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Vignette data in a comparative child maintenance study

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ABSTRACT

In this working paper, we describe the vignette data collection method as used in a research project “*Comparative study of child maintenance policies, family complexity and equalities*” funded by the Academy of Finland for the years 2016-21. Vignettes represented complex post-separation family scenarios and provided answers to the questions around how child maintenance policies are dealt with when financial responsibility is shared between separated parents. National informants were asked to explain how their country’s child maintenance policy worked and what its outcomes were likely to be, such as the amount of child maintenance owed in each scenario. We describe how the vignettes were constructed, how data was collected and particularly what the strengths and limitations of the method were. We address the central issues that researchers have to deal with when conducting cross-national comparative research using the vignette approach in the domain of child maintenance or any other public policy scheme.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Most Western countries have a variety of policies designed to secure incomes after parental separation, such as the child maintenance policy. Child maintenance is a financial contribution to be paid by a non-resident parent to a resident parent to support children financially post-separation (International Network of Child Support Scholars, 2019). In some countries, if parents are unable or unwilling to pay, the state may provide guaranteed maintenance (Corden, 1999; Skinner et al., 2007).

Child maintenance is, however, a complex policy field as it lies at the intersection of family law, social policy, and social work. It operates through different tiers of courts, agencies, and private spheres and is often regarded as a private transfer between two households (Skinner & Davidson, 2009). Therefore, many datasets may be unable to cover the full array of family ties and obligations (Dermott, 2016; Meyer & Carlson 2014; Stykes et al., 2013) and little is known about how child maintenance policy works in practice, what the levels of child maintenance payments are in complex families, as establishing such knowledge poses data-related and methodological challenges.

The vignette method has tried to solve some of the methodological problems in comparative child maintenance studies. Vignettes are short written stories and brief case scenarios that research participants are asked to deliver (Finch 1987; Hughes & Huby, 2002). Vignettes have been used to study the attitudes, perceptions, beliefs, and norms that surround child maintenance obligations (Coleman et al. 1999; Ellman et al. 2014; Ellman & Braver 2015; Ganong et al. 1995; Hans, 2009). They have also been used increasingly in cross-national research in the field of social services (e.g. Nygren et al. 2019; Soydan & Stål, 1994). Their specific use in studying welfare policies is less developed, and there are only a few prior comparative child maintenance research projects that have employed the vignette method (see Corden, 1999; Millar & Warman, 1996; Skinner et al. 2007; Skinner et. 2012).

This working paper aims to shed light on how vignette data was collected in the research project “Comparative study of child maintenance policies, family complexity and equalities”. The project was funded by the Academy of Finland for the years 2016-21. The project’s aim is to understand how child maintenance policies deal with the sharing of financial responsibility between separated parents in various countries. It focusses on how child maintenance obligations are apportioned when parents share care post-separation (i.e. when the child spends almost equal time living with both parents and both parents have a responsibility to physically care for the child) and when parents have new family commitments (i.e. when they re-partner or have ‘new’ children). Most of the prior research on child maintenance policy puts emphasis on simple, model families where, for example, a resident parent is assumed to have most care for the children. This assumption does not hold in contemporary society as families have become more complex and this change is presenting substantial operating challenges for child maintenance policies. Social policy often struggles to keep up with changing family patterns (Berger & Carlson, 2020; Meyer & Carlson, 2014). This project aims to study whether countries have effectively incorporated rules for these

complex family evolutions into their child maintenance policies and if so, how and what the outcomes have been. Vignettes then differ in important ways; for example, in comparative documentary analysis, new primary data is provided by informants and therefore is based on informants' assessments of their respective child maintenance policies.

Even though there have been a few previous comparative vignette data collections conducted on child maintenance policies a few decades ago, there is no methodological description of the data collection: how the vignettes were constructed, how data was collected and particularly what the strengths and limitations of the method were. In this paper, we address these questions. We address the central issues that researchers have to deal with when conducting cross-national comparative research using the vignette approach in the domain of child maintenance or any other public policy scheme.

2 A QUESTIONNAIRE AND COLLECTING THE VIGNETTE DATA

To answer the project's research questions we developed a questionnaire, comprising three parts. Part one included detailed questions on each country's child maintenance policy in order to understand the rationale of the outcomes. Two vignettes were then conducted: those included multiple variants and detailed questions on how child maintenance policy worked and what the outcomes were likely to be in each family scenario.

