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I want to thank all the people who have waited and supported me. I lost myself once in the global north and found myself once again. I spent one of the challenging and most growing days at the University of Vienna.

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Abstract

Care work, especially in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, is one of the much-discussed topics in Mongolia since childcare and other extended-care tasks shifted to the private sector, mainly women, due to the ongoing pandemic. Due to the rising number of Covid-19 cases, the government of Mongolia has decided to close public kindergartens for children under the age of four. Therefore, the effects of the anti-pandemic legislation included the increase in unemployment among women and the deterioration in the situation of many children, either through child poverty or through children being more exposed to domestic violence. Unfortunately, there is hardly any specific research on this, but this master's thesis attempts to shed light on the downsides of anti-pandemic legislation in Mongolia in preschool childcare based on a mixed-methods approach.

First, there is a quantifying comparison of data on the number of children required with the available public childcare places in Mongolia and the countries bordering Mongolia, Russia, China, and Kazakhstan. The qualitative method provided the framework for conducting nine in-depth interviews with parents of young children in Mongolia, demonstrating that the brunt of caring responsibilities for children, the elderly, and the household falls on women. In addition, the question of the social and economic environment of the respondents is raised. The result of the study shows that the anti-pandemic legislation has hit low-income groups harder economically and socially than higher earners. Middle-income caregivers have been able to place their crèche and preschool children in relatively expensive private childcare facilities. Due to the Mongolian government's anti-pandemic legislation, female unemployment has increased more than in China and Kazakhstan during Covid-19. In the long term, therefore, unemployment and inequality, in general, could increase because of this situation. Data is hardly available.

Care-Arbeit insbesondere im Kontext der Covid-19-Pandemie gehören zu den in der Mongolei viel diskutierten Themen, da aufgrund der anhaltenden Pandemie Kinderbetreuung und andere erweiterte Betreuungsaufgaben auf den privaten Bereich, hauptsächlich Frauen, abgewälzt wurden. Aufgrund der steigenden Zahl von Covid-19-Fällen hatte die Regierung der Mongolei beschlossen, öffentliche Kindergärten für Kinder unter vier Jahren zu sperren. Zu den Effekten der Anti-Pandemie-Gesetzgebung gehörte daher die Erhöhung der Arbeitslosigkeit von Frauen und die Verschlechterung der Situation vieler Kinder, sei es durch Kinderarmut, sei es, dass Kinder verstärkt häuslicher Gewalt ausgesetzt sind.

Dazu gibt es kaum gezielte Forschung, wobei jedoch in dieser Master-Arbeit versucht wird, auf Basis eines Mixed-Methods-Ansatzes Licht auf die Schattenseiten der Anti-Pandemie-Gesetzgebung in der Mongolei im Kontext der vorschulischen Kinderbetreuung zu werfen.

Zunächst erfolgt ein quantifizierender Vergleich von Daten über die aufgrund der Kinderzahl benötigten in Relation zu den vorhandenen öffentlichen Kinderbetreuungsplätzen in der Mongolei sowie in den an die Mongolei angrenzenden Ländern Russland, China und Kasachstan. Die qualitative Methode bildete den Rahmen für die Durchführung von neun Tiefeninterviews mit Eltern von jungen Kindern in der Mongolei, die aufzeigen, dass die Hauptlast der Betreuungsverantwortung für Kinder, ältere Personen und Haushalt Frauen zufällt. Darüber hinaus wird die Frage nach dem sozialen und wirtschaftlichen Umfeld der Befragten aufgeworfen. Das Ergebnis der Untersuchung zeigt, dass die Anti-Pandemie-Gesetzgebung die einkommensschwachen Schichten wirtschaftlich und sozial stärker getroffen hat als Besser-Verdienende. Betreuungspersonen mit Mittelschichtseinkommen waren in der Lage, ihre Kinder im Krippen und Vorschulalter in relativ kostspieligen privaten Betreuungseinrichtungen unterzubringen. Aufgrund der Anti-Pandemie-Gesetzgebung der mongolischen Regierung ist die Arbeitslosigkeit von Frauen während Covid-19 stärker gestiegen als in China und Kasachstan. Langfristig könnten daher Arbeitslosigkeit und Ungleichheit im Allgemeinen als Folge dieser Situation zunehmen. Daten kaum vorhanden.

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1. Introduction

COVID-19 has shown us how vital social protection and systems are to our society, as well as which of these systems do not work. During times of war, soldiers go to the battlefield. In this crisis, women stopped going to work and earn a living to return to their homes to protect their families, especially children and the elderly, who need care no matter whatever crises are present.

The UN Secretary-General has called the coronavirus the “most challenging crisis since World War II”, which might cause a recession with “no parallel in the recent past” (Lederer, 2020). COVID-19 affects all countries’ systems of medical care, social systems, and economic prosperity. The COVID-19 pandemic also left most countries questioning and revising their forms of governance. Mongolia is one of these countries struggling through the COVID-19 pandemic with a problematic social-economic situation for its citizens.

Mongolia’s drastic actions during the COVID-19 include evacuating and repatriating Mongolian civilians, such as the immediate repatriation of Mongolian students from the Chinese state quarantine zones. The government instituted and legitimized restrictions on the border between Mongolia and China due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, forced isolation of potential carriers of COVID-19 was authorized by the state. All educational institutions were closed, from kindergartens to universities, professional training centers, and the international children’s camps: “From January 27, 2020, to March 2, 2020, all public gatherings were cancelled. The President Cabinet intervened in all possible emergency action before there was any confirmed coronavirus case in Mongolia.” (Campi, 2020).

The first laboratory-confirmed case in Mongolia was detected on March 10, 2020. All possible contacts of infected people were tracked; all public businesses except grocery stores were closed. Domestic travel between cities and provinces, as well as all international flights, rail, and land travel were banned. Although the Mongolian government closed the border for two years, Mongolia has a high number of new COVID-19 cases every day (Munkhzul, 2021).

Mongolia is bordered by the People’s Republic of China and the Russian Federation. The Mongolian population is 3,278,290, and the population density in Mongolia is 2.0 per km² (5 people per mi²) (UN, 2021). After two years of “locking down” all schools, colleges, universities and kindergartens, the education system re-opened in September 2021.

However, children under four years are not allowed to attend public educational institutions anymore. This legislation was ratified because most state kindergartens have more than 40 children in a class. As

a result, public kindergartens in Mongolia cannot accept all children needing childcare. Children older than four years may attend a kindergarten based on their parents' request. However, until these orders are amended, all children under four are expected to stay at home (Uransolongo, 2021).

When a private kindergarten installs classes with less than 15 children, it can operate without restrictions. As a result of this anti-pandemic legislation in Mongolia and other countries facing neoliberal austerity policies and measures, many families worldwide are confronted with the challenge of balancing work and childcare.

In several countries, including Mongolia, the government measures to contain the spread of COVID-19 have mainly affected the service sector, such as retail, education, restaurants, bars, hospitality, tourism, and entertainment (UNDP, 2021). Women are a large proportion of service sector workers, and their income has decreased. Moreover, women's workload has increased, as they overwhelmingly face additional unpaid care work, such as providing care for children, people with disabilities and chronic diseases, and the elderly. Domestic work and childcare have increased following the closures of kindergartens, schools, and daycare centers. Due to traditional gender roles, women and girls are more likely than men to spend their time caring for others and providing educational support to children. The national time-use study shows that women in Mongolia spend 2.6 times more time per day on unpaid domestic work than men (273 minutes or nearly 4.5 hours). (ibid.)

1.1. Research questions

General research questions

How have families/women with children under the age of four been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in Mongolia when the government banned kindergartens for children of this age group?

Specific research questions

- How do the anti-pandemic legislations of the Mongolian government, such as not allowing children under four years old to attend kindergarten, affect parents' social and economic life? (Unemployment and economic issues of families; social participation and career outcomes)
- How do private kindergartens work? How much do public and private kindergartens differ regarding children under the age of four years? (Social class and inequality now and in the future)

- Why do families/women not protest the Mongolian government or its anti-pandemic legislation(s)?
(Traditional gender roles and the voices of women)

1.2. Personal connections to the topic

I am a Mongolian student; I am a mother and wife with a three-year-old child trying to live in Vienna under the name of a family member of a non-EU student. First, I tried to write about crises in Mongolia; I spent a semester on that topic and gave up because there was not enough data. The COVID-19 pandemic was ongoing – the world was in crisis, and things changed every morning.

My husband and my two-year-old child were going home to Mongolia during this time. We were quarantined in a hotel room for fourteen days. On the fourteenth day, when we were ready to go out, my daughter wore her winter jacket and leaned against the door; the authorities said we could not go out because some COVID-19 infected people were detected in this hotel. We would be relocated and had to stay in another hotel for another three days.

We waited a whole day in a locked room while it was getting dark; many police cars came to our hotel. We were watching it through the windows. Some people were screaming: "I do not want to go to some other place again, we are not positive and not infected, we just want to go home." Some came out of the room. We just shut the door and waited.

Surprisingly, I did not scream or revolt against what I did not want to do. I wanted to protect my child in any condition. We all knew there were many police; we knew we could not change the situation. Maybe we - my husband, child, and I – would be the first to leave the hotel. When we were out of the hotel, a loudspeaker said from a nearby car: Go to the first ambulance and be seated. You will be relocated and can leave after three days. It was 10:00 pm, when we came into a new hotel room somewhere else. From morning until that point, we did not have any food. We were all exhausted. What makes people exhausted is uncertainty. The last people of our hotel were relocated until 2:00 A.M., late into the night.

After four days in the new hotel, we still could not leave. When will they let us go? We did neither know what was happening nor who made the decisions. All the people we called and asked couldn't tell us how much longer we had to stay in quarantine. I gave some information about the situation for websites; the newspaper also answered some people's live videos on Facebook. People knowing about our situation from the information. After five days, we were released. We tested negative all these twenty-seven days when we had to remain in a room as a family. We did not have fresh air or any opportunity

to go out. I wrote once in my research diary: 'First night, I did not, cannot sleep. It was uncertain, and I was worried about my child. She had lost two or three kilos already. When the sun raised on the fifteenth day, I thought even in prison, people have the right to walk outside.'

We were not strongly affected if we compare ourselves with others; other people also travelled from Europe with us, such as a mother with a child like mine who was seven months pregnant. This mother was isolated in the room next to us with her child. The child had not eaten for a week. When night came, the child cried and did not stop because the child was hungry.

One night, I brought some food, which I had brought from Vienna for the trip, outside of her room. However, it was forbidden to contact anyone in any form. Even if they had a 24/7 camera in the hotel's corridor, I faced a risk if someone caught me. I waited until 02:00 A.M. and brought it to them. At least that night, they slept. Hungry people and starving children cannot sleep well

I interviewed mothers who were affected by Mongolia's extreme decisions during that time. I wanted to show how crisis theory implemented in Mongolia as a result from the COVID-19 pandemic. It occurred to me that I might be already doing a field study for my master thesis. However, I was going through a challenging situation with my baby. Nevertheless, I failed hard with my thesis topic.

After the quarantine in a hotel room, we were also quarantined at home for fourteen days. One photo went viral on Mongolian social media on the thirty-fourth day of the quarantine on January 20, 2020. A mother who just gave birth was transferred from the hospital to a different COVID-19 quarantine facility with the baby in her sleeper at -30C because she tested positive for COVID-19. As noted by news agencies in Mongolia, 'The video of the woman in an ambulance clutching her baby prompted fierce criticism, particularly as Mongolian tradition dictates new mothers should avoid the cold weather and cold food for the first month after birth.' (Press, 2021) Furthermore, as reported by Reuters, the '...(the) Video footage showed the patient, still wearing her nightgown and slippers, being relocated with her baby to a specialist quarantine facility run by Mongolia's National Center of Communicable Diseases.' (Staff, 2021)

After that night, around 5,000 people came to the main square outside the government building in the morning. In these demonstrations, people wore masks and respected social distancing by keeping a distance of 1.5 m² away from one another. Their first expression shouted from these streets and square: 'it is too much, too extreme, Government cannot do this to people, no matter how scary the COVID-19 is'.

My husband and I demonstrated on this day with other people alongside many pregnant women, young students, and older people. However, every group of people presented different issues under a motto. 'YOK оргон' which means the state's special commission should resign. As I remember, no one said, written in any form, or shouted: 'Government should resign.'

