

# Defamilisation and familisation measures: Can they reduce the adverse effects of pro-market pension reforms on women in Hong Kong and the UK?

RUBY C.M. CHAU AND LIAM FOSTER

University of Sheffield, England

SAM W.K. YU

Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong

## Abstract

This article explores the impact of defamilisation and familisation measures for women with caring responsibilities and their implications for access to pensions in later life in Hong Kong and the UK in the context of pro-market pension reforms. The first part of the article discusses pro-market pension reforms and their effects on women, the second discusses the potential role of defamilisation and familisation measures in reducing the adverse effects of pro-market pension reforms, and the third focuses on pension policies and examples of defamilisation and familisation measures in Hong Kong and the UK. Finally, on the basis of the discussion of the link between defamilisation and familisation measures and pension measures for women, we assert that both Hong Kong and the UK still have much to do in developing multi-option measures

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## Corresponding author:

Ruby C.M. Chau, Department of Sociological Studies, University of Sheffield, Elmfield, Northumberland Road, Sheffield S10 2TU, England.

Email: [c.chau@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:c.chau@sheffield.ac.uk)

throughout the life course, measures that could limit future inequalities in retirement between men and women.

**Key words**

double jeopardy, employment, family, life course, privatisation

**Introduction**

Pro-market pension reforms have been prevalent in both Hong Kong and the UK. These reforms emphasise individualism, attaching increasing importance to the provision of independent pensions by men and by women. An expansion in the numbers of women in the labour market has increased opportunities for more women to contribute to pensions in their own right. However, the feminisation of labour markets, with a growth in non-standard, contingent and short-term employment, has led to inequality in access to and affordability of pensions. Overall, women's typically lower pay than their male counterparts' and greater likelihood of having caring responsibilities or working on a part-time basis, mean that women tend to accumulate smaller pension pots than men.

This article explores these challenges. It focuses on two related jeopardies faced by women. The first is the challenge of securing an adequate retirement income in their own right (the feminisation of pensions), which, if not accompanied by adequate independent pension saving, can be undermined by pro-market reforms. The second is a lack of effective government measures to reduce the adverse effects of pro-market reforms on women. Examples of these measures include public childcare services that free women from caring responsibilities in order that they can take part in the paid labour market and schemes that provide carers' pension credits when they are not in paid employment. These measures are associated with the concepts of defamilisation and familisation respectively, which will be outlined shortly. By studying these jeopardies in the context of Hong Kong and the UK, this article shows that a neo-liberal environment hinders gender equality in pension systems.

This article starts by briefly discussing pro-market pension reforms and their effects on women. This is followed by the discussion of the concepts of familisation and defamilisation, and an examination of the potential role of defamilisation and familisation measures in supporting women to reduce the adverse effects of pro-market pension reforms. It then focuses on pension policies with examples of defamilisation and familisation measures in Hong Kong and the UK. Finally, on the basis of the previous discussion of the link between defamilisation and familisation measures and pensions

for women, we assert that further policies are required in order to facilitate opportunities for those women with family responsibilities to work if they so choose (building up associated pension contributions), not just in low paid insecure employment, and also to ensure that those women who undertake caring responsibilities are not penalised excessively in retirement as a result. In doing so, we draw attention to the defects of the neo-liberal world in meeting women's retirement needs.

## The pro-market pension reforms

To promote neo-liberalism, it is not uncommon for governments to reform their pension schemes with an emphasis on individual responsibility, a residual welfare model and privatisation (Shi and Mok, 2012). The fiscal sustainability of pension systems and the challenges this presents have become firmly entrenched in the policy agenda of international governmental organisations such as the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, and underpin many countries' pension reforms. Over recent years the focus on individual responsibility has been further justified by the challenges presented by increased unemployment, lower growth and financial market volatility, making it harder for all systems to deliver on pension promises (Ebbinghaus, 2011). Many governments have begun to restructure their old age income security systems in order to make them more economically and demographically stable. There has not been a uniform strategy but changes have included increasing the age at which basic pensions are received and incentivising delayed pension receipt. A further trend is the abolition or severe restriction of survivor benefits in favour of more strongly individualised systems (Foster, 2014). Indeed, pension planning that focuses on a partnership can be problematic given that in the UK for instance, the number of divorces has risen from 11% of the number of marriages in 1948 to about 50% in 2012 (DWP, 2013). Therefore it is rather worrying that Scottish Widows (2012) found that in the UK over half (54%) of women under the age of 30 are relying on joint savings for a retirement that may well be 40 years ahead. As such, more needs to be done to encourage women to save for retirement in their own right (Foster, 2011). In essence state provision is often kept low, providing a residual role and enhancing the likelihood of people looking to provision by the private sector (Chau and Yu, 2001; Shi and Mok, 2012). In carrying out these measures, the government may subsidise the public to join private pension schemes and make participation in private pension schemes mandatory.