At the beginning of the questionnaire, we explained the focus and scope of the study followed by instructions for filling in the questionnaire with core terms explained. Part one aimed to gather a broad overview of the given country's current child maintenance policy. When we asked for current information, we referred to the context of October 2017. The first part of the questionnaire covered the objectives and key operational features of current child maintenance systems, child maintenance determination and enforcement. We also asked if there had been any changes since July 2006 when the previous data on child maintenance policies in some countries were collected (Skinner et al. 2007). We also asked national informants to provide a list of the sources they consulted when answering this questionnaire (e.g. a child maintenance calculator or another tool or link to the website).

Part two in the questionnaire dealt with child maintenance in shared care arrangements. The concept of shared care differs between countries (Hakovirta and Skinner, 2020; Smyth, 2017) and we needed to define it such that it is comparable across countries. We defined it as 'situations where children spend roughly equal time living with each parent'. We first asked questions designed to determine the nature of child maintenance in cases where there is a shared care arrangement and then presented a vignette on shared care and child maintenance obligations. Part three dealt with questions concerning how multiple family obligations and commitments to a new family may affect child maintenance obligations. Again, we first asked some general questions about how child maintenance is determined when divorced or separated parents have multiple family obligations and then went on to present a vignette with multiple variants.

Respondents were able to complete the questionnaire either online via Webropol or directly onto the file. All but one filled in the questionnaire to the file. We sent the questionnaire to national informants in October 2017, and it had to be completed by the end of the year. Most informants adhered to the deadline. After the research project has been completed, the data created will be permanently archived at the Finnish Social Science Data Archive <http://www.fsd.uta.fi/en/> for further research, teaching, and study purposes, including the names of each national informant.

2.1 Developing the vignette cases

For the study, we generated two vignettes that were short stories of fictitious families. The focus of the vignettes was to explore how different child maintenance systems worked with regard to shared care (i.e. when children spend roughly or exactly equal time living with each parent) and

family situations where separated or divorced parents re-partnered and/or a new child was born. The starting point for the vignette construction was that they ought to be authentic and simulate reality (Corden, 2001; Hughes & Hyby, 2002). This study used textual vignettes, which are short written stories of separated parents with some figurative material to illustrate family changes (see Figure 1). Various sources of information were used to construct and complete the vignettes; a combination of existing literature and previous research was used, and we consulted those with personal or professional experience in earlier comparative vignette studies. Vignettes were piloted by researchers from across the participating countries, which ensured that the scenario was recognizable to national informants in all countries while increasing coherency across countries but still allowing for variation (see also Nygren & Oltedal, 2015). In this study, we paid special attention to the experience drawn from the studies that employed the same methodological approach. The authors organized the data collection as a part of a larger comparative research project on child maintenance policies.

Vignettes had to contain sufficient context for national informants to have an understanding of the situation being studied and to calculate the resultant child maintenance obligation. Both vignettes described the personal and financial circumstances of the parents, their housing costs, and the child's contact information to enable the calculation of child maintenance. We asked the national informants to introduce the quantitative information they had used in their calculations. They provided the typical amounts for median monthly male and female full-time earnings. When parents were unemployed, their income was calculated on the basis of the out-of-work social benefits available for a person in this position. We asked for rent and housing costs, even when they did not affect the use of standard guidelines. They used situations and amounts that were typical in their country and explained the basis for these decisions.

The vignettes were piloted to assess the extent to which they were representative, situations were relevant and as realistic as possible, and terms and concepts were coherent and understandable. This strengthened the internal validity of vignettes (Hughes & Huby, 2004).

2.1.1 Shared care vignette

In the first vignette, we were interested in knowing whether shared care arrangements, where children spend roughly an equal amount of time with each parent post separation, were taken into account in child maintenance policies and, if so, in what ways this happened and how did it vary across countries.

Before the vignette story, we asked detailed questions concerning child maintenance and shared care. We then presented a vignette story and asked national informants to answer the questions and calculate child maintenance obligations in different family scenarios.

