

EURAMERICA Vol. 41, No. 4 (December 2011), 917-947
© Institute of European and American Studies, Academia Sinica
<http://euramerica.org>

Cross-National Evidence on Trends in Support for Working Mothers*

Judith Treas

Department of Sociology, University of California, Irvine
3151 Social Science Plaza A, University of California, Irvine, CA 92697-5100, USA
E-mail: jktreas@uci.edu

Tsui-o Tai

Institute for Social Science Research, University of Queensland
Room 416, Level 4, GPN 3, Campbell Road, St. Lucia, QLD 4072, Australia
E-mail: t.tai@uq.edu.au

Abstract

The rise in married women's labor force participation and the liberalization of gender attitudes are two developments shaping families around the globe. In light of the primacy in childrearing which cultures assign to mothers, this paper focuses on changes over time in approval of paid work by mothers with very young children. Cross-national data from the 1988 and 2002 modules of the International Social Survey Program (ISSP) permit us to analyze the mechanisms accounting for changes in attitudes toward maternal employment in

Received October 18, 2010; accepted June 23, 2011; last revised August 15, 2011

Proofreaders: Chun-da Lee, Ya-Hsuan Tsai, Ying-bei Wang

* Paper presented at the IEAS Workshop on Family Change, October 11-12, 2010, at the Institute of European and American Studies, of Academia Sinica, Taipei. In conjunction with the European Science Foundation EUROCORES Programme HumVIB EQUALITY project, this work was supported by U.S. National Science Foundation grant # SES 0833010.

seven industrialized countries—Austria, Germany (West), Great Britain, Hungary, Ireland, the Netherlands, and the U.S. We address four questions: 1) Did approval of maternal employment show similar change in all seven countries? 2) What respondent characteristics were associated with support for working mothers? 3) Did the association for any of these characteristics change over time? 4) To what extent did the demographic changes in population composition (e.g., the growth in a highly educated population segment more favorable to maternal employment) account for changes in attitudes? The analysis confirms widespread increases in approval of maternal employment for both men and women. Most relationships between individual characteristics and attitudes remained unchanged over the course of the study. On the whole, compositional changes in the populations contributed modestly to the liberalization of attitudes.

Key Words: maternal employment, attitudes, cross-national research