

Who Pays for Raising the Next Generation of Americans --Women, Men, or the State?*

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Abstract

Children are the future of any nation, but it is expensive to raise and educate them. The costs include direct expenditures on health, housing, food, and education. They also include opportunity-costs -- the wages foregone by parents who care for children without pay, or workers who do so for low wages. In the United States, increasing single motherhood has led mothers to bear more of the direct costs than previously. Because women do most of the paid and unpaid work of rearing children, they bear most of the opportunity costs as well. Evidence of the relatively low wages of mothers and of the wage penalty for working in an occupation involving caring for or educating children is presented for the United States. When the state pays some costs of rearing children, this redistributes these costs more equally between men and women than when they are borne privately. The fact that benefits of well-reared children diffuse broadly throughout society is an argument for collectivizing more of

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these costs. However, the United States lags behind most industrial nations in state support of child care, health care, and family allowances.

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