We first provided a basic situation (Base Case A) which included information for national informants to describe how their policy worked and all necessary information to be able to calculate the child maintenance obligation incurred. The vignette story was as follows:

Mary and Paul are getting a divorce after ten years of marriage. They have two children: Emily, aged seven, and Sophia, aged ten. Both children attend a local school and there are no school fees. After the divorce, Mary and the children will continue to live in the rented apartment that Mary and Paul shared during marriage so that the children can stay in their home. Paul will rent a new apartment in the same suburb nearby. The number of bedrooms, rent and other housing costs of both apartments are averages that are typical in your 'country'. Paul is employed and earns median monthly male full-time earnings for your country. Mary is also working, earning median monthly female full-time earnings for your country. Mary and Paul have agreed that they will have 'joint legal custody' of the children, sharing the major decisions affecting the children. In terms of living arrangements, Emily and Sophia will have two overnight stays from Friday afternoon until Sunday afternoon at their father's home every other weekend.

After the vignette, we presented questions concerning the process and the options for making decisions about child maintenance in this type of case: that is, the options for formalizing arrangements concerning child maintenance. We also asked informants to explain the likely procedures for reaching a decision and the consequences if child maintenance was not paid.

In the second step, we asked the informants to calculate the outcome in terms of whether there would be a formal child maintenance arrangement, and if so, what the monthly amount was that would be awarded in these circumstances. The amounts were provided in each country's own currency.

In the next scenario of the same vignette, the situation was otherwise exactly the same as in base case 'A', but Mary and Paul had a shared care arrangement in which the children spent exactly an equal amount of time with both parents. Every other week was spent with Mary and every other week with Paul. This equal care scenario represented an ideal of equality with a presumption of 50:50 care-time and one that is perfectly and consistently exercised by parents. We then asked the informants to explain how the outcomes would differ now that the parents shared care compared to the base case.

For the shared care scenario, we had three variants, as we wanted to understand how the outcomes in terms of child maintenance awards would change if the parents have a shared care arrangement and their incomes vary. This was seen as a vital question, as Meyer et al. (2017) have documented that shared care arrangements have increased in all sociodemographic groups. It was important to understand how child maintenance policies treat families with different incomes.

We altered the circumstances in order to explore the child maintenance outcomes resulting from the following income changes:

- a) The children lived exactly equal time with both parents, but the mother was unemployed, and the vignette story was as follows:

The situation is otherwise exactly the same as in the previous scenario, but Mary is unemployed. She depends on the out-of-work social benefits available for a person in her position. Paul earns the median monthly amount for a male working full-time. Mary and Paul have a shared care arrangement in which the children live exactly an equal amount of time with both parents.

- b) The children live exactly equal time with both parents, but the father was unemployed, and the vignette story was as follows:

The situation is otherwise exactly the same as in XX, but Paul is unemployed. He depends on the out-of-work social benefits available for a person in his position. Mary earns the median monthly amount for a female working full-time. Mary and Paul have a shared care arrangement whereby the children live exactly an equal amount of time with both parents.

- c) The children live exactly an equal amount of time with both parents, but both parents were unemployed, and the vignette story was as follows:

The situation is otherwise exactly the same as in 2.3, but both Mary and Paul are unemployed and depend on the out-of-work social benefits available for persons in their position. Mary and Paul have a shared care arrangement whereby the children live exactly an equal amount of time with both parents.

Again, after each variant, we then asked national informants to calculate the amount of child maintenance the parent was required to pay, if any, in selected family scenarios, according to their country's policy and legal guidelines, and to explain why these changes in child maintenance obligations might occur.

2.1.2 Vignette on new family commitments

Empirical evidence shows that the kind of familial complexity that occurs when parents have new partners and children with these new partners is quite common (Lappegård & Thomson, 2018; Thomson et al. 2014). Therefore, we wanted to understand how child maintenance systems work in relation to commitments to new families when parents re-partner and have children with their new partners. Despite its increasing commonality, relatively little is known about the child maintenance obligations in situations of familial complexity in various countries. In complex families, determining the amount of child maintenance becomes more challenging than in a simple case involving a father, a mother, and their mutual children, as several factors must be taken into account and each of them may result in very different approaches to complex family ties.

To illustrate complex family ties, we first provided a figure (Figure 1) along with the written vignette to help national informants better understand the family transitions we were interested in. The figurative material had been employed as an elicitation tool in earlier vignette studies too (Huges & Huby, 2002).