Pro-market pension reforms convey a message that in order to secure a decent retirement income, people are required to participate in paid employment and contribute to pension schemes. These reforms can have adverse implications for a substantial number of women given that women are more

likely to undertake caring responsibilities that lead to interrupted work histories and employment on a part-time basis in low paid jobs (Foster, 2010; Ginn, 2003). For example, in the UK, among mothers with a child aged under sixteen at home less than a third work full-time (Ginn and MacIntyre, 2013). In the UK 54% of men and 58% of women working full-time were members of an occupational pension scheme, but for women employed on a part-time basis, only 30% were members (Office for National Statistics, 2014). While the number of women contributing to pensions in many countries has expanded, there is still evidence of a substantial number of women in low paid and part-time employment with intermittent working lives for whom pension systems fail to adequately cater (Ginn and MacIntyre, 2013).

## Defamilisation and familisation measures

Studies of the negative impacts of pro-market pension measures on women indicate that they may face both unequal market relationships and unequal family responsibilities when compared with their male counterparts. To deal with these unequal relationships and secure a reasonable standard of living in their retirement, it is necessary to pay attention not only to issues concerning the decommodification of labour but also to issues concerning familisation and defamilisation processes. It is worth recognising that whilst these are not terms employed explicitly by governments, these social science constructs are useful in identifying the links between care provision and pensions in later life. This is particularly important given that pensions received in retirement are dependent on earlier events in individuals' lives.

Decommodification of labour refers to the extent to which individuals and families can maintain a normal and socially acceptable standard of living independent of market forces (Bambra, 2007; Esping-Andersen, 1990; Kroger, 2011). A widely recognised way of strengthening the decommodification of labour is to provide social welfare based on social rights (Powell and Barrientos, 2011). Since Esping-Andersen (1990) classified countries into 'three worlds of welfare capitalism', decommodification of labour has often been seen as one of the important criteria for examining how much welfare people are entitled to (Bambra, 2007; Chau and Yu, 2013). However, feminist analysts argue that studies of the decommodification of labour give insufficient consideration to the difficulties faced by women in the pursuit of welfare (Lister, 1994). Furthermore, to many women it is not dependency on the labour market but, alternatively, family responsibilities and expectations that are the main factors that put women's retirement income in jeopardy (Kroger, 2011; O'Connor, 1993; Sainsbury, 1999). As such, analysts draw attention to the concept of defamilisation (Bambra, 2007; Chau and Yu, 2013). Lister (1994: 37) has made this argument:

[T]he dimension of decommodification needs also to be complemented by that of what we might call 'defamilisation', if it is to provide a rounded measure of economic independence. Welfare regimes might then also be characterized according to the degree to which individual adults can uphold a socially acceptable standard of living, independently of family relationships, either through paid work or through the social security system.

There are two different types of defamilisation measures provided by the government. The first type focuses on social security measures. These measures may help women (and men) maintain a socially acceptable standard of living independently of both family relationships and commodity relationships. Hence, these measures are termed 'decommodified defamilisation measures' in this article. Lister (1994) also identified that defamilisation measures may be associated with government measures designed to create favourable conditions for women (and men) to sell their labour power in the work economy. These measures are termed 'commodified defamilisation measures'. Examples of these measures include public care services for children and older dependants. These services may reduce women's (and men's) caring responsibilities and enable them to sell their labour power in the labour market.

However, it is important to recognise that not all governments are keen to encourage defamilisation with some encouraging women and men to undertake family responsibilities (Leitner, 2005; Yu et al., 2015). Examples of these familisation measures are care-linked contributions towards old age pensions and parental leave entitlements (Saraceno and Keck, 2011; Yu et al., 2015). The care-linked contribution towards old age pensions can serve as an example of what can be termed 'decommodified familisation' measures. These measures enable women (and men) to perform the role of a family carer and maintain a reasonable standard of living without taking part in the labour market. The parental leave entitlements give an illustration of what can be termed a 'commodified familisation measure'. These measures are meant to enable women and men to take care of their young children whilst keeping their job.<sup>1</sup> However, this measure can become a 'decommodified familisation measure' as studies show that too-long periods of leave may result in disincentivising mothers from remaining in the labour market and encourage them to perform the role of family carer on a full-time basis (Van der Lippe et al., 2011).

