

THE STUDY OF MOTHERNOMICS, ITS SOCIAL BENEFITS AND ORGANIZATIONAL IMPACT

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Abstract

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The economics of motherhood presents a dual role in society, serving as both an asset and a liability (Harkness, 2018; Miller, 2018). This qualitative study explores mothernomics and its implications in Thailand and benchmarks Thailand relative to five other countries (Sweden, Japan, Australia, Singapore, and Vietnam), examining early childhood care and parental leave through documentary and content analysis. Notably, Sweden's extensive partner leave, Japan and Australia's combined before and after birth leave, and Singapore's balanced approach contrast with Thailand's limited support. Adaptable and comprehensive policies are underscored, catering to evolving family dynamics, enhancing parental well-being, and contributing to an inclusive societal framework. This study emphasizes the multi-dimensional nature of mothernomics, advocating for holistic strategies that address the economic, social, and cultural dimensions of Thai motherhood. This approach is pivotal for harnessing motherhood's role in driving societal progress, enabling gender equality, valuing caregiving, and robustly supporting working mothers. Policymakers should consider workplace challenges and societal roles to ensure meaningful maternal participation, advancing overall societal well-being in Thailand.

Keywords: Early Childhood Care, Parental Leave, Motherhood, Mothernomics, Childcare Enrollment, Maternity Benefit, Maternity Leave, Female Workforce, Gender Equality

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1. INTRODUCTION

Motherhood plays a critical role in the family structure (Levin & Currie, 2010). Female workforce

participation in Thailand has been an important contributing factor to the growth of the Thai economy. Aside from professional roles, women are also taking roles of being wives and mothers.

Juggling between responsibilities at work and home in household chores and childrearing, Thai women are expected to perform these unspoken responsibilities as the cultural norm. Contrary to the democratic system that allows women to increasingly join the workforce as the demand for the workforce continues to grow, gender inequality still persists in various forms, particularly in an income gap (Chandowwit, 2018). Thai people marry at a lower rate. This could be due to current economic and social conditions, as well as social and cultural changes, which have contributed to an increase in the value of being single and later married due to concerns about the higher cost of living. As a result, it is possible that many people will decide to stay single. Another significant issue is concern about child support costs, which are rising in line with inflation and changing values in society as a result of increased competition. The tuition rate for each school can be quite high at times (Kaewbuadee & Kraiwanit, 2022).

In addition to lower earning income for the same job, Thai women are expected to carry more burdens on household roles and childrearing responsibilities. The responsibility of being a mother requires a great deal of effort as all mothers value the importance of childhood development. As a result, many mothers choose to leave the workforce to bond with their children. While bonding with a child is a rewarding moment of life, the opportunity in the workforce for that mother is sacrificed. There is no win-win solution between being a mother caring for a child and being able to succeed in the labor workforce. Childcare costs that are affordable for some but unaffordable for many mothers cause a financial burden to raise a child with a good quality of life. With both financial obstacles from an income gap and a financial burden on childcare, single parenting becomes even more difficult. Thai women are not only expected to care for their children but also for their elderly family members and relatives (Chandowwit, 2018). Women, then, are trapped in the prevailing norms that expect them to be responsible for the lives of young and elderly ones in their families in addition to the countless responsibilities from work and home.

Economists examine ways to explain motherhood in economic terms and conclude that female labor is often considered unproductive labor due to responsibilities outside of work that female workers must be responsible for including taking care of family members, child-rearing, and housekeeping. Therefore, female workers cannot progress into high labor productivity to earn a higher income because of the responsibilities they carry (Combet & Oesch, 2019; Jones, 2019).

According to Thaiprasert (2023), early childhood development should be taken seriously as crime and social problems are the consequences of mothers being unable to bond and care for their children. For young children to develop healthily, support to allow mothers to work at their full capacity will assist families in overcoming middle-income traps and reducing labor shortage. As a result, Thai culture can slowly fade away from patriarchy and gender inequality which also increases human dignity for women. If young children can stay with their mothers, the skipped-generation family structure can also be lessened. The prominent family

structure in which grandparents are raising their grandchildren without mothers' presence should not be taken lightly as children do not have the chance to bond with their mothers. Thailand is facing a dilemma in childhood care that a gap of up to 2 years and 9 months most Thai children are left without formal care. This facilitates informal childcare to accommodate mothers who have to return to the workforce by leaving their children with elderly relatives or informal childcare facilities. Consequently, mothers who cannot afford informal childcare expenses or cannot rely on their relatives for childcare may need to leave the workforce to care for their children with almost no income. Comprehending the current situation of the Thai motherhood struggle, the study of other countries' management of the maternity and childcare benefits allows the researchers to benchmark, compare, and recommend the directions that Thailand can adapt and make changes to the current social benefits offered to mothers. The study intends to illustrate that with appropriate management of early childhood care and maternity benefits, the outcome of motheromics and the Thai economy can progress into an increasing number of female workforce participation and gender equality.