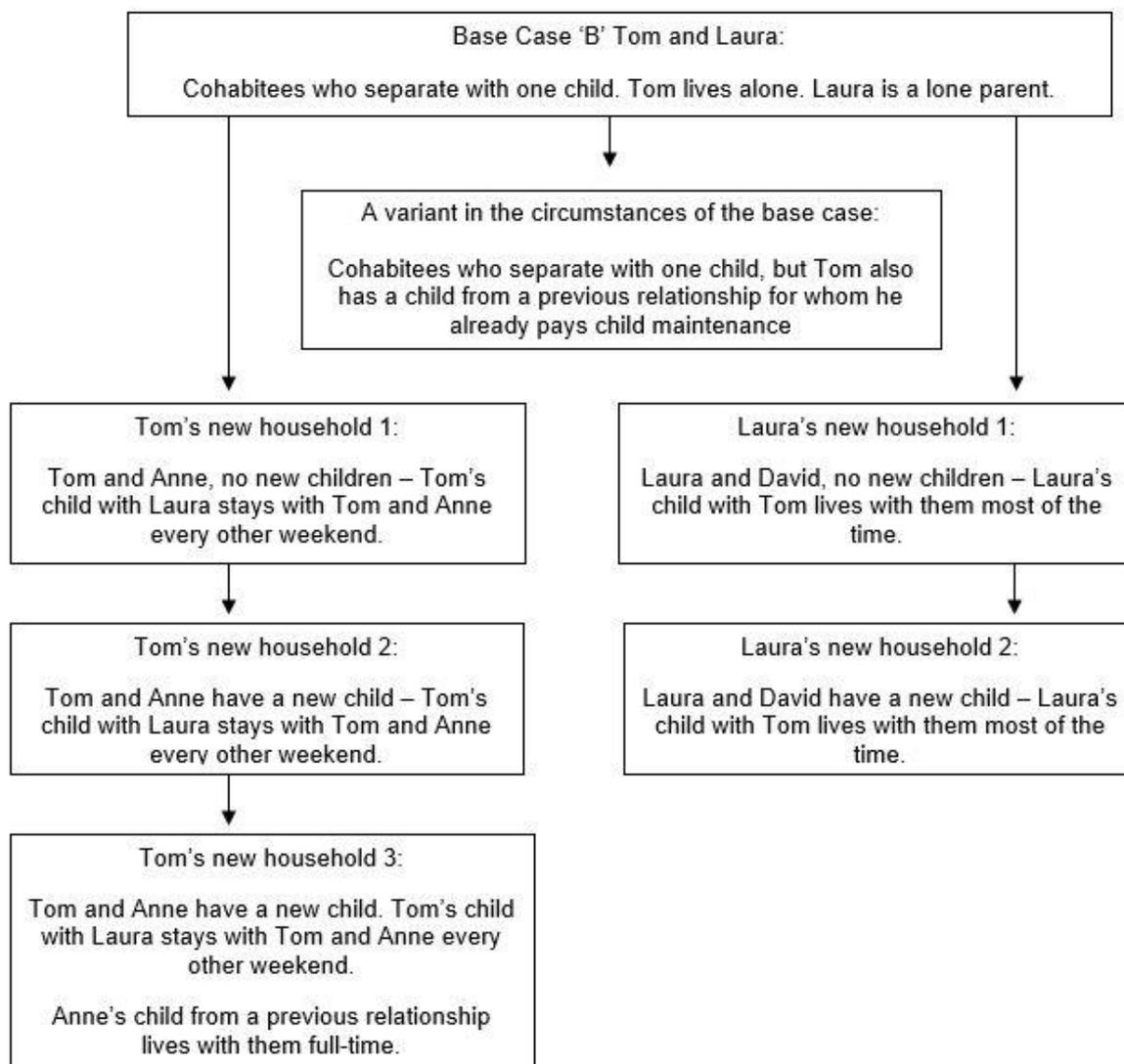


Figure 1. Different family transitions in vignettes

These family transition figures allowed us to study how child maintenance obligations may change when parents' family situations change: when parents have new partners and children with these new partners and how stepparents' responsibilities were taken into account. Do countries adjust their child maintenance obligations when a non-resident father has a child with a new partner? Do countries prescribe changes in non-resident fathers' child support obligations when a mother has a new child with a new partner? If so, what are the justifications for the changes and how much do the obligations change?