The implementation of these four kinds of familisation/defamilisation measures has important implications for whether and how women can achieve a decent standard of living in retirement. These measures have the potential to reduce gender inequality in old age income. Women may prefer to respond to the pro-market pension reforms in different ways. Some may want to take an active part in the work economy. If women can secure a high salary for a reasonably long period, they may be able to meet the requirements of pro-market pension reform measures and save sufficient amounts of money to secure a

decent retirement income. Hence, those commodified familisation measures and commodified defamilisation measures that provide favourable conditions for women to sell their labour power in the work economy may enable them to achieve a decent retirement income. Some women may prefer not to participate in the work economy. In this case, they may need to rely on decommodified defamilisation measures and/or decommodified familisation measures to uphold a socially acceptable life and accumulate retirement income.

However, it is important not to overestimate the effectiveness of these four types of familisation/defamilisation measures in achieving gender equality of outcome in old age income given that considerable gender inequality is not uncommon in the job market. Hence, even if commodified defamilisation and commodified familisation measures are available, there is no guarantee that women can access a suitably paid job with decent pension possibilities and thus accumulate an adequate retirement income. One of the ways to meet the retirement needs of those women who do not contribute to an adequate pension for a sufficient number of years is to provide decommodified defamilisation measures. However, to make old age income security systems economically stable, governments are keen to encourage people to work and contribute to pensions for longer (Ebbinghaus, 2011). There is also a perceived risk in reducing people's incentive to work by providing generous decommodified defamilisation measures. Furthermore, governments might not attach equal importance to the four types of defamilisation/familisation measures. As a result, some women's needs may be met whereas others may be overlooked.

The capacity of women to respond to pro-market pension reforms is notoriously difficult given the extent of gender inequalities (Ginn, 2013a). In essence there are a number of interrelated risk dimensions associated with gender and pensions. These relate to the commitment to redistribution on the basis of entitlement, the treatment of unpaid work, and caring and access to income. There is a risk women may suffer from a double jeopardy where pro-market pension reforms hit women harder than men and defamilisation/familisation measures are not sufficiently effective to either facilitate their employment (and adequate pension contributions) or enable them to stay at home caring (while providing credits for this period). The next section outlines recent pro-market pension reforms in Hong Kong and the UK and discusses some examples of defamilisation and familisation measures.

## **Old age income security systems in Hong Kong and the UK**

The UK has a long established state pension provision with the first scheme introduced in 1908 whereas the public assistance scheme that gave some financial protection to older people in Hong Kong was first introduced in

1971. Both Hong Kong and the UK rely on state retirement protection schemes and private sector pension schemes, largely through employers, to meet the financial needs of retirees. However, there are important differences in the design of these schemes implemented in the two locations.

Before 2000, the most extensive scheme to meet the financial needs of older people in Hong Kong was the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) scheme, which is a non-contributory government-funded benefit scheme. Its aim is to provide financial protection to all those who cannot support themselves financially (Social Welfare Department, 2014a). On top of the CSSA scheme, the Mandatory Provident Fund (MPF) was implemented in 2000. It is a privately managed, employment-based, defined contribution scheme (Siu, 2002). Almost all full-time employees between the ages of 18 and 65 and their employers are required to contribute 5% of the employees' relevant income to a recognised private provident fund each month (Shi and Mok, 2012). Employees earning less than HK\$7,100 (GBP596.60) a month are not required to contribute, but their employers must still contribute 5% of the employees' income. For employees earning more than HK\$30,000 (GBP2,521) a month, mandatory contributions are capped at HK\$1,500 (GBP126) a month. Self-employed people are required to contribute 5% of relevant income subject to a maximum of HK\$1,500 (GBP126) per month (Mandatory Provident Fund Authority, 2015). The main organisations that manage MPF schemes are government-approved trustees belonging to private companies. Employers select the approved trustees to provide at least one scheme to employees.

The state retirement scheme in the UK is much more complicated than the CSSA in Hong Kong. The current UK pension system consists of a combination of state provision (the Basic State Pension (BSP)<sup>2</sup> (Tier 1) and the State Second Pension (S2P)<sup>3</sup> (Tier 2)), additional means-tested Pension Credit<sup>4</sup> benefits, targeted at the poorest pensioners, and private (non-state) pensions largely provided by employers (Tier 3) which receive state support in the form of tax relief. Individuals can make their own private pension arrangements by buying personal pensions. Private pension schemes may be Defined Benefit (DB) or Defined Contribution (DC) in nature. A DB pension is a pension plan in which an employer provides a specified benefit on retirement that is pre-determined by a formula based on the employee's earnings history and length of service, rather than on investment returns, while a DC pension builds up a pension pot using contributions made by the employee and employer (if applicable) plus investment returns and tax relief. Over recent years, the move towards DC schemes from DB ones has sped up. In 2007, 45% of DB schemes were not open to new members, and this figure had reached 58% by 2011 (PPI, 2012). The move towards DC schemes represents a change from a more buffered system to a more individualised exposure to financial market risks. The shift to DC schemes is often taken to be a predictable outgrowth of the