People living abroad and waiting to return home due to Mongolia's closed borders observed the situation from the live videos of the demonstration. At this demonstration, a number of people protested against the decision of the Mongolian state to close its borders. I also had a sign with phrases, such as 'open the borders, Mongolian people have the right to come home.' Many people had been in quarantine; family members who were sick or dying could not meet with their loved ones because of the anti-pandemic measures. There was later a photo exhibit of those affected by these measures and issues. Some people expressed themselves against the COVID-19 commission. In this newly implemented emergency commission, COVID-19 measures are elaborated and decided on behalf of the state. Some people have been affected by these decisions. For example, people were forbidden to leave the capital city for fourteen days. Nevertheless, as I remember and observed for my previous planned thesis, no one said: 'The government should resign.'

"It is rare for anti-government demonstrators to see their demands met after a single day of protest. Yet the crowds of Mongolians who braved the biting cold of their capital, Ulaanbaatar, calling for heads to roll because of the mistreatment of a hospital patient, got what they wanted—and more. Ukhnaagiin Khurelsukh, the prime minister, announced the resignation of his entire government. The joke all over Ulaanbaatar is that the prime minister's resignation shocked even the protesters," said a leading member of the ruling Mongolian People's Party (MPP). (Economist, 2021) 'However, far from a joking matter, this episode, along with other recent events, shows that Mongolia is bogged in the same old mire that has held back the country since it ended Russia's domination more than three decades ago and took up democracy. Politics has been turbulent, sometimes clownish. Corruption is widespread. And the mining industry, which dominates the economy, is still woefully mismanaged.'" (Economist, 2021)

The day after I heard the news about the new government, I wrote on my Facebook social feed wall: 'I was thinking that I am playing checkers, but they (particularly he) have been playing chess with the demonstrators'. (Research diary) Khurelsukh Ukhnaa resigned as the prime minister but later ran for president of Mongolia and won:

“Khurelsukh Ukhnaa of the Mongolian People's Party (MPP) looks to have scored the most significant victory in a presidential election in the 30 years since Mongolia's democratic revolution. With 99.7 percent of the vote reported, Khurelsukh had notched 68 percent of votes, making him the first candidate ever to receive more than two-thirds of the votes.” (Julian Dierkes, 2021)

Some big welfare decisions such as 300.000tugrug for every people of Mongolian population during the second lock-down, increasing children's money program from 30.000tugrug to 100.000tugrug during Covid-19 pandemic has affected the result of election as a welfare policy and ruling party's decision right before the president's election.

“The election capped a tumultuous six months in Mongolian politics. In January, protests against Mongolia's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic gained steam – and led to the abrupt resignation of then-Prime Minister Khurelsukh Ukhnaa. Even at the time, there was speculation that Khurelsukh was less interested in taking responsibility amid public criticism than in maneuvering himself into position to be the MPP candidate in the presidential election. Sure enough, that's exactly where he wound up.” (Julian Dierkes, 2021)

MPP has all possible power of parliament, so the ruling party decided to take chance to win the president election in every possible way. It was clear they do every possible action before the election, although the welfare population, most social dependent group of people did not criticize what is wrong or what is not ethical.

“Meanwhile, the MPP took advantage of its supermajority in the Mongolian parliament to pass constitutional amendments limiting presidents to a single term – which effectively eliminated incumbent President Battulga from running. Battulga did not take the change sitting down; he even attempted to outlaw the MPP, charging it with abuses of power, with the complicity of the military”. (Julian Dierkes, 2021)

After a semester of attempting to apply crisis theory to the political context of Mongolia, I gave up. I considered giving up on my topic and dropping out of my master's program only before the thesis phase. I was a full-time mother in the middle of a pandemic whose family situation was in transition. We did not only leave our home, but we also transitioned socially and financially. It was hard for my daughter's grandparents to take care of a child they had never seen before and who had never lived in Mongolia. I had to be in Mongolia with my family, and I went.

At that time, I also understood that motherhood is hard; I could not overcome even the pressures of my gender roles. After eight months, I thought about my thesis as a necessary topic for myself and my studies.

When I came to Vienna, I felt the hit of maternal guilt harder. At the same time, I was concentrated and could have a few productive hours, which has not happened in the last two to three years. My daughter could enroll in public kindergartens in the countryside, where my parents live, because of the government's anti-pandemic legislation. She attends a private kindergarten in the capital; her father takes her to kindergarten every morning. I wondered how many parents the financial opportunity have to access kindergarten education for their children and how many do not have that opportunity and have to choose other forms of childcare. I landed on this topic from my personal experiences.

Until this period of my life, I always said to myself: Gender is not the only reason or answer for every problem on this planet.

2. Methodology

In this thesis, I investigated how parents with children under the age of four have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in Mongolia, since the government has banned public kindergartens for children of this age group. From these outcomes, I also present how these measures affected and changed gender inequality during the COVID-19 pandemic. How have these changes affected mothers and families with children under five years? How can these outcomes influence future inequalities? How do governmental anti-pandemic legislations, such as not allowing children under four years attending public kindergarten affect the population in Mongolia? Many young parents lose their income(s), have to decide between childcare and work, or even have to separate from their children and send them to the countryside. Childcare and gender inequality are directly connected.

During my research, I observed the reality of gender equality in Mongolia. The philosophy of this research is interpretivism. As a Mongolian mother, I viewed and interpreted the everyday life subjectively through my own background. From December 2020 until August 2021, I was in Mongolia and wrote a research diary, as well as speaking with some of the interview partners. As Haraway once wrote: “We need the power of modern critical theories of how meanings and bodies get made, not in order to deny meanings and bodies, but in order to build meanings and bodies that have a chance for life” (Haraway, 1988, p. 580)

2.1. Research strategy and design

The presence and situation of the COVID-19 pandemic are new. Governments worldwide reacted differently to the pandemic; however, each country made their decisions for the first time. Most governments are not calculating these decisions based on their impacts on gender equality or social outcomes. Therefore, this research strategy should be experimental. Based on the anti-pandemic legislation of the Mongolian government, this thesis highlights the effect on the gender equality of certain anti-pandemic legislation. This research followed the cause-and-effect strategy. Even though the situation was new, the pandemic was ongoing. In addition, academic literature and reliable data on the topic were insufficient. “Research is never free from ideologies or political beliefs. In a global frame, marginalized and oppressed people are not just oppressed by social and political but also by academic systems.” (Engelhart, 2020) This thesis tried to fill the gap between current research on the COVID-19 pandemic and gender equality globally through the lens and perspectives of Mongolian gender inequality and childcare during the COVID-19 pandemic. I hope this research has an impact on the situation or future outcomes of gender equity in Mongolia.

Applied Methods

This master thesis aims to explore and highlight how gender equality and childcare are interconnected and how parents of children under four years old are affected. In the big picture, this topic should be targeted and researched alongside data on its economic outcomes, such as unemployment rates and childcare services. In a more specific context, it must be defined by the parents who are affected or not affected by the anti-pandemic legislation during the COVID-19 pandemic. From these two perspectives of trying to achieve the result and answer the question, I used a mixed method model. Mixed method is a combination of qualitative methods and quantitative methods.

“Mixed methods research is a research design with philosophical assumptions as well as methods of inquiry. As a methodology, it involves philosophical assumptions that guide the direction of the collection and analysis and the mixture of qualitative and quantitative approaches to many phases of the research process. As a method, it focuses on collecting, analyzing, and mixing both qualitative and quantitative data in a single study or series of studies. Its central premise is that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches, in combination, provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone.” (John W.Craswell, 2008, p. 364)

2.2. Qualitative method Samples & Sampling

I conducted eight semi-structured and in-depth interviews with mothers/families and parents with children under four years who cannot attend public kindergarten because of the anti-pandemic legislation of the Mongolian government. The second set of interview partners were parents with children under four years old attending a private kindergarten. The Mongolian government decided that private kindergartens have different regulations from public ones for attending children. When a private kindergarten is in good condition and admits no more than 15 children to a class, it can run without restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Interview partners were chosen from one of the largest Facebook groups for parents on Mongolian social media. I have been a member of these social media groups for over three years. I observed reactions to the anti-pandemic legislation and asked for interview partners who posted about the anti-pandemic legislation or responded to my request ads to be interviewed about the pandemic measures. Only three of my interview participants were chosen through this approach. Afterwards, these three participants gave me information about other possible candidates to interview. The snowballing method was unplanned, although it happened while I was looking for interview partners.

All of the interview partners were 26 to 38 years old. Five interview partners were female, and four interview partners were male. All participants have a child or children with at least one child under four years old. The family types of the interview partners were different; some of them are married, single, and/or divorced.

One of the interesting observations was that most of the respondents were university-educated or studied abroad and wanted to participate in the study or help the researcher. What was hard to achieve was reaching parents with low education levels or those severely affected by the anti-pandemic legislation. Even though some saw the ad to take part in the interviews, they did not take part or did not have interest to discuss their situation. These two responses to the research and their beliefs in their own voice were highly differentiated during the interviews.

The interviewees discussed their partnership, social relationships, and independence during the COVID-19 pandemic. Are there any issues or advantages resulting from the anti-pandemic legislation of the Mongolian government connected with their decisions? The qualitative interviews uncovered and defined further specific information about the situation, and it helped me understand the research problem more deeply.

Nearly all the interviews were held online via video call in the Mongolian language. One of the interviews was conducted in a written form via Facebook chat because the participant wanted to answer the questions in the chat; they did not want to respond through a video call or another format. The online platform was chosen due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the geographic distance between the interview partners and me. Most interview participants live in the capital city of Mongolia. Two of the participants live near the border. One of the participants lives in the countryside.

The interviewees share only one similarity; all of them have a child or children. From their gender and family differences, I researched and highlighted these parents' different situations and conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

I translated all nine interviews by myself because my mother tongue is Mongolian, and all the interview partners are Mongolian.

2.3. Quantitative method

In this thesis, I analyzed the Mongolian female unemployment rate and national childcare policies in comparison to findings in the Russian Federation, Kazakhstan, and the Republic of China. National data and statistics can show policy and statistical changes throughout the years of post-socialism. I summarized these statistical findings from the ILO, WHO, and each country's national statistical agencies.

The second part of the quantitative analysis of this thesis collected the number of kindergartens and number of children enrolled in kindergartens from 1990 to 2020. Increases or declines of these figures can also highlight social changes and gender equality in Mongolia over the last 30 years.

At the end of the quantitative data analysis, I calculated and compared the correlation between the female unemployment rate and the number of pre-schools or number of children attending pre-schools in all four countries. The availability of childcare and kindergartens are one of the biggest obstacles or advantages for caregivers and parents to balance gender equality. To show or to see how these numbers correlate to one another is one of the main objectives of this quantitative data analysis on highlighting and measuring gender equality in Mongolia.

These findings show how the state's care budget, especially the number of public pre-schools, decreases the female unemployment rate or not and how these two indexes correlate. Through the

difference between these countries, I highlight the similarities of the challenges and differences between each country during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Key literature and secondary data on the impact of COVID-19 on women, girls, and their families in Mongolia were reviewed to describe the situation in detail. The main findings and statistics from Mongolian governmental and non-governmental organizational surveys and research were used as secondary data.

Significance

Based on my research, I seek to determine how anti-pandemic legislation affects the class difference between parents who have children and can or cannot afford private kindergartens. My research analyzes in which way and whether these class differences have deepened or changed gender equality through welfare state policies implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ethical issues

As a Mongolian mother with a three-year-old child, my research connects and leads to my personal experience. However, I can see things from an outsider's perspective because I have lived outside Mongolia for the last seven years and conducted research as an outsider observer with an insider's perspective. Therefore, this thesis does not include any ethical issues from the writer.

Challenges

The challenge in conducting this research was the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. I led all the interviews online. I also observed the participants to the best of my abilities on the video calls, although these interviews could not be conducted in person. However, what was arising from this challenge was also intriguing. Interview partners contacted me again through Facebook messenger and explained their situation. It was a little strange, and at the same time, a good feeling that no one asked about these things from the interview partners: many interviewees wanted to express their feelings about the topic or their decisions.

The second challenge was finding interview partners. It was important to create space for my interview participants to be interviewed and heard as they feel comfortable and confident to express themselves with their own voices. I posted online about the topic of my thesis and searched for interview partners. I received responses exclusively from mothers with high education levels. I use the term

“educated” to indicate that they had studied abroad or conducted research during university studies and graduate degree programs. I did not find anybody who was not college-educated in these online-groups. I asked three people to give me an interview about their situation because they were not college-educated or working. I even had to pay a small amount of money to buy mobile internet data for a participant in my interview. These participants do not believe in research and do not believe their voice is heard. It was hard to reach communities and individuals most affected by the state’s policies and decisions during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. It showed me the privilege of who can think about or consider the situation and who must survive without a voice or considerations about the situation.

