

Gender, Patriarchy and Families

Comparing Family Policies in the U.S. & China

Prof. Alecea Standlee

Families as Patriarchal Systems

Patriarchy

- Social system in which males hold primary power
- Men hold roles of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege and control of property
- In families, fathers or father-figures hold authority over women and children
- Historically, patriarchal families and social systems have been the norm in most parts of the world



Patriarchy in a Global Context

- Intersections of Patriarchy and Family
 - Social policies in patriarchal societies often reinforce patriarchal systems and vice versa
 - What are some elements of contemporary culture that reflect patriarchal norms?



Comparing Family Policies in the U.S. & China

- Some family policies were created to preserve patriarchal structures
 - Family & Medical Leave Act in the U.S.
- Other family policies were more neutral but had unintended consequences to patriarchal social norms
 - One-Child Policy in China
- How do social policies reinforce patriarchy in the family? How about in society in general?



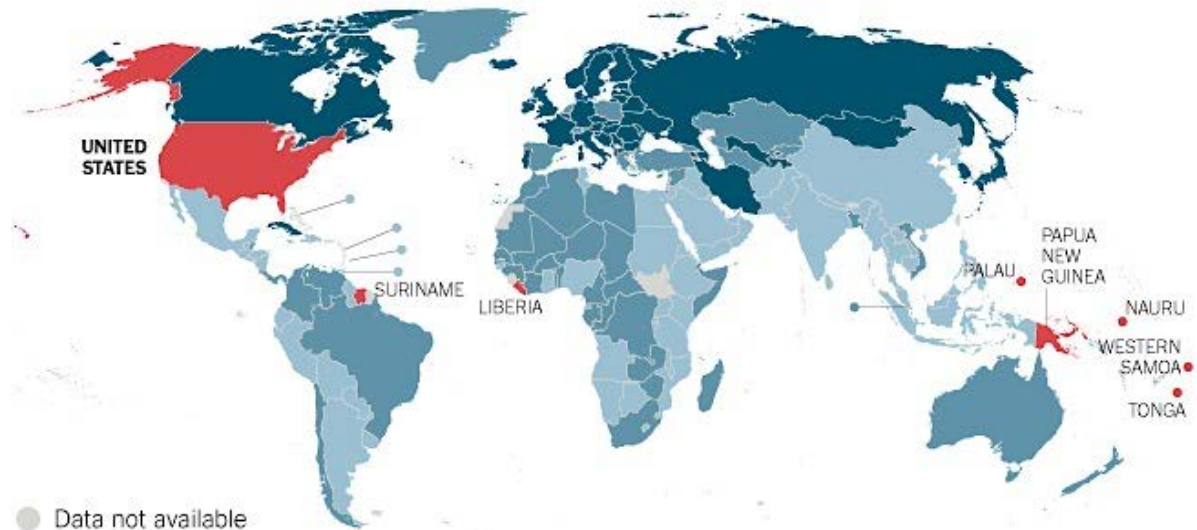
Mapping Paid Maternity Leave

- Besides the U.S., no economically developed nation fails to provide women with paid maternity leave
- Other nations that do not offer paid leave include New Guinea, Suriname, and a few South Pacific island nations

Paid Maternal Leave: Almost Everywhere

The United States is one of only eight countries, out of 188 that have known policies, without paid leave.

Countries with paid leave: ● 26 weeks or more ● 14-25 weeks ● Less than 14 weeks
No paid leave: ●



Rise of U.S. Family & Medical Leave Policies

- Starting in the 1960s, U.S. faced stagnating wages, especially for men
 - Decline in unionization had lead to decreased pay and benefits
 - Increase in low-wage service labor
 - Decline in high paying manufacturing labor
- Consequences
 - Married women increasingly entered the work force
 - Women often concentrated in low-wage “feminized” work
 - Resulted in a gender wage gap
 - Demands to support family life and work life balance emerged