rise of post-Fordism and the flexible, contingent and feminised labour markets of the 'new economy'. The alleged increasing portability of DC plans reflects the reality that most people will work for more than one employer, often on a contractual or part-time basis (Condon, 2006). This shift will tend to worsen the situation for female private sector workers in particular given that their employment and earnings rates are routinely lower and their employment has tended to be concentrated in sectors that are less likely to provide DB plans (Foster, 2014). Furthermore, survivors' pensions in DC schemes are almost non-existent and the impact of career breaks on pension accrual is greater in DC schemes than in DB pensions (Ginn, 2003).

A further type of pension was introduced in a series of steps beginning in July 2012 with the creation of the National Employment Saving Trust (NEST) to promote the automatic enrolment of individuals into low-cost saving schemes (Tier 2½). NEST is run by a non-departmental public body on a non-profit basis. Employers may select an alternative to NEST into which employees are auto-enrolled. These private sector auto-enrolment schemes must provide an appropriate default investment strategy and high and low risk investment options, and must adhere to minimum contribution rules. This reform is intended to offer access to a portable DC occupational pension to the millions of people without access to good quality workplace pension provision while allowing existing employer schemes, with benefits or contributions above NEST's minimum, to continue.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the differences in the retirement protection schemes in Hong Kong and the UK, women face difficulties in securing sufficient retirement incomes in both locations. These difficulties are partly a result of pension reforms dominated by neo-liberal values of individual responsibility, at a time in which feminisation of employment has seen a greater number of women entering the workforce but often in poorly paid insecure forms of employment where the capacity to build up an adequate pension is limited. They are also related to a lack of sufficient effective defamilisation and familisation measures to respond to the pro-market pension developments.

### ***The difficulties faced by women in Hong Kong***

Chau, Yu and Law (2014) identified that employees cannot save enough through the MPF to support their retirement unless they have made contributions to the fund for at least three decades. Hence, those with low pay and interrupted work histories may not be able to save enough through the MPF to support a reasonable standard of living in retirement (Yu, 2008). Owing to their commitment to domestic roles, it is not unusual for women in Hong Kong to have a long career break or change to work on a part-time basis after marriage. Women aged between 25 and 29 years have the highest rates of labour force participation indicating that relationship status and



children have long-term implications for their employment status (Leung, 2014). Disrupted career trajectories give women less chance to earn as much as men. As a result, there is a wide wage gap between men and women. For example, the average monthly salaries of service workers for men and women were HK\$12,852 (GBP1,080) and HK\$10,616 (GBP892.10) respectively, while the average male and female monthly salaries of general workers were HK\$10,904 (GBP916.30) and HK\$9,529 (GBP800.80) respectively (Census and Statistics Department, 2014). To make matters worse, the poor performance of the financial institutions responsible for managing the MPF and their high administrative fees further reduce the amount of money accumulated through the MPF (Shi and Mok, 2012). Chau et al. (2014) discovered that over the previous 12 years the annualised return rate of the MPF constituent funds was 2.7% lower than the inflation rate. In short, women (and men) cannot secure a decent retirement through joining the MPF schemes unless they have a long and uninterrupted career and the MPF scheme they have chosen provides a reasonable return.

In theory, those women (and men) who cannot save enough through the MPF can rely on the CSSA to maintain their living standard in old age. However, the CSSA is not designed to give protection to all retirees. Moreover, the financial support provided by the CSSA is too little to guarantee retirees a reasonable standard of living. Firstly, it is means-tested with the intention of bringing the income of users to a prescribed level at which basic needs are met (Social Welfare Department, 2014a). Secondly, the financial assistance offered by the CSSA is kept below a level at which recipients could enjoy a decent standard of living. For example, the monthly basic allowance (HK\$3,055 (GBP256.70)) provided by the CSSA for a single able-bodied adult under 60 is lower than the poverty line (HK\$3,600 (GBP302.50)) drawn by the Poverty Commission (Social Welfare Department, 2014a).

Hong Kong is well recognised as a defender of neo-liberal values (Chau and Yu, 2001). It is not surprising that the CSSA is based on residualism and the MPF is built on a strong link between employment and pensions. The failure of the CSSA and MPF in securing many women (and men) sufficient retirement incomes can be seen as an example of the failure of neo-liberal pension schemes. However, instead of developing pension schemes based on alternative ideologies, the Hong Kong government has recently implemented some rather piecemeal reforms, which emphasise the importance of the private market in the creation and allocation of retirement incomes. In 2011, the Mandatory Provident Fund Scheme Authority started allowing MPF members to switch their MPF schemes once a year in accordance with their own choices. The Authority assumes that this change will generate market forces that pressurise those organisations responsible for managing the MPF schemes to lower their administrative charges and improve their investment performance. Furthermore, in 2015, the government tried to encourage more

people to work longer through consulting the trade unions' opinions about extending the retirement age of civil servants from 60 to 65.

