market and the rate is higher in some Canadian provinces (Ontario). Consequently, the number of bi-active families, i.e. the number of families in which both parents work, has increased considerably and constitutes almost 62% of all possible family structures. This number was only 34% in 1967. The participation of women with children aged 3 to 5 rose to 41% in 1976, whereas in 1991, it rose again to 68% and has remained steady ever since. Statistics Canada reveals an even larger increase in the case of women with children under 3 years of age.

Thus, although Quebec and Canadian public policies tended in the 1990s to evolve towards the work-family balance model, Canada’s extension of its parental leave to around one year tends to bring it closer to the work-family alternating model or the conservative model. Similarly, the new federal program which pays a lump sum of \$1200 per year to women who stay home will make Canada become firmly entrenched in the conservative model, which favours alternating work with family and, in particular, the withdrawal of women with young children from the labour market.



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Furthermore, if Quebec maintains its childcare service network, it will draw closer to the work-family balance model, especially since its new Parental Insurance Plan provides for more flexibility in the duration of the various kinds of leave, which can be limited to 40 weeks if parents want to benefit from a higher income replacement rate. In addition, if the incentive to fathers' participation leads them to exceed the 3 to 5-week leave specifically reserved for them, Quebec could be considered to be resolutely in line with the work-family balance model, in which responsibilities are shared by both parents. On the other hand, although the new provisions for parental leave in Quebec could effectively bring the Quebec model closer to the work-family balance model, the developments observed in relation to the expected – and not delivered – work-family balance policy seem to go in the opposite direction and bring Quebec closer to the Canadian situation, that of the conservative or work-family alternating model. ). Also, finally, we need to say that Québec is still far from the Scandinavian standard, and some political parties (the ADQ which came second in the 2007 election) propose policies that are quite conservative, such as “cash for care” of 100 \$ a month for parents of children who are not in the daycare system, or a “baby bonus” of 5000 \$ for the third child. While this is apparently attractive to “stay-at-home moms”, it is very risky for those less educated to stay out of the labour market for many years, since they lose their skills and often have more risks of being in poverty, especially if they end up as a single mother. In any case, Québec's family policy appears to be somewhere in between the Scandinavian and the “laissez-faire” at the moment (Tremblay, 2006).

Finally, the absence of working time reduction or arrangement measures is also a weakness of Québec and Canadian policy regarding work-family issues. While recent Statistics Canada data has shown that Québeckers have shorter hours than the Canadian average, and particularly than Ontario or Alberta, the shorter hours in the public sector largely contributing to this (35 hours vs 37,5 in many Canadian jurisdictions), Québec has done little over recent years in terms of working time policy (Tremblay, 2007,a,b, forthcoming).

Thus, the situation has been somewhat ambiguous in recent years and the next election in Quebec in spring 2007 (and possibly in Canada as well since there is a minority government) has triggered the debate on work-family balance policy once again.



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