The vignette story was (Base Case) as follows:

Tom and Laura are unmarried parents in their early 30s. They have been living together in a rented apartment as partners for three years, but now they have decided to separate. They have one child, Emma, aged three. Tom has established legal paternity of Emma. Due to the separation, Laura has rented a new apartment for her and Emma to live in. The apartment is in the same suburb

where they have been living for the past three years. Tom has also rented a new apartment nearby. Tom and Laura will have shared legal custody of Emma, so they will make major decisions about her care jointly. In terms of living arrangements, Emma will spend the majority of the time with Laura, and Tom will take care of Emma every other weekend for two overnight stays from Friday afternoon until Sunday afternoon. While Emma stays with Tom, he has full financial responsibility for her. Tom and Laura are both in full-time employment. Tom's income corresponds to the median monthly amount earned by males working full-time and Laura's income corresponds to the median monthly amount earned by females working full-time. Emma is attending day care. Tom and Laura want to make a formal arrangement regarding child maintenance payments.

We altered the circumstances in order to explore the child maintenance outcomes that would result from the following hypothetical family transitions:

- a) Tom has a new partner living with him:

Tom tells Laura that he has a new partner (Anne) with whom he lives. Tom's new partner earns the median monthly amount for a female working full-time. Laura feels the maintenance obligation needs to be adjusted because she thinks that Tom is financially better off due to the new partner who shares the housing costs with Tom.

- b) Tom has a new child with his new partner:

Tom tells Laura (his ex-partner) that he has a new partner, Anne, with whom he lives, and they have a new child together aged two. His new partner Anne is returning to work after parental leave. Her income corresponds to the median monthly earnings of a female working full-time. However, due to the new child and the childcare costs of the new child, Tom thinks his household expenses have gone up considerably, which is straining his finances. Tom would like the formal child maintenance award adjusted to take into account his financial obligations to his new family.

- c) Tom has a new child and a stepchild with his new partner:

Tom has a new partner, Anne, with whom he lives, and they have a new child together aged two. The child is in daycare. Tom's new partner Anne has a seven-year-old child from a prior relationship. The child lives with Tom and Anne full time and Tom is the child's stepparent. Anne is employed and earns the median monthly amount for a female working full-time. Tom would like the formal child maintenance award adjusted to take into account his new family responsibilities. He has a new partner, a new child and a stepchild living with him.

d) Laura has a new partner:

Laura has a new partner, David, with whom she lives. David is employed and his income is comparable to Tom's income. Tom would like the formal child maintenance award adjusted to take into account the income of Laura's new partner David (who is now Emma's stepfather).

e) Laura has a new child with her new partner:

Laura and her new partner David have a child aged two. Laura and David are both working full time. Laura receives the median monthly income for women and David the median monthly income for men. The new child is in day care. As a result of the new child, Laura's household living expenses have gone up and she feels that Tom should pay more child maintenance. Laura would like the maintenance obligation to be re-evaluated.

After each family transition, we asked national informants to discuss the options and procedures for adjusting the previous child maintenance arrangements and to explain the likely outcome whether the maintenance obligation would change and if so, the monthly amount that would be expected in these new circumstances and to explain the basis for the new amount.

2.2 National informants and country selection

In conducting comparative research across multiple countries, there ought to be a rationale for the selection process of those countries. Country selection for cross-cultural analysis should be justified as it may have an impact on the research process (Hantrais, 2009, 2013). The countries chosen for the study relayed here were Australia, Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Spain (Catalonia), Sweden, The United Kingdom (UK) and The United States of America (Wisconsin State). Some countries had sub-national differences in their child maintenance policy. We asked national informants to pick one state/region/province and use it consistently throughout the questionnaire.

This choice was based on some theoretical and practical considerations. We sought to include a variety of family policy models (Korpi, 2000; Thevenon, 2011) and child maintenance regimes (Skinner & Davidson, 2009). We wanted to include countries that had recently undergone major changes in their child maintenance policy to better understand how policies have attempted to recognize family complexity and what the reasons and outcomes were for the new reforms. We also wanted to include countries with guaranteed maintenance schemes to understand how they have responded to family change and how they interact with private child maintenance schemes. The pragmatic reasons for the choice of countries were the availability and suitability of the national informants. Many of them were from existing networks. We also wanted to update and extend the earlier comparative study of 14 countries by Skinner et al. (2007) and include some new countries. The number and mix of the countries both stand to affect the depth of the analysis. The broader the country coverage, the greater the likelihood that generalizations can be drawn from the research findings (see Hantrais, 2013).

We recruited national informants through personal contacts in the research community. Many of the national informants we recruited were academics who had prior experience either as an informant or in collecting or analysing vignette data in previous child maintenance studies (see appendix 1). As each informant was an expert in the field of enquiry in their own country, it eased the task of data collection and validation and thereby helped to provide a deeper interpretation of the policy framework and the operational rules and processes surrounding child maintenance.