It is also important to note that the government does not facilitate women to fully make use of the MPF to prepare for their retirement or to seek alternative means through the provision of sufficient defamilisation/familisation measures. Studies have found that women in Hong Kong bear the major responsibilities for looking after their children (Leung and Chan, 2012; Yu, 2007). If the government is keen to reduce women's caring responsibilities and facilitate their labour market activity, particularly on a full-time basis, it should take an active role in providing services to support the care process and enable labour market participation. In Hong Kong these commodified defamilisation measures are generally insufficient. The most important public care services for very young children are those provided by day childcare centres and the Neighbourhood Service Community Care Project. However, Leung (2014) provided evidence showing that these services are generally not effective in meeting working parents' needs. Most of the day childcare centres close by 6:00 pm. This arrangement neglects the needs of those parents working long and unsocial hours. The charges of the centres are also beyond the reach of many low income families. The monthly charges for children aged between 0 and 2 years range from HK\$3,457 (GBP290.50) to HK\$5,100 (GBP428.60), whereas for children aged between 2 and 6 years, monthly charges range from HK\$1,900 (GBP159.70) to HK\$3,285 (GBP276.10). The Neighbourhood Service Community Care Project is more flexible in terms of time. However, the services provided by this project are equally expensive – HK\$144 (GBP12.10) for an 8-hour a day service and around HK\$3,744 (GBP314.60) per month for one child; more than 25% of the median income.

As mentioned above, parental leave can be seen as a kind of commodified familisation measure as it allows parents to look after their children whilst keeping their jobs. However, these measures are seriously underdeveloped. The maternity leave compensation lasts for only 10 weeks and covers 80% of the salary. These maternity benefits are not only lower than those in most of the 18 OECD countries studied by Esping-Andersen (1990) but also lower than those in some East Asian countries such as Taiwan and Singapore (Chau and Yu, 2013). To make matters worse, there is no statutory parental leave. Furthermore, male workers are entitled to only three days of paid paternity leave. It is evident that these leave policies are generally too underdeveloped to allow women (and their spouses) to take care of their young children and keep their foothold in the job market. This has implications for their capacity to contribute to the MPF pension scheme and their situation in retirement.

The government is reluctant to develop decommodified familisation measures. This point is evidenced by the fact that the carers' allowance measures are underdeveloped. The amount of carers' allowance is only HK\$2,000 (GBP168.10) a month (less than one-seventh of the median income) (Social

Welfare Department, 2014b); it is not sufficient to financially support people to become a full-time family carer. Furthermore, because the MPF is an employment-based scheme it does not provide any opportunities for those not in employment to contribute to it, resulting in those fulfilling caring responsibilities missing out on the opportunity to contribute to a pension. In addition, there are spouse and child tax allowances. In 2014, the spouse tax allowance was HK\$120,000 (GBP10,084) and the child tax allowance was HK\$70,000 (GBP5,882.40) for each child. However, a great number of workers do not earn more than HK\$10,000 (GBP840.30) a month and are not required to pay tax. Hence, these tax allowances do not provide any extra resources for them to financially support family carers or assist in preparing financially for their retirement. The CSSA by nature is a kind of decommodified defamilisation measure. Because of its emphasis on residualism, it is not effective enough to guarantee women a decent standard of living in retirement.

The examples discussed are not meant to provide a comprehensive overview of all of the familisation/defamilisation measures in Hong Kong. However, they provide an important insight into the challenges women in Hong Kong face in ensuring an adequate retirement income given limited familisation and defamilisation measures to support women to deal with the adverse effects of the MPF or to find alternatives. These examples provide evidence of the double jeopardy suffered by many women who have difficulties in securing a decent income in retirement because they are favoured neither by retirement protection measures nor by sufficient defamilisation/familisation measures.

As mentioned above, not all women have the same caring and labour market commitments or responses. Hence, the Hong Kong government needs to provide more defamilisation/familisation measures in order to ensure women have secure retirement incomes. It is necessary to stress that the government should not selectively provide some measures at the expense of others. Instead the government should pay attention to women's diverse needs for different types of familisation and defamilisation measures. Otherwise the gap between women's retirement incomes may widen.