Further analysis is performed to compare female workforce participation of the female population ages 15 years old to 64 years old among 6 countries: Sweden, Japan, Australia, Singapore, Vietnam and Thailand. The data retrieved from the International Labour Organization (ILO, n.d.) showed that Thailand is the only country with a declining number of female workforce participation while the other 5 countries are growing in female workforce. A decline in the female workforce in Thailand from 68.27% in 2014 to 66.81% in 2019 depicted that female laborers are facing early childhood dilemmas that affect their ability to continue in the workforce and are unable to return to work after childbirth. A decline in the female workforce leads to a study of early childhood development that is affecting female labor. The benefits of maternity leave, childcare subsidy, and childcare admission are interrelated and intertwined with female workers' participation in the labor market.

Given its significance, it is critical to study motheromics and its social benefits in Thailand. The qualitative method is used to conduct a comparative study on early childhood care and parental leave in 6 countries: Sweden, Japan, Australia, Singapore, Vietnam, and Thailand. This research highlights the complex interaction of policies, societal conventions, and cultural settings in influencing the position of motherhood in a dynamic societal environment. The results underscore that a successful motheromics framework transcends purely economic factors; it encompasses social, cultural, and gender-related facets, demanding a comprehensive approach for significant influence.

The remainder of the paper is divided as follows. After the introduction, Section 2 provides the theoretical context for the study. Section 3 presents the research methodology. Section 4 describes the study's results and Section 5 discusses them. The final Section 6 concludes the paper and offers the recommendations.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

“Motheronomics” is a term that refers to the economic and social considerations associated with motherhood and policies aimed at supporting mothers in the workforce. It involves analyzing the impact of maternity leave, childcare support, and gender equality measures on a country’s economy and society. The concept recognizes that the decisions and circumstances surrounding motherhood have far-reaching effects on labor markets, consumer behavior, and overall economic stability (Gangl & Ziefle, 2009; Kent, 2022).

The concept of motheronomics, as expounded by Crittenden (2001), Miller (2011), and the Ministry of Education (2022), is applied by the researchers in the current research study, which focuses on the reasons behind the reluctance of a considerable female population to embrace motherhood. This delves into the intricate reasons that underlie the hesitancy of many women in embracing motherhood, encompassing a comprehensive examination of societal norms, cultural influences, economic factors, and individual aspirations.

As reported by Gröndahl (2022), Sweden is renowned for its progressive approach to maternal support and gender equality. The country offers generous parental leave policies, allowing both mothers and fathers to take substantial time off work to care for their children. This approach has led to higher female workforce participation and a more balanced distribution of caregiving responsibilities. Jones and Seitani (2019), as well as Yamaguchi (2023), stated that in Japan, motheronomics takes on a unique perspective due to its demographic challenges, including an aging population and low birth rates. The country has been implementing policies to encourage women’s workforce participation, such as extended maternity leave and childcare support. However, traditional gender roles and workplace expectations continue to present obstacles to full gender equality in the labor market.

Australia has also made strides in supporting working mothers. The country provides paid parental leave and flexible work arrangements. These policies aim to empower women to maintain their careers while fulfilling caregiving responsibilities (Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2019). Singapore places importance on family support and work-life balance. The government has implemented measures to facilitate work arrangements for parents, including paid maternity leave and shared parental leave. These efforts contribute to a more inclusive and equitable workforce (Min, 2022). In Vietnam and Thailand, where traditional gender roles and cultural norms play a significant role, motheronomics involves addressing challenges related to maternal workforce participation. These countries are gradually recognizing the need to provide support for working mothers to balance their familial and professional responsibilities (Chunuan et al., 2020; Holland, 2021).

According to Setthawilai (2019), as well as Samutachak and Kanchanachitra (2016), Generation Y (born between 1980 and 1994) has shown a trend of postponing motherhood due to various factors. From a macro perspective on gender roles within the family structure, females are expected to handle household duties and child-rearing regardless of their career paths, this dynamic has discouraged early

marriages and motherhood. Generation Y’s career outlook emphasizes professional growth, considering motherhood an additional and expensive burden on their existing lifestyles. The trade-offs between being a mother and enjoying leisure, advancing in one’s career, pursuing higher education, providing elderly family care, and personal time is too great of the opportunity cost (Setthawilai, 2019). The estimated cost of child-rearing, averaging 1.9 million baht, adds to existing expenses such as mortgages, car payments, leisure activities, and vacations (Samutachak & Kanchanachitra, 2016). This trend of delaying or forgoing motherhood is gaining momentum within the Thai population, highlighting a noteworthy societal shift.