The last challenge was the interview results. They were so different from what I expected. The findings were different from what I planned for my thesis. It was not only a challenge, but a new opening for me. Before the interviews were conducted, I had realized that the interview dynamic was from an outsider’s perspective, similar to a researcher from the global north coming to Mongolia. Then I balanced my observation with the findings from the interview transcripts about the situation and reflected on my process. I saw and took things different than the interview partners. At this point, I remembered Smith's (2012) critique: The person positioned as an outsider must behave respectfully and inclusively to prevent the further marginalization of the research subjects through the researcher.

Closing Remarks on Methodology

Gender equality, female un- and underemployment, and their relation to the availability of childcare institutions are under-researched in Mongolia; there is an even bigger research gap regarding the outcomes and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We cannot measure gender equality only through quantitative analysis. It has become mainstream to choose and have agency over one’s gender identity. For example, during my studies in the MA program, most gender studies seminars ask for one’s name and gender. They do not assume one’s gender identity reveals itself based on what people wear or how they behave. Students’ gender is defined as they choose in these seminars and classes. States, the research falls short of the (“queer”) ideal of gender equality that I am pursuing. Accordingly, if I would do this research-based solely on the data collected by agencies or states, such as passports or documents, this research cannot define gender equality. Therefore, I feel compelled to approach my question also qualitatively.

Therefore, in the future, I hope for further research and findings on gender equality and COVID-19 from international agencies, such as UNICEF, ILO, or World Bank and academic institutions.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1. Guiding Frameworks

For the theoretical basis of this thesis, I will apply two core frameworks: welfare state theory and the gender regime concept. I will revise the welfare state theory from Esping-Andersen and his following works about the welfare state and gender. Furthermore, the contrasting perspectives will be from the leading scholars of the gender regime concept, Sylvia Walby and Mary Daly. These two frameworks will help me understand and find a balancing point to make my research. Basically, these are contrasting perspectives; one critiques the other theory from the beginning, but these two backgrounds have shared themes, such as gender inequality and care work from different angles. In the end, I will also highlight my insights into gender inequality with these two opposing but complementary frameworks. Both perspectives have agreed that “equity is *sine qua non* for a workable remodelling of our society” (Esping-Andersen, 2009, p. 3).

3.2. History of the welfare state

Welfare state theory originates from the German concept of “Wohlfahrtsstaat” in the late 19th to early 20th century as a system of state responsibility for social welfare. Otto von Bismarck enacted the first occurrence of disability insurance in the German Reich in 1883 (Burszta, 2013). All Western models of welfare state (from Bismarck’s system to Beveridge) are modeled on the “breadwinner/housewife”-model (constructing welfare benefits of women as derivating from husbands if not fathers, thus re/producing “classic” gender roles). That’s a main difference to “socialist” models which construct social claims “gender neutral” From a comparative perspective, three different paths to welfare consolidation were established:

1. "Autocratic legacy": Germany and Austria were among the first countries to introduce a welfare system under autocratic rule
2. Liberal and conservative government pacts (United Kingdom, Sweden, Denmark)
3. Catholic paternalism (Belgium, the Netherlands) (Ehl, 2013)

A British economist, lawyer, and founder of the modern British welfare state, William Beveridge introduced the Beveridge curve on unemployment and the state's role. Beveridge Report also elaborates on unemployment and social protections, such as a state can hold unemployment until 3%, and the state should regulate all employment sectors because individuals cannot respond fully to the unemployment

and work demand (H.Beveridge, 2014). Economics should plan; the state and market have a total supply or willingness when some work's demand rise or falls. Beveridge wrote in 1942 about 'the welfare state's background, a comprehensive program of social reform directed at dealing not only with Want but with the four other giant evils of Disease, Ignorance, Squalor and Idleness' (Ehl, 2013, p. 13).

Furthermore, the modern welfare state became institutionalized in the UK: 'In 1948, The National Assistance Act passed by the English government, considered a landmark often referred to as the "modern welfare state" because of its universal philosophy and services covering the whole social security scheme, e.g. unemployment, illness, maternity, widowhood, old-age benefits, and funeral grants' (Burszta, 2013, p. 12).

European countries and most states worldwide are in the process of building their social protection and welfare state. Through socialism, capitalism and market-ruled times, states had different types of social protection resulting from the political parties, hegemony, or policy continuity. However, there remains an absence of a clear definition of the welfare state, and it is one of the most ambiguously used terms in contemporary politics. Welfare state categories were introduced in the "Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism", an influential work by Esping-Andersen, who identified different historical "welfare state-regimes": 1. Liberal type regime; 2. Conservative-corporatist type regime; and 3. Social democratic type of regime.

Welfare State- Esping-Andersen

Gosta Esping-Andersen wrote about the welfare state from 1990 until now. The notion and concept of the welfare state was and continues to be implemented in various areas and different regimes throughout its historical development. From a theoretical perspective, Esping-Andersen's welfare state typology had been grounded not only in academia but also in policy implementation and state mechanisms. Although this thesis applies the welfare state as a theoretical framework, it also has to be used and taken into consideration to reflect on social protection during times of risk and instability, such as a pandemic.

In the welfare state theory, Esping-Andersen trying to convince the economic outcome of state protection through certain stages of human life. The welfare state's institutions protect individuals and the social system during conflict and crises. As raised by Briggs (1961), the welfare state was ideologically created against inequality resulting from modernization and capitalism as an attempt to protect the population from insecurity during their lifetime:

“A welfare state is a state in which organized power is deliberately used (through politics and administration) in an effort to modify the play of the market forces in at least three directions - first, by guaranteeing individuals and families a minimum income irrespective of the market value of their work or their property; - second, by narrowing the extent of insecurity by enabling individuals and families to meet certain "social contingencies" (for example, sickness, old age and unemployment) which lead otherwise to individual and family crisis; and – third, by ensuring that all citizens without distinction of status or class are offered the best standards available in relation to a certain agreed range of social services. The most important three aspects of the welfare state are: minimum income, social contingencies (for example: sickness, old age and unemployment), social services such as health care, child and elderly care." (Briggs, 1961; quoted in (Esping-Andersen, 2009, p. 6)

According to Esping-Andersen, access to support during these stages of life and social inequalities are a key: 'From a life-cycle perspective, the welfare state only really gains prominence when we are very young or old, or when we fall on bad luck. These three welfare pillars have reciprocal effects on each other. If the market fails, we will seek recourse in either the family or government' (Esping-Andersen, 2009, p. 79). During the pandemic, the young or old are not the only ones who face vulnerability, but all society is at risk.

From the universalism and social role to the social protection through the human life's crises is a long and challenging journey. Within the country and throughout the world, society is challenged by inequality, especially unemployment after the financial crises through the knowledge economy and the COVID-19 pandemic. The welfare state is one of the institutional practices for equality and broadly implemented social protection in the world. As written in Marshal's letter, 'Equality of status is more important than equality of income.' (Marshal, 1996: 33)

The Incomplete Revolution

Esping-Andersen wrote in his book, “The Incomplete Revolution”, about the three main concerns that world is currently facing. The book’s idea from Claudia Goldin's (2006) ‘The quiet revolution’ of women's roles and how this revolution rises and affects the welfare state and vice-versa. Esping-Andersen criticizes that society is in the process of transforming and does not take time to adapt to it; although many social science scholars, especially feminist scholars, cannot see the entire change, one can see only the changes that affect gender inequality.

Based on the research of “The Incomplete Revolution”, this thesis focuses on how global social changes influence not only gender but female employment inequality due to motherhood and unemployment. Esping-Anderson mentioned some of the factors and analyzed them with welfare state

institutions, as well as analyzed how countries can attain gender equality for women or reconsiders what is not included in the welfare state until now.

The main factors influencing female employment inequality are: 'The effect depends on the distribution of women across household types, in particular concerning couple units relative to single-person (and lone mother) household' (Esping-Andersen, 2009, p. 62). Some research by Maitre, 2003 and Esping-Andersen, 2007 shows that single-parent households drive inequality more significantly, such as in the USA. However, inequality is weaker in Scandinavian countries because of the welfare state's institution and ideology. (Esping-Andersen, *The Incomplete Revolution*, 2009) Female employment can be influenced not only by family or partnership but also by education, race, class, or other factors.

Some social markers and factors intersect and double for one woman. What if the research only analyzes rising employment among the institutional relations and lone mothers working factors are increasing, and the research concluded as it can be a good influence on the gender inequality? From this point would be 'wives' contribution produce inequality.' (Esping-Andersen, 2009, p. 63). If the research only compares the numbers of working persons, they do not consider single mothers and wives who are not working due to family commitments; these numbers or statistics could not measure and indicate gender inequality only with employment or unemployment rate. These inequalities multiply for women with additional social factors (education, race, class, etc.) and put them at risk during economic crisis:

"Yet, when we examine year-by-year changes in female employment, it is noticeable how women in general, and less educated women in particular, are vulnerable to economic slowdowns... One way to interpret this is that women coupled with low-wage men (usually low-skilled women) are disproportionately vulnerable to unemployment (first fired, first hired). Once again, we see the repercussions of assortative mating" (Esping-Andersen, 2009, p. 65)

Partnership plays a critical role regarding gender and social inequality as Esping-Anderson puts it:

"One of the main factors is 'partnership formation in the broader sense. On the one hand, as already discussed, marital selection in terms of human capital attributes can have substantial effects. On the other hand, there are no doubt selection mechanisms behind the dynamics of coupling and uncoupling. Those who remain single, or become so, are not necessarily similar to those who form couples. Therefore, the overall effect of partnering is difficult to predict. We would expect that singlehood is more predominant among women seriously dedicated to careers, or among women who face poor marriage markets. As mentioned, divorce and lone motherhood are in some countries an upper-class affair; in other biased towards the bottom' (Esping-Andersen, 2009, p. 66).

However, income and wealth do not leave women protected from social and gendered inequality:

“But we also see that women married to high-income men are more likely to be part-timers while those married to low-wage men are more likely to be full-timers. This certainly suggests the presence of compensatory strategies that should weaken any inequalitarian impulses that may come from homogamy and from dual-earnership”. (Esping-Andersen, 2009, p. 68).

Investing in Children

Furthermore, access to education and human rights for children also alleviates gender and intergenerational inequalities. As elaborated by Esping-Anderson, childhood education and skill-building are key to economic and social development: 'Remedying skill deficiencies among adults is, however, difficult, and costly. The real objective must, accordingly, be to ensure that the coming generation will possess the skills that meet the demands of the knowledge economy' (Esping-Andersen, 2009, p. 71). In addition, Esping-Anderson acknowledges the importance and roles of the family:

‘The challenge is so much the greater when we recognize that many of the new demographic trends associated with women's new roles contribute additionally to inequality. The life chances of children are affected when lone motherhood is biased towards the bottom of society while high earning dual-career couples are concentrated in the upper half of the income distribution. To begin with, widening income inequalities affect the resources that parents can mobilize to invest in their children's future' (Esping-Andersen, 2009, p. 71).

Inequality is one of the biggest challenges, across all economic systems, especially in capitalist regimes. According to Esping-Anderson, investing in childhood health and wellbeing is core to maintaining an equal and thriving socio-economic system: 'Investing well in our children will yield very large returns both for individuals' life chances and for society at large. Any serious consideration of equality and efficiency must realize that children are a positive collective good' (Esping-Andersen, 2009, p. 115). Through this support, most of the considerations about equality and efficiency will be solved by the children and future generations' abilities. Therefore, substantial investment in children can be a good opportunity for families and society.

In Esping-Andersen's work “The Incomplete Revolution”, he writes about child poverty and inequality while highlighting the future prognosis on how it will affect marginalized groups. The work also elaborates on how society produces inequality and how it should be overcome. Esping-Andersen's work mentions and discusses inequality through Pierre Bourdieu's explanation on 'the school milieu is

inherently biased in favour of a middle-class culture that unintentionally penalizes children from lower social strata' (Esping-Andersen, 2009, p. 122). Esping-Anderson concludes that:

Education alone is not enough.