### ***The difficulties faced by women in the UK***

Over recent years UK governments have increasingly emphasised neo-liberal concerns of private saving and individual responsibility in pension provision as a means of reducing its own expenditure and encouraging long-term sustainability (Foster, 2010). In practice, the government continues to face similar challenges to those of its predecessors: ensuring that government pension spending remains stable while reducing pensioner poverty, where women are over-represented (Foster, 2011).

The Coalition government announced a number of measures that are transforming the pension landscape. The age at which the state pension will be received was increased more quickly than previously planned (it will be extended to 66 in October 2020, nearly six years earlier than planned in 2007 under the Labour government). Approximately 4.4 million men and women will have to wait up to a year longer for their state pension. These rises are on top of the gradual equalisation of women's state pension age. About 500,000 women must wait between a year and eighteen months extra as a result of the increasing speed of pension age equalisation (Cribb et al., 2013). This may be problematic for women (and men) who have already made work, saving and retirement decisions based on having a particular state pension.

In 2011 the Coalition government stated that the state pension system would be substantially reformed, with the BSP and the S2P replaced by a new Single-Tier State Pension (STP) for those below the state pension age in 2016. The new STP will be set just above the current Guarantee Credit level, at GBP144 per week (in 2012/13 prices), with 35 years of National Insurance (NI) contributions required to qualify for a full entitlement. In the longer term, there will be many 'losers' with the new system less generous than the current system for most men and women as a consequence of a lower accrual rate than the combined rate of the BSP and S2P. Although the STP will ensure that most women will have a state pension in their own right in retirement, it is apparent that women will be less likely than their male counterparts to receive the full amount. This is as a result of the stipulated 35 years of NI contributions or credits required for receipt of the full STP, given their greater likelihood of time out of employment which does not qualify for NI credits (Ginn, 2013a). As such the crediting-in arrangements – a familisation measure – play an important role in the amount of STP an individual is entitled to.

There are concerns that NEST will penalise women in particular as the distribution of tax relief will benefit higher rate taxpayers, who are mainly men, more than basic rate taxpayers. NEST, the default auto-enrolment option, incorporates DC-type features of investment choice and individualised risk. As such, extra saving may not be advisable, due to its potential interaction with means testing (Price, 2007). There is no guarantee that the fund at retirement will exceed the value of contributions paid. The problem applies especially to those who are likely to receive less than the full STP, and those aged over 45 in 2012 (Ginn and MacIntyre, 2013). For women, the risk of a wrong decision is especially high, 'as unpredictable careers and future relationship status are combined with the uncertainties of future investment returns, charges and annuity rates' (Ginn, 2013b). As such, it remains to be seen whether auto-enrolment is a suitable option for all women.

Since employers may choose the scheme and investment utilised, auto-enrolled workers could find themselves in badly run or fraudulent funds, with

substantial annual charges significantly reducing their pension's value (Price and Livsey, 2013). There is a concern that many low to middle earners, including a large number of women, will lose out from the levelling down of pension provision to minimum standards. Women are more likely to be excluded from accessing NEST, given wage requirements. Furthermore, 'sustaining a limit gives employers substantial financial incentives to keep the wages of part-time workers low, and restrict their hours of work in order to exclude them from pension scheme membership' (Foster, 2010: 40). Unlike first-tier state pension provision, but in accordance with other forms of private pension, NEST provides no credits for periods of family caring (Foster, 2012).

In theory, the UK government can employ defamilisation and familisation strategies to assist women to tackle the adverse effects of pro-market pension reforms. However, the examples of the defamilisation and familisation measures discussed below throw doubt on whether the UK government has gone far enough in relation to this.

There have been an abundance of defamilisation policies that promote work as the best way of tackling poverty in the UK. This has implications for the likelihood of contributing to a private pension. These include strategies to make 'work pay' (such as the Minimum Wage and Tax Credits) and make work more flexible (such as improvements in maternity and paternity leave) (Dermott and Pantazis, 2014). Benefits that were a universal entitlement, such as Child Benefit, are being refocused on those most in need in the UK. Therefore, maternal employment is 'incentivised' by developments in benefit and taxation policy (Daly and Scheiwe, 2010). For instance, the Child Tax Credit and the Working Tax Credit (as kinds of commodified defamilisation measures) constitute an important strategy in enticing adults to combine paid work with care. However, certain aspects of Tax Credits provide a disincentive for the second partner to seek employment (Goddard and Knights, 2009). Under the Coalition government there was a scaling back of the real level of benefits whilst activation was encouraged.

A number of the family policy measures have been seen as supportive, encouraging choice and opportunities for employment. However, compulsory, coercive elements have also been present. Lone mothers were one of the first groups targeted by New Labour's activation policies under the New Deal for Lone Parents in 1998 (Daly and Scheiwe, 2010). Enabling elements include information, advice and some training opportunities, as well as in-work financial support. More punitive elements include making lone parents on benefits actively look for employment when their child reaches the age of 12 years, reduced to seven, and then five (by the Coalition government) (Dermott and Pantazis, 2014).