The Ministry of Education (2022) segmented the cost of motherhood into three distinct categories. Firstly, there’s the monetary cost, encompassing tangible expenditures related to child-rearing such as nourishment, clothing, toys, education, and childcare. Secondly, the opportunity cost entails the trade-offs a mother must make in terms of her own pursuits, such as foregoing career advancements, transitioning to part-time work, or even resigning from her job to focus on child-rearing. Lastly, the non-monetary cost encompasses intangible sacrifices, which paradoxically hold their own rewards. This involves the immeasurable value of the time invested in nurturing and fostering a child, forming bonds that are priceless and beyond quantification.

When examining a high labor productivity workforce, the pay usually coincides with the labor proficiency, productivity, and skill sets. The female workforce, however, often falls into an unproductive trap due to additional burdens outside of work that female workers must be responsible for. Crittenden (2001, p. 5) mentioned in the work the price of motherhood and raised the question: “Why the most important job in the world is still the least valued?”. Being a mother is the most important job that is not getting paid. The more children the mother has, the less of the income she receives to raise the children. According to Jensen (2020) published by UN Women, 51.6% of female working-age people are participating in the labor force compared with 94.6% of their male counterparts. The gender gap is largest among married women with children whose motherhood bears a greater share of unpaid care work responsibilities (Azcona & Bhatt, 2020). Being a single mom balancing work and life can be daunting as care work for a child is always undervalued and subordinate to an income-earning role. Women’s eminent role in unpaid childcare is a key contributor to a gender gap in paid work engagement.

The impact of having children on women’s participation in the labor market is profound, both in the short and long terms. Canaan et al. (2022) reveal compelling evidence regarding the positive health outcomes that emerge for both mothers and children when policies are established to extend short maternity leaves, especially during the crucial initial 6 months after childbirth. Interestingly, low-income mothers appear to derive even greater benefits from such provisions when paid leave is extended. However, the introduction of universal paid leave might hold the potential to yield more significant advantages for mothers from lower-income backgrounds. On the other hand,

the lengthening of paid leave duration could potentially jeopardize the career trajectories of highly educated mothers, placing them at risk of encountering obstacles in their pursuit of ascending to higher professional positions.

In the international context, the research turns its gaze to Japan, which stands as the primary focus of comparative study in this domain. Japan's innovative approach involves offering benefits to mothers who, during pregnancy leave, do not receive compensation, facilitated through a comprehensive health insurance scheme. The government plays a pivotal role in cases where workers find themselves without wages during this leave period, ensuring that they receive 60% of their average monthly wage via the state's health insurance program (Jones & Seitani, 2019). Shifting the focus to Singapore, another noteworthy dimension comes to light. The Singaporean context dictates that employers must comply with the stipulation that grants childcare leave to employees, underscoring its significance by imposing a potential fine of \$5,000 or even a prison sentence of up to 6 months for those who disregard this requirement. This emphasizes the nation's commitment to supporting working parents and acknowledging the significance of childcare responsibilities in the broader workforce structure, as enshrined in the revised Singapore Employment Act of 1968.

Beyond maternity provisions, the study takes into account the pivotal role of paternity leave in fostering gender equality. Research by Canaan et al. (2022) highlights how paternity leave plays a role in alleviating the burdens placed on mothers within households, thereby facilitating increased female participation within the labor market. This dynamic aligns with the broader societal drive toward achieving gender parity in various facets of life.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The qualitative method was used as a research strategy in this study. The goals of qualitative research are to investigate every context in which people or groups make decisions and act, as well as to explain why that specific observed phenomenon occurred in that manner. The qualitative method consists of four primary research steps: question design, data collection, data analysis, and report writing. Additionally, the documentary method was conducted to explain motherhood and its social benefits. The documentary method is a technique used to classify, investigate, interpret, and identify the limitations of physical sources, most commonly written documents in the public or private domain such as personal papers, commercial records, state archives, communications, or legislation (Payne & Payne, 2004).