‘What is now firmly understood is that education systems, no matter how progressive and egalitarian in design, are institutionally ill-equipped to create equality. Pierre Bourdieu (1977) has provided one explanation, namely that the school milieu is inherently biased in favour of a middle-class culture that unintentionally penalizes children from lower social strata’ (Esping-Andersen, 2009, p. 113).

In last few years coming out a new convincing, powerful explanation. ‘Grounded in developmental psychology, the argument is that the crucial cognitive and behavioural foundations for learning are cemented very early in childhood. What occurs in the pre-school ages is fundamental for children's ability and motivation to learn when they subsequently embark on formal education” (Esping-Andersen, 2009, p. 113). However, Esping-Anderson elaborates that the role of the family is crucial support: 'The logical conclusion is that we should centre our attention more on what happens within the family than on education policy' (Esping-Andersen, 2009, p. 113).

A remedy against inequality would be education and skills. 'There are two basic 'efficiency' reasons why we need to ensure minimal inequality of skills and human-capital. The first is demographic. Due to prolonged low fertility the coming youth cohorts are, and will continue to be, very small... The second reason has to do with the rapidly rising skill requirements in the knowledge-intensive economy' (Esping-Andersen, p. 114). The roles and resources of the family contribute to this process:

‘We must distinguish three kinds of family effects: the 'money' effect, the 'time investment' effect, and the 'learning culture' effect. An interesting aspect of these is that they do not necessarily coincide: the rich are not necessarily those who dedicate most time or stimulation to their children; schoolteachers earn very little, but they read books’ (Esping-Andersen, p. 122).

In the research section of this thesis, I will elaborate on these effects in more detail on COVID-19 and gender inequality in Mongolia.

3.3. Gender Regime Concept

After Esping-Andersen’s welfare regime was introduced and implemented in some countries, the theory of gender regime concept was grounded in the early 1990s as a critical feminist reference to the welfare regime theory. (Betzelt, 2007) At the beginning of Esping-Andersen’s idea, the gender regime

concept was seen as an opportunity to equal labour participation from both genders and increase the number of the female workforce. Moreover, while the welfare state regulation was developed, the gender regime concept also widened the frame of the research. It included state institutions and non-state actors in many other fields. The gender regime concept broadened the research field and was used in comparative studies (Betzelt, 2007). The concept also clarifies the interdependencies between politically mediated gender relations and social practices that cannot be fully explained by the welfare regime (Betzelt, 2007). This concept also serves as a critique of the breadwinner-housewife model which is re/produced by the western welfare model. Some people, such as single mothers, are left out of the welfare regime concept. Gender regime concepts critique the Esping-Andersen model: In the backdrop of Esping-Andersen's notion of the welfare state, there are three groups of countries where welfare state institutions or ideologies are implemented. Out of these three groups, many countries and individuals were excluded from the welfare system.

Nancy Fraser

Nancy Fraser critiques the welfare state theory from a viewpoint of social justice (Marx, Sen) through the two essential theoretical elements of socio-economic redistribution (Umverteilung) and the cultural dimension of recognition (Anerkennung) (Betzelt, 2007). Fraser argues this point based on increasing gender inequality due to class and ethnicity between women. From this, Fraser formulated a “universal care work” model. In this model, both genders have to be equally involved. Men and women should earn an equal wage in every position and do care work equally. To meet this aim, welfare institutions should restructure their system to ensure gender equality, not double the burden on one gender but focus on equality more than historical structure. (Fraser, 1997)

Nancy Fraser wendet sich dabei der wachsenden Ungleichheit zwischen Frauen entlang schicht- und ethnizitätsspezifischer Komponenten zu, die mit einer sozialstaatlich flankierten Vermarktlichung von Betreuungsarbeit verbunden ist. Ausgehend von der Kritik an Erwerbszentrierung und ungleicher Arbeitsteilung werden die normativen Grundlagen geschlechtergerechter Wohlfahrtsstaaten diskutiert (Betzelt, 2007, p. 10).

Fraser concludes that both genders should do care work and paid work equally in every form of society. Some states have been trying to apply this strategy, such as paternal leave in certain welfare states. Although, it cannot count on at least a beginning of structure change because most states have already built their social protection system. Moreover, they cannot get out of their comfort zone to

implement new forms of social welfare during the challenging times of the COVID-19 pandemic. As every country faces some form of economic difficulties and women are confronted with the situation of their state, society, family, and gender, they are forced to perform established sets of gender roles and gender relations. However, gender equity and care work are not only beneficial for society; economic and social care should be valued at every stage. “Care is an essential part of life; it grows people, nourishes people, and no one can live without it (Federici, 2012; Puig de la Bellacasa & Maria, 2017; Tronto, 2007). It is the effective and material work that ensures we continue to exist – in the day to day as well as over generations” (Fraser, 2016)

Why Gender?

In her late work *Gender, Capital, and Care* (2021), Fraser discusses and elaborates on care crises and how it affects gender relations and society. Fraser applies her argument through the history of the capitalist system and is a new contribution to the works of the gender regime scholars. Prior to this publication, the gender regime concept was not considered a theory because of the lack of historical research. In this late work, Fraser criticized the two eras of capitalism and how it has affected women and how they changed their idea of reproduction to production work. The capitalist system helped to spread the male breadwinner model but did not resolve structural gender inequalities and challenges. Capitalism also intensifies male dominance. It changed through time for the women at a certain point, but men’s roles and power were not challenged because they were considered the drivers of the workforce and economic production.

Based on the crisis of care and society, Fraser argues that the care crisis contributes to economic and environmental problems. However, these challenges could be a fundamental change or point to overcome the care crisis. Fraser explains that the connection between the welfare state and social protection policy has not solved these social, economic, and environmental problems. In order to prove her point, Fraser uses care work and world systems theory. The global south has turned into a care exporter, with a high number of care workers to the global north, which is considered a core region, where ethnicities and classed women have been doing care work. Care work supply and the problem-solving system function the same as a world system theory and would become the same result as a raw material export. However, care workers are different from raw materials because they also have their own families and need care. In the global south, family members whose parents are exported as a care workforce rely on care work from low-income people or marginalized communities in their region. The market for care work

functions in the same continuity in the global north and south. However, the structures and understanding of care change with this core-periphery system and affects our future generations in many destructive ways. If some states resolved their care gap with the public care system or financialized methods, states – in particular, low-income states from the global south – are at risk of further rising debts. Furthermore, it brings such players as the IMF into a prominent role.

Fraser finishes her latest work with the following question. “What can replace the two-earner family model?” Moreover, answered with such words: ‘World is far from solving this problem, although globally society should recognize the problem and begin to search for the answer, not a fire extinguisher.’ (Fraser, 2021) ‘Contradiction of Capitalism Care deficit is an expression of capitalism’s social contradiction.’ (Fraser, *Capitalism’s Crisis of Care*, 2016)

According to Fraser (2021), there are three eras of care in the capitalist system: the era of separate spheres, the family wage, and the two-earner family. Fraser takes arguments in every era. For example, in the separate spheres era, children and females work for a small amount of money for the industry. The capitalist system was not entirely responsible for that era and banned child labor and women with children. After this era, a capitalist system supported ‘the family’ with the male breadwinner model, which produced male dominance in society. In the two-earner family era, the financialized capitalist system exacerbates the conflict between economic production and social reproduction for the final word. This era also supported male dominance and established the model of ‘the family’.

In addition, there are three struggles of the capitalist era in recent times: social struggle, class struggle, and boundary struggles. (Fraser, 2021) As she writes, capitalism takes care like a ‘free rides on’. ‘Activities of provisioning, caregiving and interaction that produce and maintain social bonds, although it accords them no monetized value and treats them as if they were free.’ (Fraser, 1997)

Fraser highlights the new form of neo-colonization through care. Fraser (2018) defines expropriation as “domination unmediated by a wage contract” (p. 4). Expropriation has long been seen as a condition of capitalism subjecting “unfree, dependent, and unwaged labour” (Fraser, 2018, p. 4), correlating with the colour line and through slavery, colonization and neo-colonization (Alexander, 1979; Fraser, 2018; Robinson, 2000). Based on these arguments, Fraser (2016) understands social reproduction and colonization and slavery as “background conditions” of capitalism (p. 101), and the expropriation of such enables the other “ex”- exploitation of labour.

3.4. Gender and the welfare state - Mary Daly and Katherine Rake

In their book *Gender and the Welfare State*, Mary Daly and Katherine Rake argue about welfare's influence on gender equality from theoretical and statistical perspectives. More specifically, they demonstrate that the welfare state affects gender relations. Daly and Rake argue that the welfare state and gender incorporate 'the material, normative, and behavioural elements correlated with power relations' (Rake M. D., 2003, p. 3). On a macro scale, these things are connected and influence one another. One of Daly and Rake's main arguments is that the welfare states influence social relations and social norms with materialistic redistributions and changing the behavioral aspect of the individual, and, eventually, changing society's behavior for purpose. They also mentioned social relations with the social expectation and how these things have been produced by the welfare state or affected by the welfare system. (Rake M. D., 2003)

In addition, they demonstrate that the welfare state's core arguments and research are instructed on quantitative data from many countries, and it does not include specific things or results. Scholars used the selected big data and proved points, mainly before the research already pointed or aimed as a goal to achieve (Rake M. D., 2003). In most comparative studies, scholars take many countries to focus on measures of welfare state activity or a few countries and research a specific country as a case study. Against this foreground, her book uses a middle comparative method between 'highly quantitative (many countries, few variables) and the highly qualitative (few countries, many variables) approaches' (Rake M. D., p. 5)

Daly & Rake questioned the gender relations in the welfare state system with care, work and welfare. 'Care' has been analyzed from social and economic conditions in this work. Also, their work highlights care as receiving and providing, which should be considered equal in state welfare systems. Daly & Rake (2003) also analyze how care across diverse institutions, from family structures to public care sectors and other forms of care provided and received by state welfare institutions, affect gender relations.

In their book, "work" is defined as every productive activity, paid work and unpaid workarounds, and welfare. "Welfare" has been shown as the central concept in this work, affecting the time, money, and opportunity of people and system, how welfare states have been producing social relations and affecting the family level and individual level. Daly & Rake (2003) display how these welfare state countries generate the social expectations and mechanisms through working conditions, access to the labour market or labour legislation produced in these welfare states (Betzelt, 2007).

Gender relations contribute three core components to the welfare state:

- Resources: ‘Individually available goods and skills (capacities); this includes time and opportunities; The way in which (e.g. time and financial) resources are combined is particularly important for the gender analysis. To summarize, our framework considers the welfare state as a (re)distributor of money, time and opportunities as they play out across the life course’ (Rake M. D., 2003, p. 41).
- Social roles: ‘norms and behavior provided by social codes for women and men; this also includes alternative roles provided for by the welfare state and the associated positive and negative sanctions.’ (ibid)
- Power relations: ‘close connection between roles and power relations; the welfare state influences the power resources between the sexes and their distribution, e.g. through taxation, the system of social security.’ (Betzelt, 2007, p. 14)

Daly& Rake (2003) also further elaborated their argument on gender relations and inequalities with data from eight welfare state institutions and statistics: “Women’s location on the periphery of the economic order or in a mediated relationship with the state can be created and reinforced by the mechanisms used to transfer income. Finally, it is important to scrutinize the privilege attached to particular family forms and conversely, identify those family types (lone parents, cohabitants, same sex couples) that are excluded from provision” (Rake M. D., 2003, p. 95). *For example, women who have children within a cohabiting relationship may not be offered protection equivalent to that of their married peers, affecting their claims on an ex-partner’s current income or their contribution to state or occupational pensions.* (Rake M. D., 2003, p. 189) (from notes of the book)

3.5. Care and Welfare

As noted by Daly and Lewis (2002), academic literature on care is often divided between lived experiences and policy: ‘Running a risk of oversimplification, one could say that care has had two main currencies in the literature: as a concept utilized to interrogate and account for the life experiences of women, and as a tool for the analysis of social policy’ (Daly and Lewis 2002). In addition, these social policies also reveal social and gendered underpinnings: ‘In the former guise, the concept draws attention to the material and ideological processes that make up care and at the same time confirm women in the

social role of care givers. Care has been identified as work with a woman's face' (Rake M. D., 2003, p. 49).

Daly and Rake (2003) also note that care work extends beyond the role and influence of the state: 'The political economy of care extends beyond public provision. While the state may provide supports and services and regulate the conditions under which care is undertaken in the public realm, most care is provided informally in families and communities and has costs attaching to it (even if these are not always visible)' (Rake M. D., 2003, p. 49).