Respondents were personally invited to participate in a data collection. Only two rejected the invitation, and in these cases they suggested an alternative contact in their country. In most countries, there was only one informant, but in the case of Denmark and France, two people completed the questionnaire together.

A challenge encountered when using the vignette technique is that the time respondents require to respond to the vignette questionnaire varies (Soydan, 1996). In order to guide national informants about the amount of detail required in answer to the questions and how to approach the vignettes, a fully filled in questionnaire from Finland was sent as an example. We suggested that it might take one to two days to complete the whole questionnaire. The national informants were paid for their efforts after completing the questionnaire in time.

3 LIMITATIONS AND ADVANTAGES OF THE VIGNETTE METHOD

Because of the multipurpose nature of the vignettes in research, this methodology has considerable advantages as well as unique challenges and disadvantages. Drawing on the experience of comparative vignette data collection, we will next discuss the strengths and limitations of the method used in this research project.

3.1 Limitations

The non-equivalence of key terms or concepts represented a major challenge for cross-national comparative research. Many concepts do not travel well across national, social, or cultural boundaries (see Corden, 2001; Hantrais 2013, 2017). Particularly, in the field of public policies, the vocabulary for different benefits varies considerably from one national context to another (Hantrais, 2007, 117-119). Achieving a meaningful comparison between the countries involved a search for correspondence in terms and concepts in each country.

As the definition and concept of shared care vary across countries (e.g. Smyth, 2017) it was hard to conceptualize it in a generalizable way. The concept of shared care has been reported as one of those concepts that may refer to different things across different cultures (Smyth, 2017). First, multiple terms are used for this phenomenon. Shared residence is used in Norway (Haugen, 2010), alternating residence in Sweden (Singer, 2008), and shared care in the UK and Australia (Haux et.al. 2017; Smyth, 2017). In the US, shared care is described as joint physical custody and shared physical placement (Meyer et al. 2017). Second, defining the concept of shared care is broad, and the term can be used to cover a range of care-time allocation arrangements from 25% to 54% spent with each parent (see Fehlberg et al. 2011; Smyth, 2017). This means that cross-national comparisons and research translations present formidable challenges (Smyth, 2017).

For the purposes of standardisation, we used term shared care. We defined it as referring to scenarios in which a child spends equal time living with both parents and both parents have the responsibility to physically care for the child. We tried to ensure that questions had equivalent meaning among all respondents.

Language is the most significant problem, particularly in qualitative comparative research (see Hantrais, 2013, 2017; Mangan, 2013). In this study, the working language was English, and it created challenges for some national informants, which resulted in differences in the quality of the answers and data obtained across countries. Units of expression are not necessarily the same across languages, and comparisons of family allowances and child benefits have been problematic (Hantrais, 2004, 122–127). In this case, researchers have to be aware that obtaining conceptual equivalence will be more difficult in situations in which they rely on respondents' familiarity with a lingua franca to interpret and respond to research questions (see e.g. Corden, 2001).

There are limits to the number of hypothetical families, income levels, parental employment permutations and contact arrangements that can be covered. This means that the comparisons have to be illustrative rather than representative. Throughout the literature, critics of vignette research have raised concerns about the artificiality and validity of vignettes (Hughes & Huby, 2002; Wilks, 2004). That is, textual descriptions and hypothetical cases might not be sufficiently representative of real-world phenomena, and this raises concerns about the validity of research findings and the conclusions made based on them. The method gives a picture of a situation that could exist given the existing formal rules and laws. It does not represent how these rules and laws operate in practice and, although it can, it does not often attempt to take into account the non-payment. The data on amounts, therefore, does not suggest one parent always pays that amount, but it highlights how policy works in these particular family situation models and there is value in taking account of what the state seeks to do — it represents the intention of child maintenance policy (see Bradshaw, 2009).

Another problem is the treatment of incomes and housing costs. Housing costs vary by tenure, age, size, and location of the dwelling, and, in the case of some countries, by the length of occupancy. In the case of owner occupiers, they also vary by the age of the mortgage and the interest rate. We used a method whereby we asked national informants to specify a “typical” housing cost for their country, and this meant that it was variable, comparing like with like. However, this is a problem without an adequate solution (see Bradshaw, 2009). There is no denying, nonetheless, that the problem is a serious one, given that housing benefits are such an important part of child maintenance calculations in many countries. The estimates of earnings can also be problematic. We relied on national informants’ information on male and female median earnings for full-time work and on welfare benefits and asked them to provide the amounts that they used in their calculations.