The chosen research methods for comprehensively evaluating the state of motherhood and childcare development involve a comparative study and a qualitative analysis, drawing from a collection of literature reviews. To execute the comparative study, a United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund's (UNICEF's) guideline (Gromada & Richardson, 2021) *Where Do Rich Countries Stand on Childcare?* was employed, ranking 41 affluent nations based on parental leave, accessibility to child care assistance and facilities, childcare quality, and affordability through subsidies or incentives within national childcare policies. The guideline is in line with the Thai

Health Promotion Foundation (Sinthuprama, 2022) which promotes maternity leave, early childhood childcare enrollment, childcare grants and supports. This approach allowed for the selection of Sweden, Japan, and Australia, representing the upper (most famous for childcare policy), middle (developed country in Asia with a similar culture of motherhood and childrearing), and lower tiers respectively. Moreover, two additional Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries were included to potentially serve as benchmarks for Thailand's childcare development due to their close resemblance of culture and their geographical locations. Vietnam, a rapidly growing socialist nation, boasts the highest female workforce participation among ASEAN members. Singapore, an advanced unitary parliamentary developed country, excels in childcare development and was thus chosen for the study. The combined use of comparative analysis and qualitative assessment offers a well-rounded and comprehensive understanding of the various dimensions and intricacies of motherhood and childcare development across diverse socio-economic contexts.

Qualitative content analysis typically begins with the systematic transformation of a large amount of text into a concise summary of key findings (Siripipatthanakul et al., 2022). This method is used to explain and quantify specific phenomena comprehensively and objectively through valid inferences derived from verbal, visual, or written data; it is known as content analysis (Jangjarat et al., 2023; Limna, 2023; Viphanphong et al., 2023). Therefore, content analysis was employed to analyze the qualitative data in this study.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS

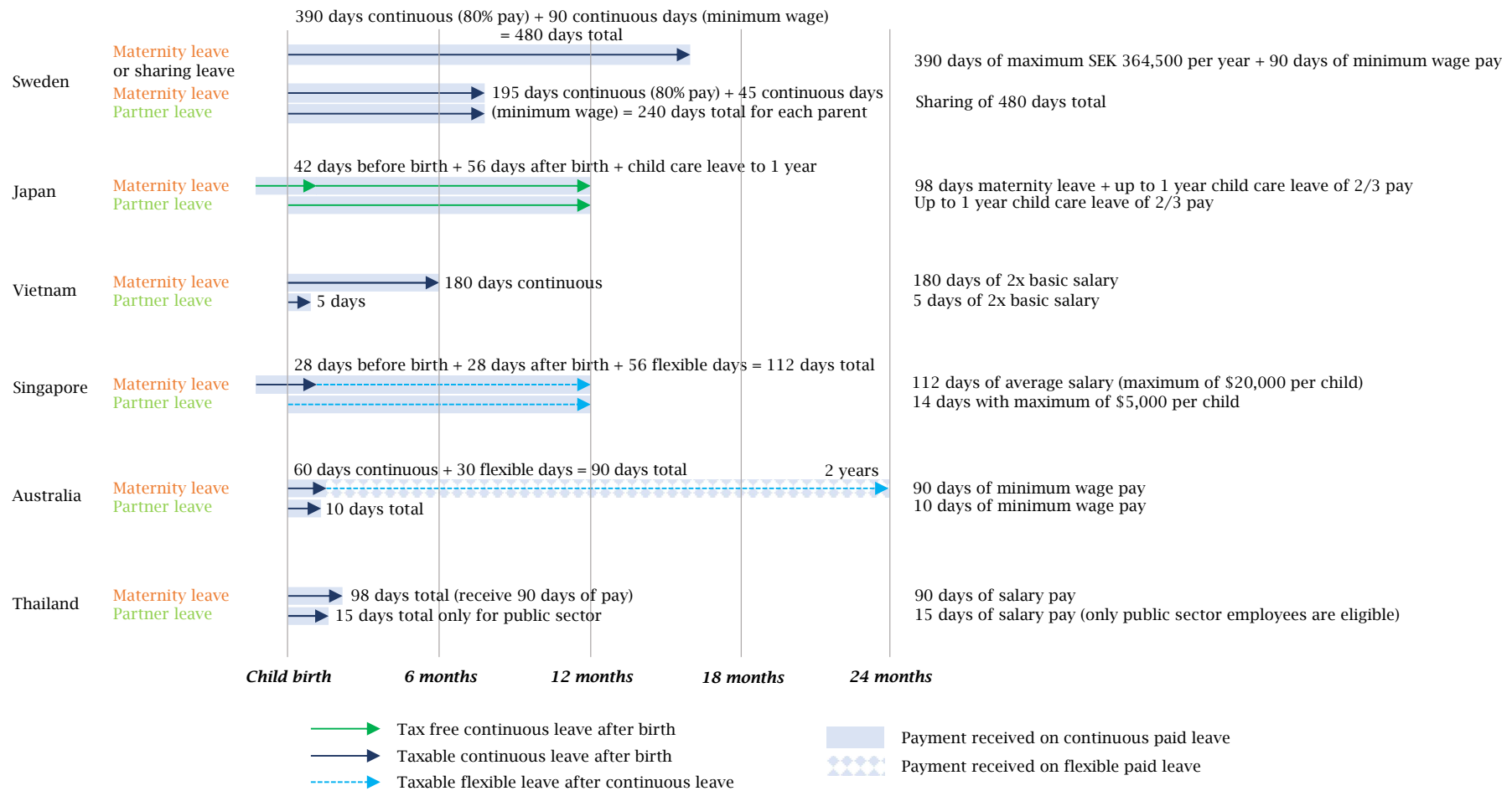
Employing documentary and content analysis methods, the study revealed insights into motherhood and its implications. It investigated early childhood care and parental leave policies across Sweden, Japan, Australia, Singapore, Vietnam, and Thailand, offering a comprehensive understanding of the subject.