- Monetary and social security benefits, such as cash payments, credits for benefit purposes, tax allowances. These compensate people financially for either the provision of care or the costs incurred in requiring care.
- Employment-related measures, such as paid and unpaid leaves, career breaks, severance pay, flexitime, reduction of working time. Time and income compensation for earnings lost are the main 'goods' conferred by these provisions.
- Benefits or services provided in kind, such as home helps and other community-based support services, childcare places, residential places for adults and children, and so forth. These provide care directly, thereby substituting for private provision.
- Incentives for provision provided outside the state, such as subsidies towards costs, vouchers for domestic employment, and vouchers for childcare.

These resources and criteria also contribute to a complex understanding and structures of care: 'These influence the supply of care and have a direct effect in shifting the locus of care. Taking children first, the two measures most telling of how public policies treat care are parental, as distinct from maternity, leave and public childcare facilities' (Rake M. D., 2003, p. 51).

Daly and Rake highlight the research on the welfare state and its successes or advantages resulting from welfare institution(s) in eight selected countries. They are compared and analyzed while emphasizing each country's institutions unique qualities, which should also be considered in this research:

In terms of the range of implications of caring, existing work suggests that caring has two possible effects (Jenson and Jacobzone 2000). In the first instance there is a substitution effect, whereby time devoted to informal care reduces labour market participation, either by a complete withdrawal or by a reduction in hours. The second is an income effect, caused by income forgone due to investment in caring work which is either unremunerated or offers only a low level of financial

compensation. In seeking the financial implications of caring, therefore, we are especially interested in two sets of effects: chances for participation in employment and the effect on income' (Rake M. D., 2003, p. 58).

First, they may protect the interface between the risks associated with family-related activities-for example, that of motherhood. Second, they affect the conditions under which care is carried out, including the resources associated with it, by influencing whether the work is paid or not...

Thirdly, welfare states' political engagement with care centres on how they frame the normative environment. It may also be the case that her or his needs are not considered by policy or are overshadowed by those of the care receiver (who is generally regarded as being in a more vulnerable position). One can see how policy favours one set of interests over another. (Rake M. D., 2003, p. 67)

This has huge implications for the power relations involved in care, and usually acts to reinforce the power of the care giver or the care receiver (Daly 2002). A further political issue is the question of who should care. (Rake M. D., 2003, p. 67)

Sylvia Walby

One of the leading scholars of gender regimes, Sylvia Walby rejects the notion that the family is the foundation of gender relations. It underestimates the significance of social practices wider than the family in shaping gender relations. Walby (2020) argues that gender is shaped by the economy, polity, violence, and civil society, the family is present in her gender regime model, but its influence and presence are spread across institutional domains:

"The practices traditionally associated with a concept of the family are not ignored but rather dispersed across four domains for analysis: care-work in the economy, sexuality in civil society, the governance of reproduction in the polity, and domestic violence in violence. This permits the theorization of these practices as variably in the domestic or public rather than conflating them" (Walby, 2020, p. 418).

Walby presents and applies her work as a theoretical background on gender, society, economy, and the state on varieties of gender regimes, gender for modernization, and the development of capitalism. (Walby, 2020) Feminist theory is often missing in creating economic and social change or feminist theorists ignore the macro level and are more concentrated on specific socio-economic case studies.

Walby differentiates gender regimes into two levels: the "domestic" and "public" gender regime. (Walby, 2020) Different forms of domestic and public gender relations exist in each of the three domains and the system. They emphasize that the degree of gender inequality (as an outcome of gender regime)

does not necessarily correspond to the structure of a gender regime; this is instead an empirical question. For example, a predominantly “public” gender regime is an indicator, such as high female labour force participation – not automatically be more egalitarian than a more “domestic” gender regime with lower labour force participation. There is significant wage inequality between women and men. (Betzelt, 2007)

“Gender regime theory addresses the alternative forms of gender relations at a macro level and the transformation of patriarchy/gender regime from a private, domestic, premodern form to a public, modern form. The public, modern form itself takes more than one form, with a distinction between neoliberal and social-democratic being the most important. They have different levels of gender economic and political inequality, quality of intimacy, and levels of violence. These alternative public forms of gender regime intersect with the multiple forms of modernity and capitalism but are not fully aligned” (Walby, 2020, p. 416)

Walby's work is exciting and essential because other scholars found her comparative work demonstrates that “globalization” has different effects on class and gender relations (Betzelt, 2007). Walby’s works criticizes women's exclusion from assets and power in the domestic gender regime, which was introduced and continues to operate through the welfare state or neoliberal and social democratic forms. Walby suggests that instead of a new variety of conservative gender regimes, one should theorize this phase as an “uneven transition from domestic to public gender regimes, in which domestic forms of exclusion and power continue to be practiced in care work in the economy and in intimacy in civil society” (Walby, 2020, p. 248). It means raising gendered democracy at every level, as well as that carework extends beyond the domestic space as a benefit to the public. “Gender relations involve sexuality, reproduction, and fertility (Stanworth 1987), invoking not only bodies but also technologies that alter them.” (Walby, 2020, p. 76)

Walby accepted that “the neoliberal and social-democratic are still most important forms of public gender regime” (Walby, 2020, p. 428). The evolution of care is complex, even if women are employed or educated. (Walby, 2020) Intensification of gendered democracy and feminism's force should have cooperated, and their connection will be the answer to the curve, which will face modernity and capitalism. (Walby, 2020)

From Fraser to Walby, most gender regime scholars argue and demonstrate that gender relations are not only based on the family structure or issues but also on other forms of social relations that could be fundamental to gender inequality. In addition, the concept and framework of the gender regime contributes and makes clear that the implementation of the welfare state system and welfare state theory

intensify and can drive inequality. Gender regime theory provides a holistic perspective on solving social inequalities outside and within public institutions and the welfare state, Walby continues that:

“(…) the place of the family in gender regime theory, there are three positions: treating it as an institutional domain; increasing the focus on the family but not as an institutional domain; and dispersing the relevant practices across the four (plus violence) institutional domains. Changing the focus to gender rather than family has been one of the important contributions of gender regime theory to social theory” (Walby, 2020, p. 428).

Gap

The gender regime concept is not implemented in many countries ideologically and institutionally compared to welfare state theory in public policy. The gender regime concept has been criticized with the chronicle order as a theory.

Welfare state theory does not include marginalized communities outside of a country's majority or those not directing political decisions. Family structures which defy the nuclear family model, such as single parents, are not equally included or considered in welfare state theory because of their care demands. One of the welfare state's critiques is not resolving inequalities during adulthood and entering the workforce, such as stages of life from after childhood until old age. Without these considerations and assistance, struggle and conflicts arise even though the population is in their most productive years. Welfare state regimes and family structures institutionally produce inequality and affect the outlooks and behavior of the public, as mentioned by feminist scholars. Welfare state institutions are not accountable for all emerging problems and are not qualified to meet these needs. If a country's welfare state system is institutionalized inconsistently, it also produces a new emerging class through its new welfare state policies, such as an unemployed class. This thesis investigates how these incomplete ideologies and public welfare systems affect and react to the COVID-19 pandemic and gender inequality in Mongolia.

“Island of excellence in a sea of ignorance”

In addition, I also seek to understand and clarify how anti-pandemic legislation is accepted in a country and how it could affect future generations. How will it produce inequality if we accept that only a certain number of children under four years old can attend kindergarten while the other excluded children stay at home for safety reasons? How are these circumstances answered by the theory and my research? How can I best demonstrate these results with my thesis? It could be concluded with Esping-Andersen's word, which he summarized as an “‘island of excellence in a sea of ignorance’ i.e., a

knowledge elite surrounded by a large mass of low-skilled populations” (Esping-Andersen, 2009, p. 115). Furthermore, Esping-Andersen states that “high-quality childcare and pre-school participation may, accordingly, constitute a truly effective policy in the pursuit of more equal opportunities” (Esping-Andersen, 2009, p. 136).

Especially, ‘Care’

There is a “male breadwinner model” which contrasts with the “who cuts the bread” and “who makes the soup” model. Until these theories and considerations of gendered carework are applied, we have some stages to go. Once as Fraser writes, there is a “male breadwinner/female caregiver”, “male breadwinner/female part-time earner”, “dual earner/state caregiver”, “dual earner/marketised caregiver”, “dual earner/dual caregiver” (Betzelt, 2007). From the gender regime concept, scholars analyze and model gender relations based on two dimensions, such as the public and private, more specifically the domestic or family dimension. (Walby, 2009) Until the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, public and private gender relations were both responsible for care. However, during the pandemic, most governments, depending on the spread of the infection in their country, are deciding that care should be provided in the “private” sphere. The private, domestic sphere of “care” has not been researched enough. Care was always a “black box” of neoclassical economics; academic research and society did not wonder what happens inside this box or raise the question in which ways “things inside” affect gender relations (Bahn K, 2020). During and right after the lockdown, care work was predominately done in those “black boxes”.

Care work has been viewed historically as a woman’s and gendered work. Researchers attempted to explain this gendered work through biology; they argued women are biologically assembled to nurture and manage the children and home well from society’s perception. (Moen, 2001) This assumption and perceptions are more valid than women for men (Moen, 2001). As a result of women’s physical abilities, only women can carry children and have the physical ability to feed a child. Care work is concluded as women’s work. However, outside of these physical differences, there is not enough evidence which provides that care work is women’s work (Moen, 2001).

Caregiving is work accomplished by others for those who cannot take care of their basic needs. In this relation, there are at least two sides. First, a care recipient, who needs help in her/his daily life, be it a young child, an individual with a physical, intellectual, or emotional disability, and/or an individual of old age. Second, the caregiver can be a family member who is mostly unpaid and has a personal

relationship with the individual as a family member, friend, or another social connection. Caregivers can also be professionals and serve as a paid workforce as a care worker in roles such as a physician, home nurse, or babysitter. (Atkins, 2021) A care-recipient may be a young child, a person living with a physical, intellectual, or emotional disability, or an ageing adult who needs assistance with activities of daily living (e.g., bathing, dressing, toileting, and eating) (Snelling, 2012; Lightfoot & Moone, 2020). Care work is not defined or acknowledged as work. If it is defined or accepted as work, it is paid not well paid and deemed as low wage in comparison to other forms of work. This dynamic makes female workers more vulnerable during economic crises (Power, 2020).

This pandemic is not just an economic or medical crisis; it also can demonstrate and give evidence of how gender roles in society have been overseen and ignored within our social structures. If we see this crisis from a half-full, half-empty perspective, this pandemic can be a starting point where regimes and theory should include gender norms, gender roles, and, more specifically, care work in public policy. It can be the era when care work and gender relations become the center of attention as an essential structure for society instead of hidden in the black boxes (Bahn K, 2020).

The concepts of the gender regime, especially gender roles in care work with welfare state institution and their policy during the pandemic, provides perspectives on the implementation and research of gender inequality during the COVID-19 pandemic often missing in policy research.

“Supreme court justice Potter Stewart famously said that although he could not provide a clear definition of pornography, ‘I know it when I see it.’ In many ways, the same could be said of ‘care work.’” (Duffy, 2011, p. 9). It is not describable, but it is recognizable. It is care work. Why is it not described or defined until now? Because it cannot be measured in monetary terms and cannot be expressed in precise numbers, in any society, anywhere in the world. Some try to define, value, or measure care work. Some states provide welfare funding and cash transfers for families to support childcare; in some regions, domestic workers are paid a low wage and not fully protected under any labor law in any country. Still, most family members provide and make up for this care work gap through unpaid and paid labor by women. Recent research such as (Power, 2020) shows that these circumstances and inequalities rose during the COVID-19 pandemic globally.

Institutional Definitions of Care work

Care work comprises *direct care activity* and *indirect care activity*. *Direct care activity* are also known as *personal* or *relational care*. Some examples include providing care in any direct form, such as

giving medicine to a person who needs it. *Indirect care activity* is not directed to an individual or related to the person, but this activity is also needed for the individual or family, such as cooking, doing the laundry, and cleaning (ILO,2018).

Care work is divided or, in other words, amounts to unpaid care work and paid care work. Paid care work is maintained by care workers, such as nurses, teachers, doctors, or personal care workers (nannies or personal assistants). Domestic workers also provide direct and indirect care in various contexts (ILO, 2018).

