



June 2002

An Offer you Can't Refuse: Workforce in International Perspective.
Ivar Lodemal and Heather Trickey (Eds.).

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw>



Part of the Social Work Commons

Recommended Citation

(2002) "*An Offer you Can't Refuse: Workforce in International Perspective.* Ivar Lodemal and Heather Trickey (Eds.).," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 29 : Iss. 2 , Article 20.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol29/iss2/20>

This Book Note is brought to you for free and open access by the Social Work at ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.



rise in dual earner families emphasizing racial group differences and gendered career patterns from a life course perspective. In a poignant qualitative analysis, Rubin reveals the challenges and rewards of raising children later in life, in conjunction with caring for aging parents and maintaining a career. Other chapters document the changing role of men in family household tasks. Section two of this book focuses on changes that have occurred in the world of work, including Gross's analysis of family and globalization. An analysis of small businesses and family-based policies is included as is Kropf's assessment of the rise in part-time and contingent labor.

The third section of this book follows the recent trend in family-work literature by examining decisions from the vantage point of dual earner couples, not simply individual female workers. Gerson and Jacobs (Chapter 10) provide compelling findings about the perceived costs of utilizing family friendly policies in the workplace. Other chapters in this section examine work-family experiences in a variety of employment settings. The final section of the book provides insight into children's experiences and understanding of their parent's work lives. Rarely has research into work and the family included the voices of children. This was one of the most engaging sections of the book.

The editors have compiled an outstanding array of renowned researchers, diverse theoretical perspectives and methodologies in this volume. A premise of this book is that paid work and family are dynamic and interrelated, and this book sheds light on the complexities of this relationship. Both students and experienced family researchers will find fresh and provocative ideas in this work. It will also provide an excellent basis for any course on family and work. A summary chapter would have been useful to point the reader toward the future issues in this area of research and policy. Nonetheless, this minor point does not detract from the book's substantial contribution.

Ivar Lodemal and Heather Trickey (Eds.), *An Offer you Can't Refuse: Workfare in International Perspective*. Bristol: Policy Press, 2001. \$ 32.50.

Although social welfare programs have historically been based on a conceptual approach which stressed the importance of altruism and social rights in meeting the needs of those experiencing

difficulties, many social policy scholars believe that this approach no longer provides an effective normative basis for legitimating social provision. Today, they argue, the notion of welfare has been replaced by notions of reciprocal obligation, responsibility and work. Some commentators even contend that the 'welfare state' has been replaced by a new social policy formation known as the 'workfare state'. They point out that welfare to work programs, which are at the core of the new workfare state, are not only to be found in the United States where they are prominent, but in other countries as well. Most European nations, including the most generous welfare states of Scandinavia, now promote programs of this kind.

Lodemal and Trickey have assembled an extremely useful collection of papers on the nature of workfare programs in Britain, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and the United States. The chapter on the United States by Michael Wiseman contains specific examples of how these programs have been implemented in New York, Wisconsin and California. These country case studies are augmented by three excellent chapters by the editors that provide a framework for the book and secondly summarize trends and draw conclusions. The collection provides important insights into the role of welfare to work programs in social policy today.

In their introductory and summary chapters, the editors show that the notion of workfare is a complex one and that its adoption around the world is not a simple matter in which, as was suggested earlier, the dominant welfare approach to social policy has been replaced by a workfare approach. They also suggest that the importance accorded to workfare in social policy circles is not, as many believe, an inevitable consequence of globalization, the demands of new technology, demographic change and other wider impersonal forces, but that ideology continues to play a vital role in shaping the way social policies are formulated and implemented.

The editors also point out that although widely used, the term 'workfare' fails to capture the complex ways in which social policies have engaged labor market issues in recent years. They show that the term 'workfare' has various meanings and that it has been used, on the one hand, to refer to any labor market

policy designed to promote employment and, on the other to very specific public works programs for those who receive social assistance. They show that the notion of workfare is not a recent innovation in social policy. While it is true that it now features more prominently in social policy welfare than before, the idea that it is a recent invention is not historically accurate. Putting the poor to work was a key element in the Poor Laws and welfare-to-work programs were prominent during the New Deal in the United States. In many European countries, employment and training have been integral to social policy for many decades.

Nevertheless, it is clear that welfare to work is now a obsession with policy makers in the industrial countries and that compulsion is being more widely used to promote work among welfare clients and the poor. This is particularly true in the United States where the 'work first model' has been adopted. The book suggests that this trend will continue and remain a dominant feature of social policy. In addition to summarizing general trends, the country case studies provide a wealth of information about the implementation of workfare. The book will be an essential resource for students and others in social policy. Despite its depressing prognostications about the centrality of workfare in social policy, the book suggests that employment programs need not be an instrument of coercion but can be effectively linked to wider social policy initiatives that are less concerned with promoting work than with promoting welfare for all.