4.1. Maternity leave and parental leave

Figure 1 shows the maternity leave and partner leave. Based on a comparative study among six countries, the rankings are as follows: Japan, Sweden, Vietnam, Australia, Singapore, and Thailand, from highest to lowest, respectively. Notably, only Japan (with 42 days) and Singapore (with 28 days) offer before-birth leave, which continues as after-birth leave. Remarkably, Japan is the sole country providing nontaxable income to mothers, ensuring full payments without deductions. In contrast, Thai mothers receive the least advantageous maternity leave, spanning 98 days with 90 days of salary coverage.

Crucially, partner leave assumes a pivotal role in redistributing the burdens of motherhood to a shared parental responsibility. Both Sweden and Australia champion this concept, irrespective of gender identification. Notably, Sweden leads with an extensive partner leave policy of up to 240 days. Conversely, Thailand permits paternity leave for public sector employees, potentially totaling 15 days, contingent upon entity permissions.

Figure 1. Maternity leave and partner leave



Note: SEK — Swedish krona.

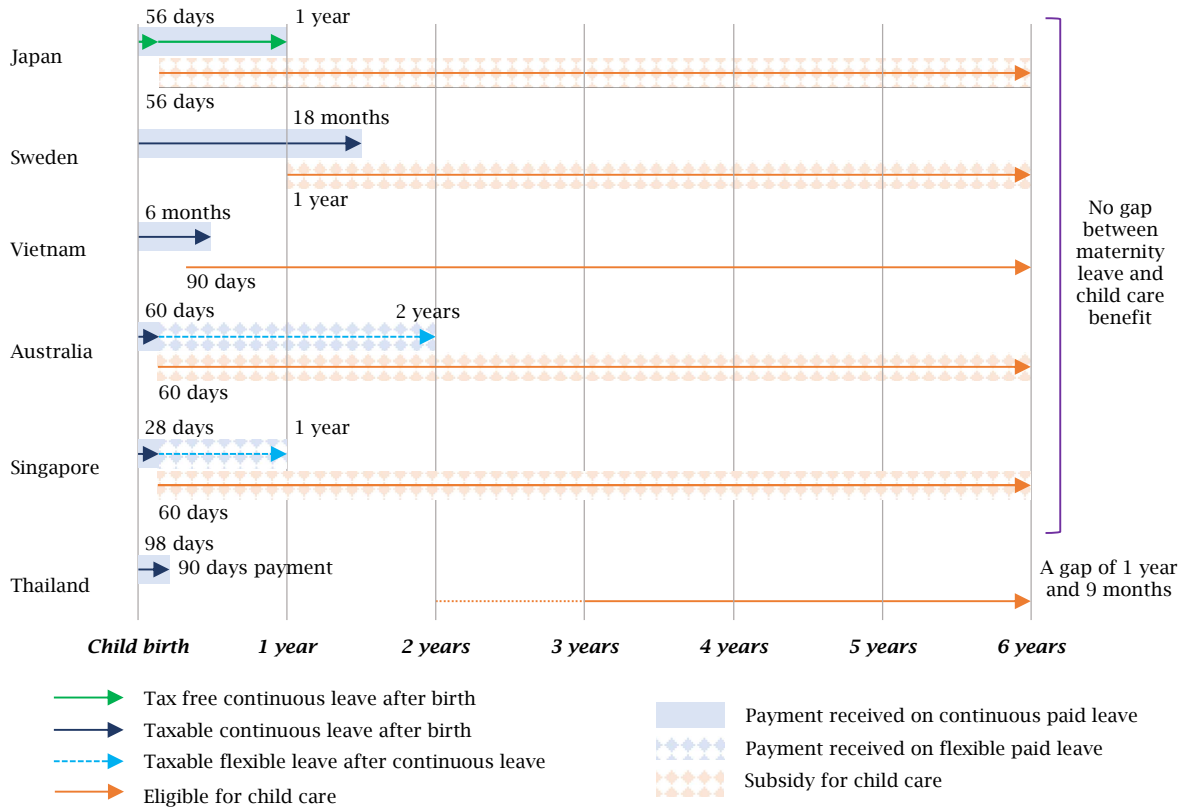
Source: The data was collected by the authors from 6 countries retrieved from sources: Japan Management Consulting (JMC, n.d.), The Tokyo Life (2021), Försäkringskassan (2021), Duvander and Löfgren (2021), European Commission (2023), International Cooperation Department (2017), Fair Work Ombudsman (n.d.), Services Australia (2023), Singapore Government Agency (n.d.-a, n.d.-b, n.d.-c), Ministry of Labor (n.d.).

