

Reconciling work and family: Issues and policies in Thailand

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Objectives of the Study

- Examine major trends in the work - family balance in Thailand
- Highlight key work - family policies and practices
- Based on secondary data and interviews with key informants (Aug-Oct 2005)

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Key Problems

- Changes in the labour market have changed the working and family lives of women and men:



1. Casualization of jobs
2. More strain on poor households, women and grandparents
3. Little state/non-state support for family care, especially child & elderly care

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1. Labour market changes: Longer working hours

% of workers working longer than 48 hours per week:

Women		Men	
2001	2003	2001	2003
29%	30%	36%	38%

In 2003, in establishments with 200 workers or more:

- daily paid workers worked 52.0 hours per week
- piece rate workers worked 52.3 hours per week

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1. Labour Market changes: Low wages

- 27% of all workers and 52% of workers in small establishments of 1-4 persons paid under the minimum wage (Table 1.6)
- Stagnant growth in minimum wages (Chart 1.10)
- Wide wage disparities:
 - Monthly paid workers: Bt 10,000 per month
 - Daily/piece rate workers: Bt 4,000 per month
- Gender wage disparity diminished during economic crisis but increased during economic recovery (Section 1.3.3)

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2. Strains on families in poverty: Income disparities

- Incidence of poverty increased up to 2000 and is on the decrease overall, BUT:
- Household debt is on the increase, especially the % in consumption debts among the poor (Chart 1.11)
- Income disparities in Thailand are increasing again since 2002

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2. Strains on family in poverty: FHHs

- Female-headed households (FHHs) increased:
 - From 15% in 1990 to 26% in 2000
- Average monthly income of FHHs is lower than male-headed households (Table 2.2)
- FHHs: more dependent on stagnating wage income (Table 3.2)

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2. Strains on family in poverty: Women: Family care & paid work

- Household maintenance and management:
 - Married women: 2.9 hours per day
 - Married men: 1.4 hours per day
- Care for children, the sick, elderly & disabled:
 - Married women: 2.7 hours per day
 - Married men: 1.5 hours per day

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2. Strains on family in poverty: Childcare by grandparents

- Care work responsibility goes to mothers first, and then to grandparents:
 - Example: 65% of children of mothers in prisons are taken care of by grandparents, only 6% stayed with fathers
- Irregular remittances so many grandparents have to earn a living for their 'skip generation household'
- Difficulty in establishing parent-child bonds due to distance

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3. State support for family care

- Maternity leave
- Child/childbirth/education allowance
- Little family support benefits
- Low recognition:
 - work-family conflict is a problem
 - family support will improve productivity.

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3. State support for family care: Childcare centers

- Not adequate in terms of quantity and quality.
- Hardly any nurseries accept infants of young age
- Hardly any nurseries operate 24 hours to accommodate needs of workers in night shifts.
- Little incentive given to enterprises and communities to establish day-care centres.

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3. State support for family care: Future needs for family care

- Pressure on women to do paid work and unpaid family care: Is it now more difficult to have children?
 - Total Fertility Rate
 - 2.6 per woman in 1987
 - 1.8 by year 2010 (below replacement rate)
- How about elderly care?
 - 9.9% over 60 years old in year 2000
 - 31.5% over 60 in year 2050

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Main findings

- Work-Family balance is a problem in Thailand for many low-income families.
- The main problem is that it is not perceived as such. So individual workers – often but not only women – struggle in silence to find individual solutions rather than opening up a debate in families and society on solving it

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Conclusions - 1

- Long working hours at low wages
- Childcare is not available, not of adequate quality and is not affordable
- Bulk of family responsibilities for women
- Childcare by grandparents: too heavy burden for them and sacrifice of bonding time between parents & children

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Conclusions - 2

- Expectation for ‘strong families’ with little support from state, trade unions, communities, and employers

As a result:

- Burden on women or grandparents
- Fathers do not/can not support
- Difficult for women/men/society

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Recommendations - 1

- State needs to show recognition and commitment:
 - Ratify the Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention 1982 (no.156) and Maternity Protection Convention 2000 (no.183).
- Improve child-care services
 - Quality
 - Access (workplace/ community)
- Provide child allowances independent of employment.

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Recommendations - 2

- Reduce working hours, increase leave entitlements, and provide living wage
- Public awareness on work-family conflict
 - data/statistics
- Sharing of household work between women and men

Responsibility lies on government, employers, trade unions, communities, working mothers and fathers

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