Indirect measures have also strengthened the role of mothers as workers, including reforms of unemployment benefits (as a kind of decommodified defamilisation measure), which have seen the lowering of

long-term unemployment benefits push mothers into employment to supplement household income. However, evidence suggests that there are limited financial benefits to the often low paid, flexible work available to many lone parents in particular. Nearly half (45%) of lone parents (predominantly women) were poor even when they were in employment, with those in full-time employment the most likely to avoid poverty (Dermott and Pantazis, 2014). Furthermore, those on low earnings are least likely to be able to afford to contribute to a private pension even if one is available (Price, 2007). As such, defamilisation measures may not have a sufficient effect on facilitating employment that enables people to contribute to private forms of pensions.

Encouraging work for lone parents and those with caring responsibilities for children requires there to be sufficient affordable childcare of good quality, a commodified defamilisation measure. However, childcare costs have continued to rise, yet salaries have stagnated. In the UK, formal childcare is primarily paid-for and informal childcare is unpaid. Enhanced childcare services have included the introduction of free part-time nursery places for all 3–4 year olds, and the expansion of breakfast and after-school clubs (Daly, 2010). Although there have been substantial increases in childcare places in the last 20 years, the current provision falls short of demand (Daly and Scheiwe, 2010). Furthermore women's low earnings may make such childcare unaffordable, restricting their options to return to work (Schober and Scott, 2012). Such options are affected by women's social class and income status (Warren, 2000). Bennett and Daly (2014: 11) argue that 'current systems [of childcare] to help with costs are complex and generally inadequate'. Generosity in leave periods (with a right to return) can assist mothers avoid poverty by enabling them to remain in paid employment. However, the structure of family leave in the UK can work against parents sharing family leave equally (Bennett and Daly, 2014). Furthermore, the UK only allows a right to request flexible working, a strategy used to remain in employment. Paid leave for carers for disabled or older people (as a kind of commodified familisation measure or decommodified familisation measure), most likely to be undertaken by women, lags further behind.

We have already established that private pensions play a key role in the income an individual can expect in retirement. The way in which state pensions operate can also be seen as supporting defamilisation or familisation. For instance, credits in the current BSP and in the forthcoming STP are important in establishing the state pension received in retirement. However, the limited nature of state pension provision is well known (Foster, 2014; Ginn, 2003). It has been argued that state-funded care credits in NEST on the same basis as in S2P could be provided or an alternative fully portable pay-as-you-go scheme, which includes carer credits as in state pensions (through either cross-subsidy or a grant from the Exchequer in lieu of tax relief), thus avoiding the penalty for caring years incurred in private pensions, should be utilised (Ginn and MacIntyre, 2013; Townsend and Walker, 1995).

The examples discussed do not provide a comprehensive picture of the defamilisation and familisation measures in the UK. However, they shed light on the double jeopardy faced by women who have difficulties in securing a decent retirement income because of the challenges presented by pension reforms in combination with insufficient defamilisation/familisation measures. The UK government, like Hong Kong's, needs to respond to the diverse employment and pension needs of women through a diverse provision of defamilisation/familisation measures, otherwise it may widen the gap between women in terms of the retirement incomes they can secure.

## Conclusion

This article has discussed the jeopardies faced by women in securing an adequate retirement income. While the feminisation of pensions has emphasised the need for women to access pensions in their own right independently of their male counterparts and regardless of their family circumstances, it is evident that, despite numerous defamilisation/familisation measures, women are still disadvantaged in terms of employment and its explicit connection to pensions in both the UK and Hong Kong. In the UK, activation policies, especially those targeted at single mothers, have led to some growth in employment but this has largely been on a low paid feminised basis and it is these people who are least able to contribute to private pensions. The introduction of auto-enrolment and NEST, targeted at low and medium earners, will offer new possibilities for many women who otherwise lacked access to an employer's contribution. However, it does not take caring commitments into account and excludes the lowest earners, including many women. Maternal roles and entrenched assumptions about gender still restrict women's employment and subsequent pension accumulation (Ginn and MacIntyre, 2013). These challenges are not experienced equally by all women and depend on class dimensions and other divisions among women. In Hong Kong, which has been characterised by pro-market pension developments as well, it is also evident that the defamilisation and familisation measures have not adequately met the needs of women in terms of enabling them to build up a decent pension in their own right. There is a lack of effective care policies including pension credits to assist female (and male) full-time carers secure a decent retirement income. Moreover, the leave arrangements and the public childcare services are too underdeveloped to free women from caring responsibilities and to enable them to work full-time.