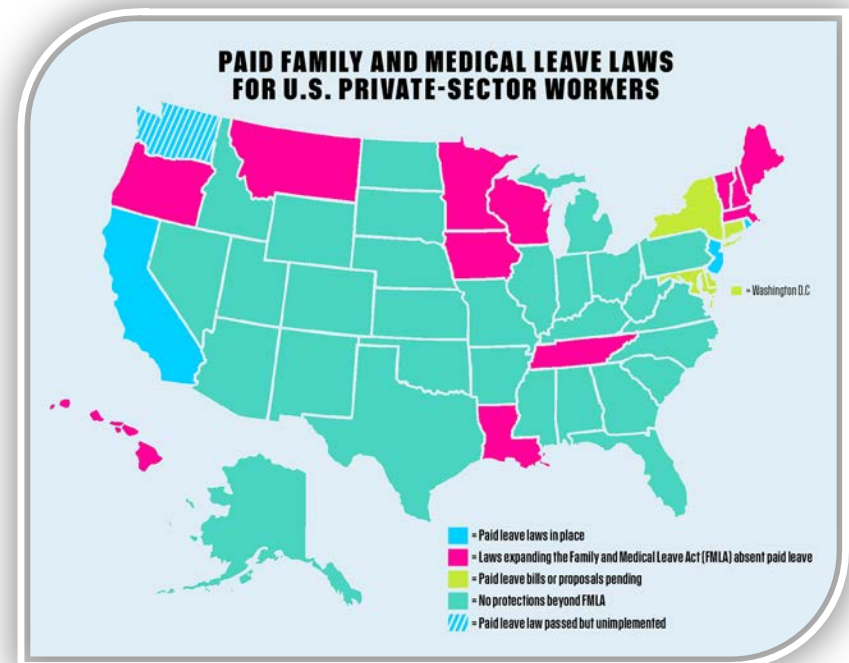
U.S. Family & Medical Leave Act

- In 1993, President Bill Clinton Signed the Family & Medical Leave Act
 - Required businesses to provide employees job-protection and unpaid leave for qualified medical and family reasons
 - Family leave includes unpaid time off for birth of a baby, adoption or family illness
 - Federal FMLA only applies to employers with 50 or more employees within 75 miles



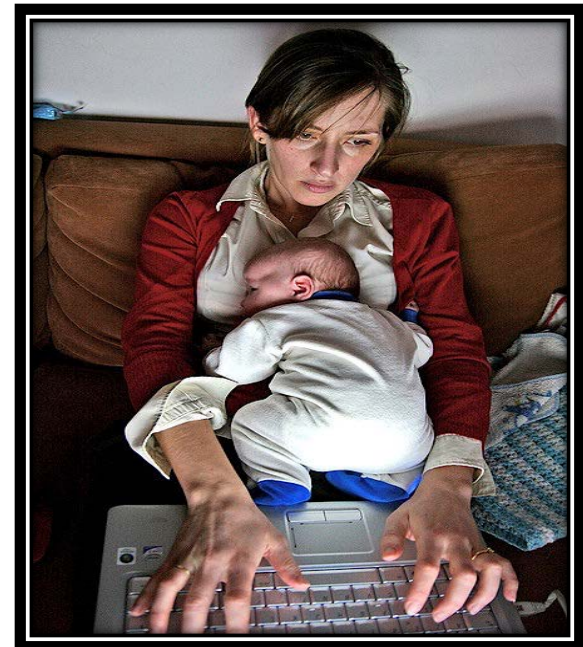
Impacts of FMLA

- Improved health for mothers and children due to longer time off from work
- Minimal impact on employers
- Decreased childcare costs for very young infants
- Decreased parental stress
- Why hasn't the U.S. expanded parental leave the way other nations have?



Problems with FMLA

- Limited availability to poor and working class parents
 - Covers less than ½ of the workers in the private sector
- Upward mobility limited for women
 - Raises, seniority and promotion are all impacted
- Decline in workforce participation for women with children
 - Increase in poverty for low-income families
 - Fathers are largely excluded