4.2. Child care center admittance

Singapore leads the way in welcoming infants and young children into childcare centers, with facilities accepting infants as young as 60 days old. Notably, all countries, barring Thailand, seamlessly bridge the gap between maternity leave and childcare center enrollment. Unfortunately, Thailand stands alone with a substantial gap of 1 year and 9 months for child care centers that accept children 2 years old of age up to 2 years and 9 months for most child

care centers that typically accept children 3 years old. During this gap, children require caretakers but lack formal care arrangements. As a result, children aged between 3 months and 3 years old are either placed in unregistered childcare centers catering to this age range or entrusted to their grandparents or relatives for care. Some mothers may leave the workforce to care for their children until they are old enough to be enrolled in formal childcare facilities.

Figure 2. Maternity leave and child care benefit



Source: The data was collected by the authors from 6 countries retrieved from sources: JMC (n.d.), The Tokyo Life (2021), Gender Equality Bureau (2023), Försäkringskassan (2021), Duvander and Löfgren (2021), European Commission (2023), International Cooperation Department (2017), UNICEF (2016), Fair Work Ombudsman (n.d.), Services Australia (2023), Australian Bureau of Statistics (2017), Singapore Government Agency (n.d.-a, n.d.-b, n.d.-c), Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA, 2019), Ministry of Labor (n.d.).

4.3. Onsite childcare facilities at work

Vietnam is the exemplary model for onsite childcare facilities in factories. Since Vietnam has a higher than 78% female participation workforce, childcare facilities are necessary to accommodate workers. The Child Care center at Evervan shoe factory accepts young children from 15 months while Now Vina fabric factory works with a local childcare facility to enroll children as early as infants (International Finance Corporation [IFC], 2020). Childcare centers in Vietnam are flexible and coincide with mothers' working hours. There is no after-hour fee. If a mother chooses not to enroll her child at the facility onsite, she can enroll her child in an offsite facility with a paid benefit of a monthly allowance from the factory.

4.4. Career opportunity and credentials in early childhood development

Sweden and Singapore stand out as commendable examples for offering significant early childhood career prospects. Swedish preschool teachers receive a salary comparable to that of primary and high school teachers, as reported by the Skolverket Swedish National Agency for Education. Meanwhile, in Singapore, early childhood development staff are categorized into various roles, including teacher, educator for early childhood care, educator for early years, educator for infant care, para-educator or teacher assistant, para-educator or educator assistant, and para-personnel or helpers. Each certification qualifies individuals for specific deployment levels, spanning from infant care (before 18 months) to

playgroup (18 months–2 years old), pre-nursery (3 years old), kindergarten 1 (5 years old), and kindergarten 2 (6 years old).