It is evident that moves towards individual provision for retirement through private pensions are likely to result in greater income inequality between older women and men, and between those who have had an intermittent or low paid employment history and those with an advantaged position in the labour market (Foster, 2010). In essence the emphasis on financialised

provision in pensions is creating new forms of gender inequality, and new forms of gendered insecurity. The complexity of women's life courses is not reflected in gendered retirement provision norms. Despite the apparent feminisation of pensions represented by the growth in DC structures for instance, they are unlikely to improve this gendered normativity, especially given that the mantra of stock market investments is that essentially people need to be in it for the long-haul (Condon, 2006). Pension penalties arising from earlier caring roles will continue to be magnified, creating increasing income disparity among women in older age according to their employment, partnership status and care history. In order to tackle this problem, there is a need for more effective and generous defamilisation/familisation policies in both the UK and Hong Kong. For instance, greater provision of affordable, high quality, flexible childcare can facilitate employment opportunities. When provided within a competitive free market this may be in line with neo-liberal ideologies. Given that private pensions widen inequalities between men and women related to their levels of employment participation, this emphasises the need for policies to encourage good quality, flexible female employment, which is important in enhancing women's pension prospects in the future (Foster, 2014).

Strengthening the connection between the labour market and pension policies, and other social investments such as family-friendly working and childcare strategies are particularly important if women are to bridge the pension divide and for the feminisation of pensions to result in a reduction in gendered pension inequalities. While care credits are one way of 'compensating' women for periods of unpaid care, they do not account for wage penalties associated with time out of employment and largely apply to first/second pillar pension provision. Furthermore, all policies require a gender lens analysis in order that any effects across disparate groups of women are visible (Lewis, 2006). An approach with a transparent organisational structure with enforcement mechanisms has the potential to benefit women of all ages and ensure that policies undergo a comprehensive analysis through a gendered lens.

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### **Notes**

1. The four terms are to a certain extent indebted to Saraceno and Keck's (2011) ideas. They have used the terms 'defamilialised decommodification', 'decommodified



- supported familialism' and 'defamilialised decommodification of care work' to conceptualise policies that affect gender equality.
2. The BSP is a regular payment from the government that begins when people reach the state pension age. The amount of the payment depends on an individual's history of payments of National Insurance Contributions (NICs).
  3. The S2P, paid in addition to the BSP, provides an additional state pension to individuals with annual earnings above GBP5,772 in 2014/15. It also provides an additional benefit to those in receipt of particular benefits. Individuals contribute towards the S2P through NICs. The government also allows certain people to 'contract out' of the S2P in exchange for a private pension and reduced NICs.
  4. The Pension Credit is an income-related benefit that tops up people's weekly income to GBP148.35 (for single people) or GBP226.50 (for couples) when it is below these levels. There is also an additional savings component.
  5. Those with an income below GBP9,440 per annum are not auto-enrolled, and even if those earning below GBP5,668 opt into NESTs, or an alternative employer auto-enrolment scheme, they will not attract an employer's contribution (these thresholds are reviewed annually).

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## Author biographies

**Chui Man (Ruby) Chau** is a visiting scholar at the University of Sheffield. Her main research interests are comparative social policy, welfare mix, women and family, and culturally sensitive social work practice. Latest publications include: 'Using defamilisation typologies to study the Confucian welfare regime', *Journal of International and Comparative Social Policy* (2015) 31(1): 74–93 (with Yu, W.K. and Lee, K.M.) and 'Defamilisation of twenty-two countries: Its implications for the study of East Asian welfare regime', *Social Policy and Society* (2013) 12(3): 355–367 (with Yu, W.K.).

**Liam Foster** is a senior lecturer in social policy and social work at the University of Sheffield. His principal research interests include theories of ageing, pensions and funeral provision. Dr Foster is a member of the Social Policy Association Executive Committee and the National Institute for Social Care and Health Research Funding Committee. He will also become a Managing Editor of *Social Policy and Society* in January 2016. Recent articles include 'Active and successful aging: A European policy perspective', *Gerontologist* (2015) 55(1): 83–90 (with Walker, A.) and 'Financial planning and the reality and requirements of retirees with private pensions', *Journal of Retirement* (2015) 3(1): 115–127.

**Wai Kam (Sam) Yu** is an associate professor in the Department of Social Work at the Hong Kong Baptist University. He teaches social work and social policy. His research interests are social exclusion and welfare mix. His recent publications include 'The contributions of the studies of health care systems to the examination of the productivist welfare capitalism thesis', *Journal of Policy Practice* (2014) 13(4): 222–238 and 'Studying the health care systems in seven East Asian countries by the cluster analysis', *Development and Society* (2014) 43(1): 81–107.