

# Working Conditions and the Experience of Families Globally

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May 18, 2006



# Findings from:

## **Forgotten Families**

Ending the Growing Crisis Confronting Children and  
Working Parents in the Global Economy  
(Oxford University Press, 2006)

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# Demographic and Laborforce Transformations

- Transformation in both men's and women's labor over the short and long term
- Movement away from laboring where children can accompany, away from work where adults control hours to work where supervisors determine hours and families not present
- Movement of first men then women into industrial and post-industrial laborforces



## Transformation in women's paid labor

The percentage of the paid labor force that is made up of women increased between 1960 and 2000 from:

- 26 to 38% in the Caribbean
- 16 to 33% in Central America
- 17 to 25% in the Middle East
- 23 to 31% in North Africa
- 31 to 46% in North America
- 27 to 43% in Oceania
- 32 to 41% in Western Europe
- 21 to 35% in South America



# Global Magnitude of Working Families

- More than 930 million children under fifteen are being raised in households where all of the adults work.
- A conservative estimate is that 340 million of the world's children under six live in households in which all adults work for pay.



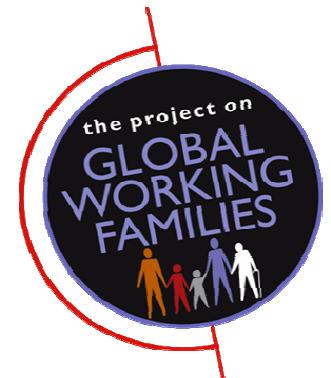
# **Demographic shifts far outpaced societal response with high toll on children and parents**

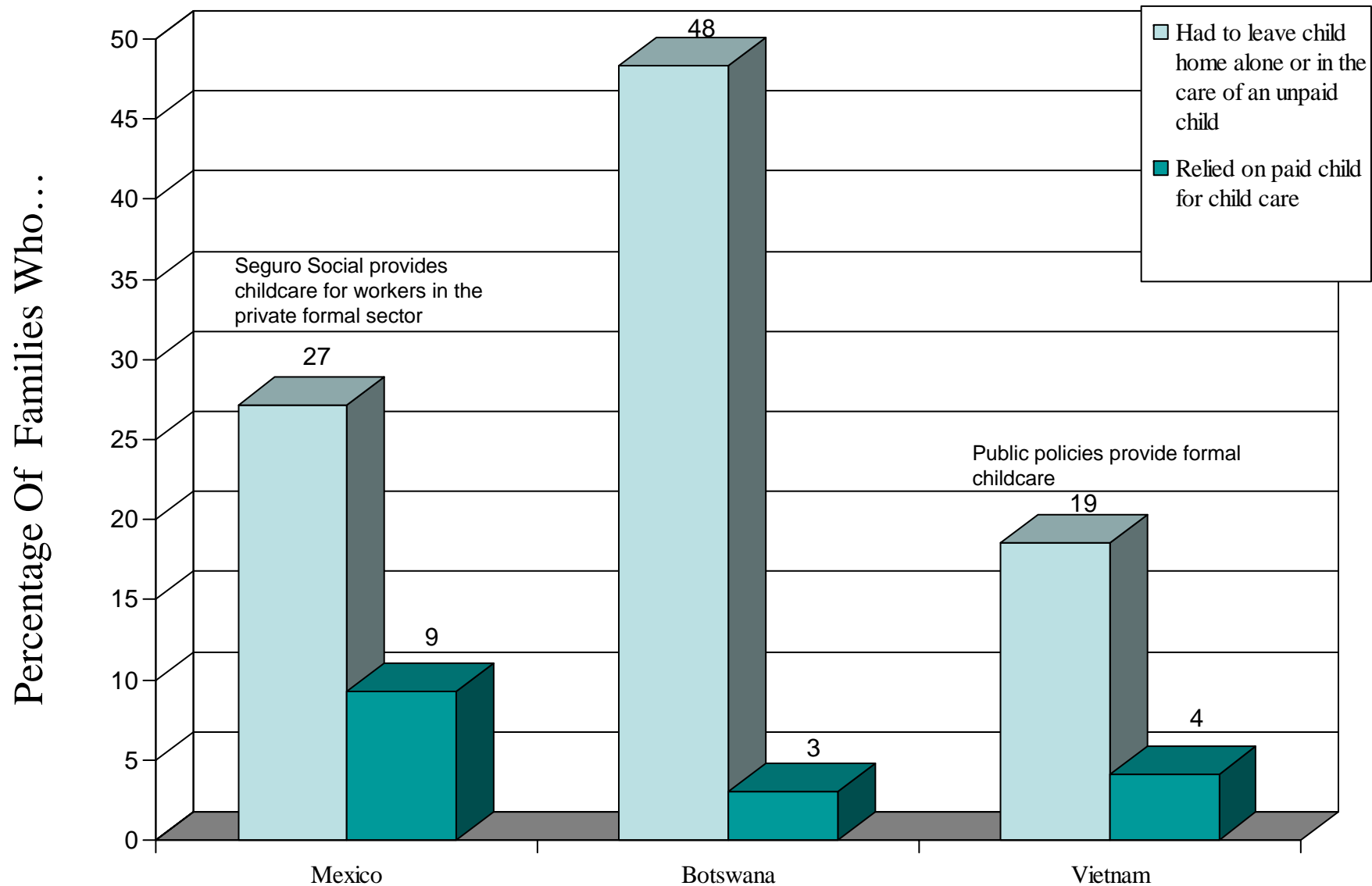
- children home alone
- children in care of other young children
- increased illness and injury rates
- educational disadvantages magnified
- lost wages
- lost chances of exiting poverty
- gender inequities magnified