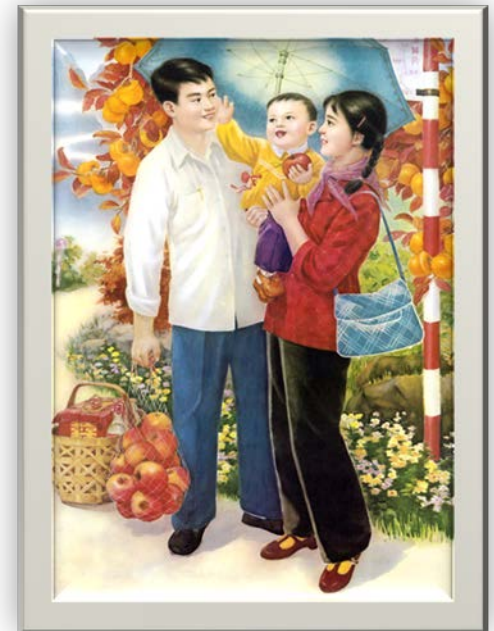
Rise of China's One-Child Policy

- China in the late 1970s was faced with serious overpopulation
 - Attempted to feed 25% of the world's population on 7% of the land
 - Flooding and famine resulted in starvation
 - Limited energy resources to support improved quality of life
- Population control was seen as essential to economic reform
 - Implemented One-Child Policy
 - Had unintended consequences to patriarchal social norms and persistent gender inequality



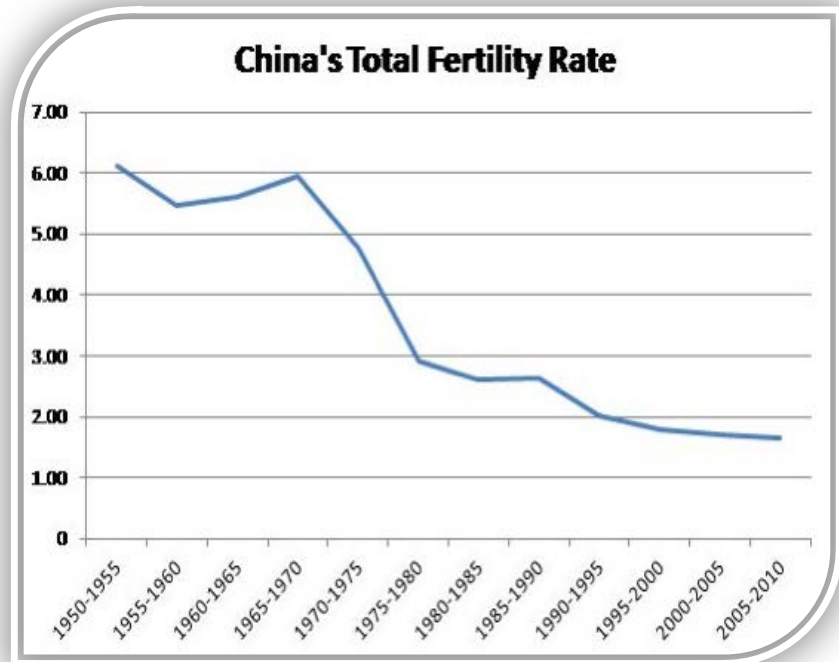
China's One-Child Policy

- Families were limited to one child per household
 - Violations resulted in fines and limited access to resources
- Policy ran primarily between 1978-2015
 - Applied to about 36% of the population
 - There were many exceptions including for rural and ethnic minorities
- Limited women's reproductive autonomy
 - Increased women's access to work
 - Increased financial security
 - Universal access to birth control



Impacts of One-Child Policy

- Fertility rate, the average number of births per woman, declined from 2.9 children in 1979 to less than 1.7 now
- Chinese standard of living has improved but remains uneven
- Food security has improved but is increasingly linked to global food security



Problems with One-Child Policy

- To reinforce patriarchal social norms, there was a preference for boys
 - Gender ratio in China is currently about 100 girls to 116 boys
 - Girl non-registration and abandonment
 - Lack of eligible brides
 - Socially disruptive behavior in men
 - Kidnapping and trafficking of women
- Aging Parents & The “Lonely Generation”
 - More older people and fewer young
 - Resulted in the 4:2:1 Phenomenon
 - Chinese couple is often responsible for 1 child and 4 parents



Let's Analyze

- How do policies like FMLA and One-Child reinforce patriarchy?
- In what ways are the two policies similar? How are they different?
- How are different family members impacted by these policies? Moms? Dads? Kids?
- What policies should be created by the U.S. to address working mothers?
- What policies should be created by China to address population growth?