Human beings have many needs from infancy until the end of their lives. Every individual face phase, situations, or times when someone needs to take care of him/her during their lifetime. These needs are provided by others and can be physical, psychological, or emotional. Who provides care work and support? Care work is primarily done by women, especially women and girls with low income or from underprivileged social strata and regions of the world (ILO, 2018).

Feminist scholars have found mutual obligations of man and women provide wage work particularly problematic because it overlooks unpaid care work and social reproduction at large. (Deborah J. Anderson, 2002) As argued by McDowell (2005), welfare conditionality policies “ignore the relational values of care and love for others that inform voluntary and unpaid care, assuming instead that value lies only in financially remunerated forms of effort” (McDowell, 2005, p. 372). This dynamic results in major and enduring tensions of mutual obligations and its inability to recognize various productive activities, including unpaid care work (Blaxland, 2010; Land, 2002)

There is no society, or indeed life, without the care work of raising the young, caring for the elderly, maintaining a home, building and sustaining communities, and the vast work of ecological care. Care work is mainly unpaid (and if not unpaid, it is underpaid) and feminized. The gendered division of labor consists of work relegated to women through gendered norms and structures beyond the roles gendered subjects take on, but also the very conditions that make this relegation possible (Folbre, 2012).

“In her domestic care-work, left out of focus by centring the analysis on women’s earned income, asking what proportion of men’s earnings are earned by women (a measure used by the UNDP), thereby explicitly treating the lack of income from domestic care-work as a component of gender inequality? Should unpaid domestic care-work be treated as a positively valued activity in its own right? Or is it a key part of gendered economic inequalities?” (Walby, 2009, p. 20)

Based on these definitions, concepts, and theories, this thesis will examine where care, especially childcare policy fails or where the decisions go well. Who said what, who followed which concepts, and

what are their results? How do global governance systems and national states relate and differ during crises, such as the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic? In the following section, I will compare the anti-pandemic legislation's result according to childcare institutions in Mongolia, Kazakhstan, China, and Russia to investigate how these measures and goals affected gender inequality.

4. Quantitative Research Section

4.1. Comparison of childcare policies and unemployment rates: Mongolia, Kazakhstan, China, and Russia

In this part, I collected the data from four countries' childcare institutions, the number of children data from the World Bank and ILO's general data. After that, I compared the number of childcare institutions and women's unemployment rate, highlighting the results of welfare institutions such as childcare institutions and women's unemployment rate and finding their correlation. To the childcare policy, I chose the public childcare institutions and government decisions according to childcare and their caregivers during the pandemic and their connection. From their post-socialist care systems and geographical proximity close to Mongolia, these countries will be analyzed to compare their care policies based on their statistics and outcomes of their pre-school (childcare institutions) educational and family policies.

It is useful to compare data from neighboring post-socialist economies with national statistics from Mongolia to understand the country's welfare system and welfare state policy, more specifically, its decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Mongolian care system was built under the control and influence of care systems in the Soviet Union. After the socialist era, the national welfare system was restructured, although the foundation and systems of the care sector remained similar to the socialist model. This comparative section will show the similarities and differences between these countries and Mongolia with primary data provided by the ILO, WHO, and the select country's national statistical organizations. This quantitative analysis provides a fundamental understanding and comparative perspective. It will clearly demonstrate how Mongolian anti-pandemic legislation would affect gender equality if the data is collected and compared for its neighboring states. The comparative section will be based on four countries' data: Kazakhstan, Russia, China, and Mongolia. Why have these countries been chosen? First, they were selected due to their geographical proximity. Children cannot choose their parents. States cannot choose their neighboring states to be nation-states. Geographical considerations and borders are also more robust if the country is landlocked such as Mongolia. Mongolia is bordered by the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation. Second, all these countries were once socialist countries with socialist social systems. It is relevant to understand Mongolia's former social order and how its welfare and social systems evolved under contemporary capitalist care systems.

Mongolia does not directly border Kazakhstan, but it is near the Mongolian border. Mongolia and Kazakhstan are 23 miles (37 km) apart at their closest points (Tipton, 2018). Among Mongolia's 21 provinces, Bayan-Ulgii is next to Kazakhstan, and a considerable number of its inhabitants speak Kazakh. Communities from this province are an ethnic group of Mongolia. Kazakhstan and Mongolia have similar economic development paths because both countries have been dependent on one core export sector, such as mining and mineral oil industries. Economic diversification has been a challenge for these two countries.

The gender equality index and childcare sector are similar in each of these countries. All four countries have a post-soviet childcare system. After the fall of the socialist system, the national childcare systems collapsed in these countries. However, children are still born and need care. Gender inequality has been in the same category. All four countries are committed to gender equality by adopting international treaties and policies. They changed their laws and amended laws about gender equality, although each country enforces these laws differently in their judicial courts and social practices. These factors can be explained by economic development, geography, or cultural background(s). However, since the fall of the Soviet Union, gender equality and economic outcomes have not been related to one another in these four countries. At the same time, the economic situation of women has worsened compared to men, because gender role in these countries has been intensified with unequal economic participation resulting from not enough state-run and financed care institutions, which are connected to traditional gender roles and state policy.

These states provide money for childcare or children's money. Since there are not enough care institutions, when we see the statistical numbers of institutions and children's numbers, because of the economic situation or families, mostly mothers should take care of their children instead of going to work. The governments of these countries support families and will not give mothers or caregivers the chance to seek employment. As noted by Dugaravo (2019), these national systems function to support patriarchal power instead of changing gender norms and social systems: "Persistent gender inequality in these countries is underpinned by the neo-liberal approach to welfare provision, conservative social norms, and limited agency of civil society to influence the policy agenda. Nonetheless, these states have distributed to the population with an emphasis on working mothers, and this policy choice has been driven by economic, demographic, and political considerations, which ultimately serve to support, rather than transform, the patriarchal power structure in these societies." (Dugaravo, 2019, p. 385)

A select set of welfare indicators of these four countries will be analyzed. This comparative analysis is created using data to measure and understand gender perspectives in relation to each state's welfare system and public childcare policies. The most relevant childcare and gender equality policies will be compared in this section.

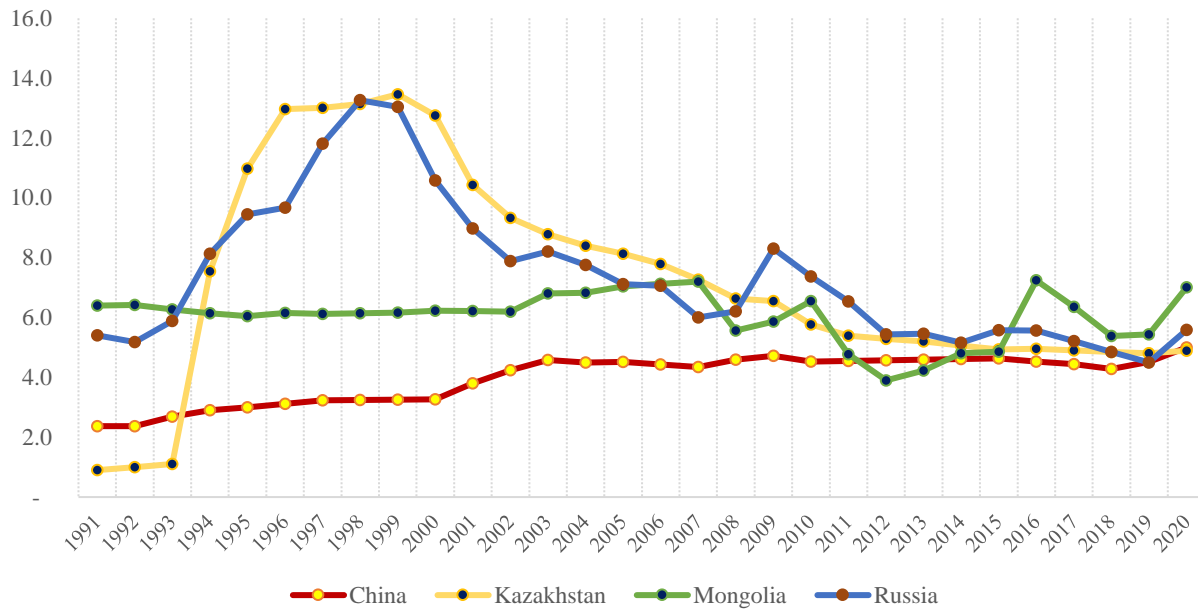
Fig. 1: Parental leave provisions in Kazakhstan, Mongolia, the Russian Federation, and the People's Republic of China

Parental leave provision	Kazakhstan	Mongolia	Russia	China
Paid maternity leave	18 weeks	17 weeks	20 weeks	14 weeks (98-128 days)
Paid paternity leave	No	No	No	In some regions, 7-30 days
Paid childcare leave	1 year	1 year	1.5 years	10days
Unpaid childcare leave	3 years	3 years	3 years	1year

“Paid maternity leave provision is a major policy measure that is intended to make maternal employment more compatible with breastfeeding. By safeguarding women's employment and income security during pregnancy and after childbirth, paid maternity leave reduces the opportunity cost of time spent on breastfeeding and consequently increases the likelihood of optimal breastfeeding duration.” (Addati, Cassirer, and Gilchrist 2014) cited in (Kin Bing Wu, 2012).

As a result of China's rising economic development, China implemented paid paternal leave between 7 to 30 days in select regions of the country. It is a new step in these four countries, especially due to their economic and political categorization as developing countries. However, paid childcare leave is not directly universal regulated in China. Childcare is regulated in China for mothers, although it is not generally implemented in various regions of China. Every region can decide on their childcare leave policies except for paid childcare leave. If the mother has given birth to a sick child or has a complication during birth, it can be considered differently in China. There is not yet universal regulation on childcare, maternal, and paternal leave implemented in all regions of China.

Fig. 2 Unemployment rate



Source: World Bank

As indicated in the graph above, the unemployment rate in Mongolia is sharper than in the other three countries.

China's economy is a planned economy. Based on its structure, the female unemployment rate in China is slowly growing, and there has been no sharp decrease or increase, as indicated in the graph. The Chinese female unemployment rate increased faster than expected between 2000 to 2003. After a decade, it was constant until the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. It has also drastically impacted the Chinese economy, even though the economy is organized to function and resist crises throughout any condition in the global economy.

Kazakhstan's female unemployment rate was the highest in comparison to the three other countries from the end of the 1990s until the beginning of the 2000s. However, Kazakhstan's female unemployment rate has decreased since the 2000s. The most likely explanation for this rise is that the economy grew as the price of mineral oil rose. After 2000, Kazakhstan expanded its pre-school system more than the other countries. It could also be relevant to the country's declining female unemployment rate: "The situation with preschools in Kazakhstan began to improve in the late 2000s. The progress has been attributed to the state program "Balapan" (2010–2014, 2015–2020), which contributed not only to

the increase of preschools through the construction of nurseries and kindergartens but also to the increase in the actual number of children attending them.” (Dugaravo, 2019, p. 392)

At the same time, Russia’s female unemployment rate increased to the same extent as in Kazakhstan until 2019; however, unlike Kazakhstan, it did not decrease after 2019. As Russia was hit harder than the other three countries by the financial crisis in 2008, the female unemployment rate increased enormously in 2009.

From 2018 until the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the female unemployment rate in all four countries decreased. Evidently, the female unemployment rate has increased in all four countries because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The sharpest rise in female unemployment is observable in Mongolia and Russia, and somehow, the share of female unemployed is similar in both countries with drastic increases and decreases compared to the other countries. At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the female unemployment rates in Russia and Mongolia are similar and increasing steadily. On the other hand, the female unemployment in China and Kazakhstan is increasing more slowly, and both countries exhibit a similar rate of female unemployment.

“Investments in early child development are among the most cost-effective strategies for breaking the intergenerational transmission of poverty and improving productivity and social cohesion in the long run.” (Kin Bing Wu, 2012) When female unemployment rates and access to public childcare or private preschools are correlated, states should increase the number and capacities for children to attend preschools to boost economic and social development for women, gender equality, and society. The number of public childcare facilities, pre-schools, and kindergartens should be regulated and increased to provide equal access to childcare and equal opportunities for all children.