# Children Home Alone

- In 66% of the families where parents had to leave children home alone or in the care of an unpaid child, the children suffered accidents or other emergencies while their parents were working.
- In 35% of the cases where children were left alone or in the care of an unpaid child, the children had suffered from developmental or behavioral problems.





## Frequency Children Are Left Alone or in the “Care” of Other Children

Source: Data from Project on Global Working Families in-depth interviews with working caregivers. Analysis is based on households with a 0-5 year old.

Vietnam had more families overall with access to formal childcare, and the differences across income groups were smallest due to the availability of public services. 57% of lower-income families in Ho Chi Minh were able to send a child to formal childcare, as were 62% of higher-income families.



## Parents caring for sick children

- 61% of working parents in Baltimore had left a sick child home alone or in someone else's care.
- In Botswana, 32% of working parents had either left a sick child home alone or sent a child to school or day care sick.
- In Mexico, 18% of working parents had either left a sick child home alone or had sent a child to school or day care sick.
- In Vietnam, 27% of working parents had either left a sick child home alone or had sent a child to school or day care sick.



# Policies in caring for sick children

Solutions can be found in countries with less economic resources:

- In Mexico paid sick leave benefits at 60% wage replacement rate of up to one year are guaranteed through a social security system, Seguro Social.
- 16% of working parents report having to leave a sick child home alone.
- In Vietnam federal law guarantees paid sick leave benefits at 75% wage replacement rate to workers for 30 days and for young children for 15 days (20 if under 3 years of age).
- In Ho Chi Minh City, 7% of working parents report having to leave a sick child home alone.
- In the United States there is no federal paid sick leave policy for workers or their children's health.
- In Baltimore, 58% of parents reported they could not stay home with a sick child.



## Situation around the world

- 49 nations from around the globe provide paid sick leave for care of children.
- Of the countries for which duration data were available, 46% mandate that employers guarantee one to ten days or more of paid leave.
- 54% guaranteed 11 days or more of paid leave.
- 3 countries mandate paid leave of 31 days or more.



Outside the United States paid sick leave is widely available and often available for a month or more:

- 153 nations from around the world provide sick leave for working adults
  - o 126 countries provide sickness benefits for at least one week
  - o 95 countries have paid sick leave for one month or more
  - o 76 countries provide paid sickness benefits for at least 26 weeks or until recovery
  - o The vast majority provide it with at least 50 % wage replacement rate



# Implications for US and the world

- There is now an unprecedented level of competition for jobs – and global movement of jobs. The greatest job loss from the United States to other countries began with the manufacturing sector. However, the job loss is now widespread in the United States and includes jobs in the service sector, as well as low-skilled entry-level and high-skilled professional jobs.
- Jobs are not only being lost now from Europe, the United States, Canada, and similar economies, jobs are also being lost from middle-income countries.
- Moreover, the movement of jobs has spurred a downward spiral in working conditions.



# Myths Feeding Inaction

- Myth 1: We Don't Know What Works

In fact, there is extensive evidence regarding what would make a difference in the health, development and education of children. Among the many policies and programs that we know would make a difference are paid parental leave, early childhood care and education, and paid leave for children's health needs.

- Myth 2: Improvements Can't Reach Workers in the Informal Sector

Workers in the informal sector can be insured and paid leave provided through cooperative arrangements. Moreover, many of the parents interviewed landed in the informal sector when they were unable to keep formal sector jobs while caring for their children.

- Myth 3: No Affordable Solution

Addressing the needs of working families globally will cost money, but it is affordable. Most of the programs and policies required have self-scaling costs, that is, their costs are lower in poor countries than in affluent countries.



- Myth 4: Bad Jobs Are Better than No Jobs, and Action Threatens Bad Jobs

Being better off – if that “better off” still means living in misery – is not an adequate reason to stop fighting for improved conditions. Furthermore, if we ignore bad jobs, the global economy will race to produce more.

- Myth 5: Parents Can Solve the Problems Alone

As the stories and statistics in *Forgotten Families* show, working parents around the world are forced to make untenable choices between earning a living and caring for their children.

- Myth 6: Individual Countries Have No Choice

In actuality, individual countries have passed into law protections vital to the welfare of working parents in every region around the world. In some areas, such as paid maternity leave, enormous progress has been made over the last century.

- Myth 7: There’s No Way to Move Forward Globally

Collective action holds many advantages in the context of a global economy. Collective action would allow countries to set a humane floor on working conditions and prevent nations from competing for capital, factories, and jobs by guaranteeing conditions that are unsustainable for those working, their children and families, and societies.