4.5. Law, rule, and regulation to make motherhood economically beneficial to society

Developing a framework of laws, regulations, and rules that enhance the economics of motherhood is a multifaceted endeavor, necessitating a strategic approach. Key strategies emerge to ensure that the vital work of caregiving is both recognized and supported. Firstly, equal pay laws must be vigorously enforced, compelling employers to provide equitable compensation regardless of gender, thereby minimizing the economic setbacks that mothers often face in the workforce. Secondly, the provision of paid parental leave plays a crucial role, affording mothers and fathers the necessary time to care for their newborns or adopted children while maintaining economic stability. This approach serves to mitigate the economic burdens typically borne by mothers when they temporarily step back from their careers to fulfill caregiving duties. Additionally, childcare subsidies prove essential in easing the financial strain associated with childcare, enabling a broader spectrum of mothers to participate fully in the workforce. Ensuring that these subsidies are means-tested helps guarantee that the necessary resources are accessible to all families in need. To further empower mothers, it is imperative to confront workplace bias and discrimination through legislative measures that safeguard them against professional disadvantages due to their caregiving roles. Addressing gender bias ingrained in technology, particularly within fields like artificial intelligence and machine learning, is pivotal to preventing technological advancements from perpetuating gender stereotypes and hindering mothers' equitable participation. Lastly, enhancing overall caregiving support, be it through policies such as universal healthcare, affordable childcare options, or aid for eldercare responsibilities, contributes to alleviating the exclusive burden on mothers. In amalgamating these strategies, a comprehensive framework can be constructed, recognizing and valuing the role of motherhood in the economy and society at large.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study underscore the diverse approaches employed by Sweden, Japan, Australia, Singapore, Vietnam, and Thailand in their maternity and partner leave policies. Sweden's exceptional provision of extensive partner leave, up to 240 days, stands out, promoting shared parenthood irrespective of gender. In contrast, Japan and Australia prioritize both pre- and post-birth leave, with Japan uniquely granting nontaxable income to mothers. Singapore demonstrates a balanced approach, whereas Vietnam and Thailand lag behind, facing challenges in terms of leave duration and support. The study highlights the critical need for adaptable and comprehensive policies that cater to evolving family dynamics, ultimately contributing to the enhanced well-being of mothers and parents, and a more inclusive and supportive societal fabric.

Of significant note is the prevailing concept of *motheromics* within the findings, reflecting the decline in gender inequality. However, unpaid care work remains disproportionately assigned to females, irrespective of their position in the workforce. While the sharing of parenthood and household responsibilities among younger generations is on the rise in practice, it is yet to be effectively realized at a policy level. The study's comparative analysis reveals the urgent need for transformative change in Thailand's maternal leave, particularly its 98-day maximum leave and limited partner leave, to incentivize and support motherhood. The absence of government assistance in childcare during the critical years of early childhood development further exacerbates the issue, leading to a declining birth rate.

Mothers returning to the workforce after parental leave often face an impasse when attempting to enroll their children in childcare centers. Public childcare centers in Thailand typically admit children at the age of 3 years old, creating a troubling gap of 1 year old and 9 months to 2 years old and 9 months, where young children remain unsupported and unattended. This forces mothers to make difficult career decisions: either leaving the workforce to care for their children or entrusting them to elderly relatives, hampering early childhood development and bonding. Significantly, Japan is the sole country recognizing the value of motherhood by offering nontaxable maternity leave income and providing mothers with complete benefits. In contrast, countries like Thailand do not consider such an approach, leaving maternity leave income subject to taxation. Additionally, the absence of government subsidies for childcare expenses before a child reaches the age of 3 further burdens mothers, who must bear out-of-pocket expenses for private or unregistered childcare centers.

Thailand's childcare landscape presents a unique challenge, characterized by a high number of facilities but low enrollment rates. Despite having a substantial number of childcare centers, a significant proportion of children remain unenrolled, unassisted, and outside the system. The gap between 1 year old and 9 months to 2 years old and 9 months in childcare center admittance raises concerns for early childhood development, necessitating government intervention. Furthermore, the ratio of children to staff in these facilities, as reported by the Ministry of Public Health of Thailand, is in line with other countries, emphasizing the importance of maintaining this balance for effective care.

Sweden and Singapore have invested significantly in user-friendly databases, offering comprehensive information on pregnancy, childbirth, parental leave, childcare facility admission, subsidies, and more. Notably, Singapore's dedicated ECDA provides essential information to parents, simplifying the search for suitable childcare centers. Sweden, on the other hand, adopts a unique approach, with each municipality offering a dedicated section for education and childcare, listing available preschools along with contact details. These countries empower parents to make informed decisions before visiting childcare centers.

Vietnam stands as a model for *motheromics*, with over 65% of female labor contributing to the factory workforce, highlighting the economic

significance of motherhood. Factories and employers acknowledge the importance of childcare and child development, offering benefits to female employees. In contrast, Thailand faces challenges in accommodating working mothers, particularly in terms of inflexible and non-accommodative childcare center operating hours. An exceptional Vietnamese shoe factory offers childcare benefits as early as 15 months, facilitating a smooth transition from maternity leave to workforce reintegration, and easing family planning for female workers.