Fig. 3 Number of preschools in Kazakhstan, Mongolia, China and Russia

(thousand)	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Kazakhstan	8.7	5.1	1.1	1.2	4.8	7.2	7.7	8.5	8.8	9.4	9.8	10.3	10.6	10.7
Mongolia	0.9	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.8	0.9	1.1	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.4	1.4	1.4	1.5
Russia	87.9	68.6	51.3	46.5	45.1	44.3	43.2	51.0	50.1	49.4	48.6	36.6	-	-
China	172.3	180.4	175.8	124.4	150.4	181.3	198.6	209.9	223.7	239.8	255.0	266.7	281.2	291.7

Source: National statistic offices.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, and Russia had to choose a strategy toward a care system based on the market economy. During this time, these new social systems and governments reduced the welfare state. Care work transitioned from a public service to the population's individual economic responsibility. This outcome has been hard for the vulnerable communities; the four states attempted to support vulnerable communities through their welfare state policies. (Dugaravo, 2019) These policies focus on supporting further employment opportunities instead of the public childcare systems and provisions implemented and regulated by the state during the Soviet socialist systems:

“Public childcare services were widely accessible and affordable throughout the Soviet time, accounting for 87,900 preschools and 9 million children attending these institutions in 1990. They were seen as a necessary instrument to make women available for the labour market in order to meet the economic needs of the socialist state (Kulmala & Tšernova, 2015). Much of the enterprise-based childcare stopped functioning, as enterprises cut back on social facilities under pressure for profitability. A sharp fall in demand for preschools was mainly attributed to falling fertility, unemployment, and income decline.” (Dugaravo, 2019, p. 392)

Kazakhstan: To solve the problems such as increasing childcare institutions and unemployment, the Kazakh government expanded the number of private day care centers for children and covered the actual costs of daycare. After some time, a public-private partnership was formed to fund and support public pre-schools throughout the country. In 2017, 31% of all pre-schools were private. It means that one-third of children of pre-school age attend private preschools. (Dugaravo, 2019)

Mongolia: At the start of the 2000s, pre-schools increased as a result of governmental support for the care sector. This change was implemented and supported by the country's legislative reforms, such as the Law on Pre-school Education in 2008 and the approval of the Law on Childcare in 2015. Due to legislative support and the country's economic development, preschools increased quickly, as well as the number of children attending pre-schools. (Dugaravo, 2019) After the Law on Childcare was implemented in 2016, private preschools covered 37% of the demand for child-care opportunities. (Dugaravo, 2019) At the same time, the Mongolian population increased and needed more child-care facilities. Private day-care centers replaced public state-run day-care centers that the Mongolian government is not willing or not capable to provide. Although in the last five years, public preschools increased by 5 to 10 and the number of private preschools also raised in Mongolia. However, there are not enough places in children's daycare in the capital and kindergarten places are distributed by lottery. As a result, half of the children in Ulaanbaatar cannot attend pre-school. The Mongolian day-care system for young children has a unique form of a preschool for the children of nomadic communities living in rural regions. When the Mongolian population started to settle in the cities, the government attempted to provide equal opportunities for the children in rural areas. (Dugaravo, 2019) This new form of childcare was provided by "ger" preschools (гэр цэцэрлэг) in Mongolian yurts. This program is aimed at nomadic communities with classes with mobile teachers. 9% of all children in Mongolia have attended this kind of preschool in rural areas. (World Bank, 2017) However, as noted by the World Bank (2017) on these mobile pre-schools: "The impact of these services on children's educational attainments, however, is limited (ibid)."

Russia: A Presidential decree on childcare for children under the age of 4 and above was published in 2012. (Dugaravo, 2019) According to this decree, 90% of all children of the age group of 4 to 6 years were attending a pre-school. At the same time, approximately 40% of children between the ages of 1 to 3 attend daycare (ibid). Additionally, waiting lists for children under four years old, who needed a place in a daycare place was growing. In 2017, over 326,000 children did not attend pre-schools, even though they were registered for pre-schools. (Dugaravo, 2019) Interestingly, at the same time, the number of day-care centers in Russia is decreasing:

"This reveals the insufficient provision of childcare services, particularly during the period of mothers' unpaid childcare leave, which constrains their participation in the formal labour market. In 2016, the employment rate of women with children aged 3–6 years old was nearly 31 percentage points higher than among women with children aged 0–2 years old (77.8% vs. 47.2%).

In contrast to Kazakhstan and Mongolia, most preschools in Russia are state run, and although private kindergartens are gradually growing, their services are not easily affordable.” (Dugaravo, 2019, p. 394)

Russian private pre-schools are expensive with few facilities. In 2017, only 2% of care demands were provided by the private care sector. (Dugaravo, 2019)

“Thus, on the one hand, the substantial development of childcare facilities in the three countries can be interpreted as an important step undertaken by the governments to increase the economic participation of women and redistribute childcare responsibilities between the state, the family, as well as the market (notably in Kazakhstan and Mongolia). However, the shortage of preschools for children under the age of 3 years old, its quality particularly in remote areas, and their affordability in the case of private kindergartens have forced many women to stay at home to fulfil their maternal duties and rely on financial assistance from the family or the state, which does not necessarily compensate for the earnings forgone due to unpaid care work. Furthermore, a lack of, or insufficiently developed, mechanisms for involved fatherhood and equitable sharing of domestic and childcare work between parents strengthen traditional gender relations and reinforce the male breadwinner model in these contexts.” (Dugaravo, 2019, p. 393)

China: Chinese kindergartens have been inconsistent since the care system was established. The latest notable change was made in 2010 with two major decisions. The Chinese childcare sector has been strongly privatized; public childcare has many fees to attend. Low-income and middle-income households cannot afford to send their children to a pre-school in China. In July 2010, China announced the Outline of China’s National Plan for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development (2010–2020) (hereinafter referred to as ‘the Plan’). It is the blueprint for China’s education reform and development for the next 10 years.’ (Hui Li, 2016, p. 6) The Chinese preschool system has been formulated under the name of “3A problems”, such as accessibility problems (it is hard to get in the preschools), affordability problem (some preschools’ fee are higher than universities), and accountability problem (not every preschool are high-quality): (Hui Li, 2016, p. 10)

“Sustainability matters: The brand-new family planning policy— the ‘two-child policy’—will possibly result in further worsening of the ‘3A’ (accessibility, affordability, and accountability) problems in ECE. Since January 1, 2016, China has begun to allow all married couples to have two children, according to the newly revised Law on Population and Family Planning (Burkitt 2015). This new birth policy, replacing the country’s controversial 35-year-old ‘one-child policy’, is aimed at ‘mitigating a potential demo-graphic crisis.’ (Hui Li, 2016, p. 13)

One of the extensive research projects about Chinese preschools and ECD (early childhood development) is also directed at the common problems of all four countries, which are compared in this

section. Based on the World Bank's report on China, this section will highlight the common problems, challenges and common obstacles, outcomes of the preschools in China and the three other countries.

Kazakhstan has increased its preschools quickly and successfully since 2010 due to the country's economic development. The country's pre-schools are predominantly public, while private pre-schools have increased to one-third of all available child-care institutions. The inaccessible costs and challenges of accessing pre-schools are also less prevalent in Kazakhstan.

Mongolian kindergartens have increased more slowly compared with the other two countries. On the other hand, the population of Mongolia has been growing more rapidly. It means childcare needs are not met with the available number of pre-schools. At the same time, private pre-schools are increasing, and the fees of the pre-schools are rising. Parents whose children do not attend a (public) pre-school are trying to afford a private one because most of the "left-out children" and mothers must stay at home. Mongolia also faces the same "3A problems" as the Chinese pre-school and early education systems.

The Russian Federation is the outlier in these countries as the number of pre-schools is decreasing sharply based on available data produced in the last two years. During the COVID-19 pandemic, most of the country's childcare services were closed and under pressure from the state during lockdowns. In reality, these figures should be different from the other three countries' statistical data.

Accessibility of ECE: The importance of ECE in one's life-long development has been widely recognized, and the slogan 'win at the starting line' has been echoed by many Chinese parents. This phenomenon has thus increased the demand for public kindergarten, yet it has not been met with parallel level of supply. (Hui Li, 2016)

All these '3A' problems are not only facing in China, but also rising in all four countries of the comparing countries in this part.

Affordability of ECE: The ECE reform in the past two decades has thoroughly reshaped the landscape of ECE, with public kindergartens being closed down and private ones being expanded. This shift to privatization and marketization has led to a serious problem with the affordability of ECE in China, as private kindergartens received no funding support from the government and had to make a profit through charging higher tuition fees from parents. Although the percentage of public kindergartens has slightly increased since 2011, the serious problem of affordability remains. (Hui Li, 2016)

In general in these four countries, the rising demand of the childcare institutions are increasing the private childcare institutions, although according to the emerging new business sector such as high fee private childcare institutions having the big problem of affordability.

Accountability of ECE: The quality of ECE is now a hot issue for policy makers and the public in China. Many aspects should be considered, including teacher qualification and professionalization, curriculum and pedagogy, and early childhood environment. Poor management of private kindergartens, leading to the provision of low-quality early care and education services, is also an issue. It is like the act of prematurely ‘plucking a crop to help it grow’, which ends up harming rather than facilitating these children’s development and growth. (Hui Li, 2016, p. 12)

In these countries, preschool, which is one year before the school entrance, all children must attend education as compulsory in public or private schools. Unfortunately, until this year, most childcare institutions are not good at measuring the quality of childcare legally and practically.

Access to pre-school and early childhood education has been a big obstacle for low-income and medium income parents who cannot afford private preschools.

“The challenge of social justice with affordable public kindergartens being vanished and replaced by private kindergartens, early childhood education is either too expensive (and of good quality), or too cheap (and of poor quality) in China. In fact, the remaining public kindergartens are tough for the general public to get into due to the short supply, and children from low-income families have an even harder time getting a quality early education.” (Hui Li, p. 13)

Similar to the research on Chinese early childhood education, researchers mention the “2S challenges” of sustainability and social justice in pre-schools. Hui Li and other researchers have analyzed the common outcomes of public and private pre-schools in China. A comparative analysis reveals that the grievances identified in China also apply to the other three countries, which also all face “2S challenges”. The care system at large, including public and private preschools, faces issues with funding and monitoring. All four countries lack access to the public care system needed for children and supporting their parents while at work. This gap is bridged by private pre-schools as new players cause and drive the new “2S challenges” and affordability. These problems are already evident a decade after the introduction of private kindergartens in post-Soviet socialist economies and rising social inequality, even though private preschools’ direct impacts on inequality in these countries have not been monitored or researched:

Fig. 4 Number of children in preschools in Kazakhstan, Mongolia, China and Russia

(million)	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2012	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Kazakhstan(million)	1.07	0.41	0.13	0.19	0.39	0.58	0.73	0.76	0.81	0.86	0.88	0.89		
Mongolia(million)	0.10	0.06	0.08	0.09	0.12	0.15	0.21	0.23	0.24	0.26	0.26	0.26	0.25	0.19
Russia(million)	9.00	5.60	4.40	4.50	5.40	6.00	6.80	7.20	7.30	7.50	7.58	7.61	7.44	
China (million)	19.70	27.10	22.40	21.80	21.00	36.80	40.50	42.60	44.10	46.00	46.50			

Source: National statistic offices.

“Investments in early child development (ECD) are one of the most cost-effective strategies for breaking the intergenerational transmission of poverty and improving equality of opportunity. Evidence from neuroscience and longitudinal studies indicates that experiences during the first six years of life affect the development of the brain and, consequently, the cognitive and socioemotional development of children in subsequent stages of their lives.” (Kin Bing Wu, 2012)

Fig. 5 Correlation

China	Unemployment rate
Unemployment rate	1
Number of preschools	0.38847835
Number of children in preschools	0.577864727
Kazakhstan	Unemployment rate
Unemployment rate	1
Number of preschools	-0.752570547
Number of children in preschools	-0.855306875

China: Female unemployment rate and the number of preschools, these two variables are positive moderate. The correlation between the Chinese Unemployment rate and the number of children in preschool is $r=0.58$. This strong positive association show that the number of children in preschool and the Chinese unemployment rate is strongly correlated.

Kazakhstan: Female unemployment rate and the number of kindergartens are strong negative associations. The female unemployment rate of Kazakhstan and the number of children in preschool is $r=-0.86$, a strong negative association. It might depict that unemployment results from the children's number in preschool, but other factors should also include.