3.2 Advantages

The advantage of this approach is that it suggests a set of common assumptions about family types and income levels and thereby contributes to a comparison of like with like. It helps to establish the reasons for similarities and differences between systems that require the examination of historical and cultural contexts (Corden, 2001). Moreover, it allows for a detailed study of how child maintenance policies operate so that outcomes can be linked with a real understanding of how they are achieved.

Vignettes have proven to be an inexpensive research method and can be conducted more quickly than large comparative surveys and interviews (Hughes & Huby, 2002). Furthermore, when vignettes are used to answer quantitatively focused research questions, they can quickly generate considerable amounts of data for a large participant group.

Vignettes represent real-life situations in meaningful social circumstances, and the national informants were then able to offer their observations and interpretations from within their own policy contexts, but for standardised family types. There was room for participants in each country to provide the details that related to the different policies, laws and institutional practices that were influential to their child maintenance policies. Furthermore, the vignettes allowed them to interpret the case according to their own setting. This ensures that as far as possible like is compared with

like and standardized comparison across countries is reliable, as the stimuli are held constant for national informants across the countries investigated.

4 SUMMARY

In this paper, we have described the vignette data collection method as used in a comparative child maintenance research project. Vignettes represented complex post-separation family scenarios and provided answers to the questions around how child maintenance policies are dealt with when financial responsibility is shared between separated parents. National informants were asked to explain how their country's child maintenance policy worked and what its outcomes were likely to be, such as the amount of child maintenance owed in each scenario.

In planning and collecting the data, we have understood the advantages and disadvantages of this method but have also found that the vignette technique is an adequate instrument for data collection for the purposes of comparing child maintenance policies across countries. The vignette method is needed if we are to be up to date with the constant changes in child maintenance policies and if we seek to explore their consequences and learn from other countries' experiences.

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Appendix 1. List of national informants

Australia

Professor Kay Cook, ARC Future Fellow and Associate Professor, Swinburne University, Department of Social Sciences

Belgium

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Denmark

Dr. Karen Margrethe Dahl, Senior Research Analyst, The Danish Centre for Social Science Research

Dr. Miriam Wüst, Senior Research Analyst, The Danish Centre for Social Research

Estonia

Dr. Mare Ainsaar, Head of Social Policy, University of Tartu, Institute of Social Studies

France

Dr. Isabella Sayn, Director of Research at the CNRS, Centre Max Weber

Dr. Antoine Math, Researcher, IRES, Institut de Recherchers Economiques et Sociales

Finland

Dr. Mia Hakovirta, Academy Research Fellow, University of Turku, Department of Social Research

Germany

Dr. Lisa Yashodhara Haller, Researcher at University of Hildesheim, Institut für Sozial- und Organisationspädagogik

Iceland

Professor, Gudny Björk Eydal, Professor of Social Work, University of Iceland, Faculty of Social Work

New Zealand

Dr. Michael Fletcher, Researcher, Auckland University of Technology

Norway

Dr. Anne Skevik Groedem, Senior Researcher, Research Director, Institute for Social Research

Poland

Ms. Agata Chelstowska, University of Warsaw, Institute of Applied Social Sciences

Spain

Professor Lluís Flaquer, Emeritus Professor of Sociology, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Department of Sociology

Sweden

Professor Johanna Schiratzki, Professor of Welfare Law, Ersta Sköndal Bräcke University College.

UK

Professor Christine Skinner, Professor of Social Work, University of York, Department of Social Policy and Social Work

USA

Professor Dan Meyer, Professor of Social Work, University of Wisconsin-Madison, School for Social

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The Inequalities, Interventions, and New Welfare State (INVEST) aims at increasing wellbeing of Finnish society during childhood, youth and early adulthood and preventing psychosocial risks compromising such development through innovative interventions. Based on cutting-edge research on the conditions and mechanisms involved at different periods of development, INVEST will evaluate and develop various universal and targeted interventions to improve the efficiency of the current welfare state institutions at critical points of the early life course. INVEST aims at providing a new model for the welfare states that is more equal, better targeted to problem groups, more anticipatory as well as economically and socially sustainable. INVEST is a Flagship project of the Academy of Finland.