One of the most significant challenges in Thailand pertains to the qualifications of childcare staff, particularly those responsible for infants and young children. Limitations on early childhood teaching credentials hinder career advancement for teachers and caretakers. Qualifying assistants or helpers through basic training and certification can help bridge the gap and address staff shortages. This approach could even include the inclusion of elderly adults as eligible caretakers, maximizing the potential of Thailand's extensive childcare facilities. Enhancing quality and providing staff training could be achieved at a marginal cost, significantly improving early childhood development for children aged 0 to 6 years old.

6. CONCLUSION

This study delved into the concept of motheromics and its ramifications. By examining early childhood care and parental leave policies in six diverse countries — Sweden, Japan, Australia, Singapore, Vietnam, and Thailand — this research has shed light on the multifaceted strategies employed to support mothers and parents, while also uncovering broader implications for policy-making and societal progress. The findings shed light on Thailand's current situation of maternity and childcare benefits. Benchmarking Thailand against five other countries illustrated that Thailand is lacking in maternity leave up to only 90 days with pay and a significant gap between maternity leave and early childcare enrollment. It raised a concern that requires Thai government intervention in making significant changes to the maternity and early childhood benefits. As Thai female participation in the workforce and birth rate has been declining, making progress and commitment to motheromics, an economy of being a mother, is essential to support the Thai female workforce and gender equality.

The comparative analysis of maternity and partner leave policies highlighted the remarkable variations in approaches taken by different countries. Sweden's pioneering model of extensive and gender-neutral partner leave stands out as an exemplar in fostering shared parenthood, promoting gender equality, and encouraging the active involvement of fathers in caregiving responsibilities. This approach not only enhances family dynamics but also contributes to a more balanced distribution of domestic duties, which is crucial in a rapidly changing economy. On the other hand, Japan and Australia's emphasis on comprehensive pre- and post-birth leave, coupled with Japan's innovative non-taxable income provision, presents an alternative route in supporting motherhood. These policies acknowledge

the unique challenges faced by mothers during pregnancy and the early stages of child-rearing, providing a safety net that helps alleviate financial burdens and ensures maternal well-being.

Singapore's well-balanced approach to parental leave policies offers valuable insights into achieving equilibrium between work and family responsibilities. The consideration of both maternity and paternity leave, along with the flexibility to allocate leave days, underscores the importance of accommodating diverse family needs and work arrangements.

However, the less supportive policies observed in Vietnam and Thailand emphasize the urgent need for adaptive and comprehensive measures that account for evolving family dynamics. As these countries navigate the demands of a growing female workforce, it becomes imperative to create an enabling environment that enables mothers and parents to participate fully in both the workforce and caregiving responsibilities.

This study underscores the intricate interplay between policies, societal norms, and cultural contexts in shaping the role of motherhood within an evolving societal landscape. The findings emphasize that an effective motheromics framework goes beyond mere economic considerations — it encompasses social, cultural, and gender-related dimensions that require a holistic approach for meaningful impact. As countries strive to navigate the challenges and opportunities, the lessons drawn from this study can inform the development of more inclusive and adaptive policies that empower mothers and parents to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

The implications of this study extend to the broader understanding of the economics of motherhood. It illuminates the delicate balance between the personal and societal dimensions of motherhood's economic impact. While motherhood holds potential benefits for society through nurturing the next generation, inadequate support and undervaluation of caregiving work can translate into economic costs. These costs manifest as lost career opportunities, reduced workforce participation, and limited access to essential resources. To harness the benefits of motherhood for society, it is imperative to implement comprehensive policies that promote gender equality, support working parents, and provide a conducive environment for mothers to thrive in both caregiving and professional roles. This study calls for a holistic approach to policy-making that recognizes the multifaceted nature of motherhood's economics and its far-reaching implications. Furthermore, as an addition to the existing body of literature on motheromics and its role in the economy, this study opens avenues for further research. Scholars can build upon these findings to delve deeper into the complexities of motherhood's economic dynamics beyond the policy examinations. Further evaluations of the actual implementation of the policies and document analysis can serve as a more comprehensive benchmark and comparison for countries that have close resemblance in cultural, social, and political contexts. The study's measurements and insights can serve as valuable foundations for future quantitative research, such as large-scale online questionnaires, aimed at exploring the intricate relationships and broader societal

impacts. By expanding the research landscape, future studies can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of motheromics and its intricate interplay with the economy of being a mother, ultimately shaping more effective and inclusive policy interventions.

In this study, there are several limitations and recommendations for future research. The study's

limitations include its limited scope, qualitative nature, potential for overgeneralization, and the need to account for temporal relevance. To address these limitations, future research should consider a global comparative analysis, employ both qualitative and quantitative methods, conduct longitudinal studies, delve into cultural and social contexts, and consider intersectionality factors.

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