<i>Mongolia</i>	<i>Unemployment rate</i>
Unemployment rate	1
Number of preschools	-0.061617297
Number of children in preschools	-0.139460789

Mongolia: The correlation between the female unemployment rate and the number of preschools is $r=-0.06$, and the female unemployment rate and the number of children in preschools, the correlation coefficient is $r=-0.14$. These two correlations depict the lack of association. Because the number of preschools in Mongolia shows not only the number of public kindergartens' but also includes private kindergartens' number increase.

<i>Russia</i>	<i>Unemployment rate</i>
Unemployment rate	1
Number of preschools	0.180048266
Number of children in preschools	-0.768990538

Russia: The correlation between the female unemployment rate and the number of preschools is weaker association between the two variables. Female unemployment rate and the number of children in preschools' correlation coefficient is $r=-0.77$, indicating a strong negative association.

Based on the importance of early childhood development, this research study compared the number of pre-schools and students in these four countries. Although China, Russia and Kazakhstan border Mongolia, these countries have diverse political backgrounds and economic circumstances. Geographical proximity is an important indicator that cannot be changed. By comparing these countries, one can highlight a similar situation with different outcomes in the locations next to Mongolia:

“Carneiro and Heckman (2003) conclude that investing in ECD yields high economic returns because early learning is far more productive and cost-effective than later, remedial education, as the social and behavioral skills that children learn in their early years set a pattern for acquiring positive life skills later in life.” (Kin Bing Wu, 2012)

Every country plans its economic strategy and plan, including how to boost its population's prosperity and boost all the human development indicators. Pre-school is one of the most under-researched and undervalued indicators to measure human development. This research highlighted the roles of access to public pre-schools in economic development and gender inequality.

5. Qualitative Research section

5.1. History of the Mongolian welfare state

The history of the Mongolian welfare state will be divided into two eras in this thesis; the first era is socialist welfare state from 1921 to 1990, and the second era is from 1990 to 2022, the post-socialist welfare from the first democratic constitution until the COVID-19 pandemic. The second era will be divided into two phases: a democratic national welfare system until the COVID-19 pandemic and a detailed analysis solely concerning the COVID-19 pandemic.

The first era of the welfare state was developed under the direct control of the Soviet Union (USSR). Through socialism, the Mongolian welfare system provided free education, healthcare, childcare, housing, and even work. Mongolia was not directly a part of the Soviet Union, but a satellite state. All systems of the Mongolian state had socialist policies under the control and ideology of the Soviet Union according to education and socialism. Financial assistance and political influence were clearly accepted and expected from the Soviet Union to Mongolia from 1921 to 1990. Mongolia was a member of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance during the socialist era. The Council for Mutual Economic Assistance and the USSR provided Mongolia with economic and technical aid. (Goyal, 1999)

Socialism was built on the idea of equality and the state provided a care system for children, older people of any age and/or groups of people in need of help. Owed to this system, parents or caregivers had the full potential to work and participate in the national workforce. Nowadays, democracy gives “human rights” as the reason for providing public care, but it is not sufficient.

During the socialist era, Mongolian teachers at every level of the educational system and even, care workers were either educated and trained in the Soviet Union or graduated in Mongolia under the socialist educational system. A high number of teachers and doctors from the Soviet Union worked in Mongolia until the country could build and maintain its public health and education systems.

Mothers saw their role in the socialist system first as socialist citizens and participants of the national workforce, before their gendered roles as women or mothers. Most women returned to work shortly after giving birth, because public care centers took care of all children from the age of three months to school age while mothers pursued their wage labour. There is evidence that when childcare is provided systematically, women’s employment will reach a high number, which was proved by the zero unemployment of women during the socialist era. As noted by Gochoosuren on socialist welfare systems and care, ‘The government funded pensions, maternity leave, and allocated child benefits in direct cash

transfers. There was a strong safety net to protect children's health and development.' (Gochoosuren, 2013)

After the uprisings of the socialist system in other countries, such as USSR, a democratic revolution initiated by young demonstrators happened in Mongolia. The ruling government of Mongolia was handled wisely. The young generation changed the country's system without bloodshed. It was not only the democratic revolution or hunger strike at the Sukhbaatar square in the capital city of Mongolia that caused this change but also the acceptance and an understanding of change by the ruling government. Young demonstrators asked for human rights, a multi-party-political system, glasnost, and perestroika. They even talked or wrote about their historical ancestors, such as Chinggis Khan, because it was forbidden under socialist and communist rule.

During Mongolia's political and systematic transition from socialism to democracy, the national budget deficit rose, and childcare institutions closed; a number of people working in these care centers were sent home without any social support and unemployment funding. As a result of the new system and budget deficit, even the teachers or care workers were affected. The generation of this time faced challenges and high poverty rates without any welfare system during this period of Mongolia's political and economic transition.

After the country's transition from socialism to democracy, the Mongolian population was well educated and in good health due to the country's robust socialist welfare system. For the first time in Mongolia in nearly a century, a young government was formed without the support of the Soviet system. The entire system of the Mongolian state had previously relied on the socialist ideal of communism. After 1990, Mongolian socialism transitioned into privatization. During the socialist regime, the healthy and educated population of Mongolia were employed in jobs with a state-run welfare system. The new post-socialist government faced many problems, such as unemployment and inequality, without a stable state system to handle the arising issues.

In 1990, Mongolia organized its first democratic election. The revolution in Mongolia changed the one-party political system into a multi-party-political system. However, opposing parties continued to claim social protection and social welfare systems in different forms. In 1992, the State Great Khural (the parliament of Mongolia) amended the first constitution of Mongolia under the democratic system. The national constitution of Mongolia declared that all the people of the country have an equal opportunity for education, employment, health care, and social care.

The Mongolian welfare system was built and changed through time due to “reforms” of the ruling party re-building the government. These reforms are indicated in the timetable below chronicling the national elections from 1992 to 2021. Mongolian social welfare developed and depended on these political, economic, and historical developments. (A, 2006)

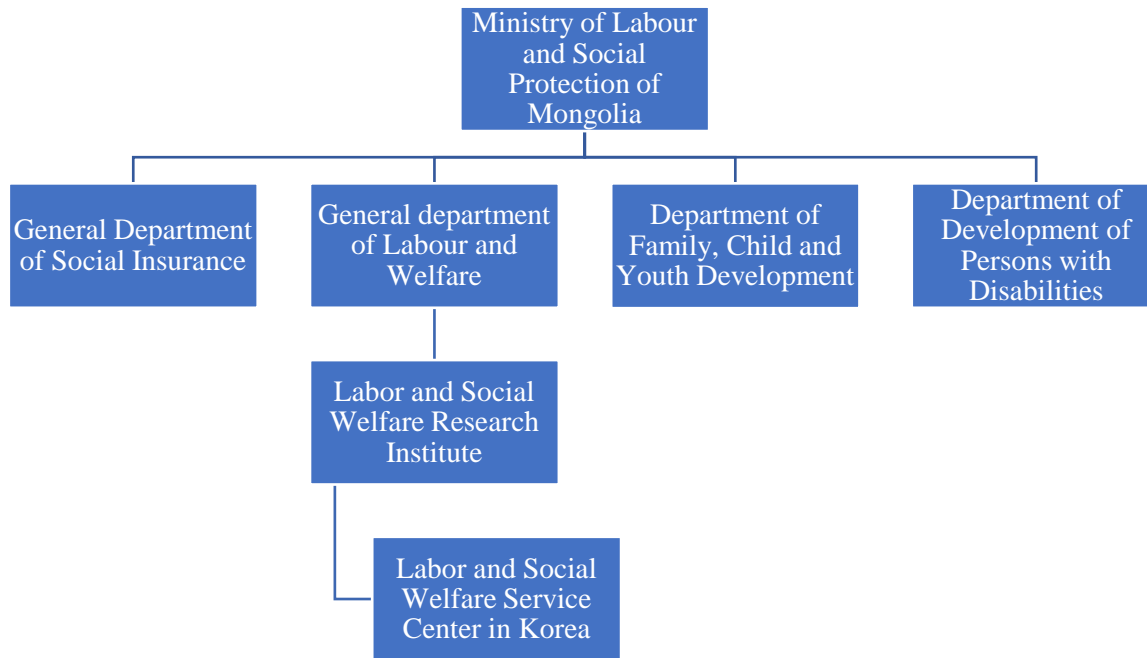
Fig. 6 Timetable of Social Welfare Policy and Laws in Mongolia

Years	Actions
1958	Pension law approved
1990	Mongolia joined in Children’s Right Convention of the UN
1994	Social insurance law approved
1995	Social welfare law approved and established an independent authority of social welfare. Established Social Protection Benefit Fund
1996	Children's Right Protection Law approved
1997	Minimum guaranteed income introduced
1998	Social Welfare Law amended
1999	Family Law (legalized and recognized domestic violence, its liability, and divorce)
2001	Employment Promotion Law approved
2005	Child Money program started and the first use of income-test
2006	Newly-weds cash allowance started
2006	Allowance for honor mothers started (Mothers with four to five children will receive a second-grade medal as an honor mother. Mothers with six to more children will receive the first-grade honor mother medal.)
2008	Law on pre-school education
2010	The government introduced the income replacement method, which defines the income of a family
2010	The Social Welfare Law (Reform) amended
2011	Gender equality law
2015	Childcare service law accepted
2016	Children’s protection law accepted
2016	Family law against domestic violence
2017	Law of Benefits for mother, father and family with many children
2017	Law on the elderly
2019	Increasing pension for some groups of people

National Welfare Structures of Mongolia

In 1995, the first Mongolian social welfare law was approved. The Mongolian welfare system and its social welfare policies were directed by the government and implemented by the government ministries and state agencies. The Mongolian welfare policies are monitored through the Ministry of Social Welfare and Labor.

Fig. 7 National Welfare Structures of Mongolia



In 2016, the Ministry of Labour and Social protection was restructured, as indicated in the graph above (Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, 2022).

It could be easy to achieve a new social welfare system in a small country with a small population, although the Mongolian welfare policy has some problems with targeting and more expenditure than provided by its people. In welfare state theory, there is ‘Third way’ (Giddens, 1998) policy which is very similar to the model attempted by the Mongolian welfare system.

Due to the budget deficit and natural disasters in 2000 and 2002, the Mongolian government began to ask or seek assistance from other resources to provide welfare institutions. In 2003, 20 per cent of the country’s GDP was financed from aid from the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, and International Monetary Fund.

Children’s money program

The children’s money program was introduced first in 2005 in Mongolia. At an earlier point, the idea of children’s money was based on the suggestion of public support for children of parents living in poverty who had to struggle to feed their children. It was a small amount of money, 3000 tugrug (2.49\$ in that time, now 0.8\$) per child for families with more than four children and living in poverty. This early concept of children’s money has changed through time and due to reforms of different governments

across various political parties. In 2006, shortly after the beginning of the program, the children's money program expanded and included all children under 18 years who are not considered poor and/or living below the national poverty line.

National promises and children's money program

In 2004, both ruling parties promised to increase the children's money. The winning party, the Mongolian People's Revolutionist Party, increased this funding during their election campaign to 100.000tugrug (30 euro) for every newborn child and a one-time 500.000tugrug (151 euro) for newlywed couples. In 2007, one year before the next election, the government distributed 25.000tugrug (7.5 euro) per season of a year per child.

Some researchers have pointed out that promising more money without clever targeting or forecast leads to wrong destinations. The children's money program failed to target the people and communities who needed the most help, because of the registration (Araujo, 2006). After the cash flow from the government to its people, the national poverty rate decreased. (Hodges A, 2007) However, there is not enough research on how this cash assistance has affected the well-being of families, people, or children. People with children living under the national poverty line have survived with this money, but it was not clear how this modest additional financial support has affected people below the national poverty line.

What defines the national poverty line? When should the government and political parties stop promising more cash only during elections without a designated political plan to develop the program's impact?

Both political parties tried to implement cash transfers and a family support policy while in government: "The social transfers are no guarantee for escaping poverty; However, they have greatly helped to lower its negative effects and to diminish the costs of economic transition." (A, 2006) Ill-designed and poorly structured social protection provisions may bring about low growth in the economy (Cichon, 2007).

The ILO mentioned Mongolia and its national children's money program as a success story in their report with positive results; it is one of only 23 countries implementing a cash transfer for families and children of its kind. (ILO, 2020)

UNICEF Mongolia also published 10 facts about children's money program on their website:

1. In the world, only 23 countries provide universal children's money. Mongolia is one of these countries. This program has proved to have a good effect on the country's development.

2. Children's money program should be universal because the equal distribution of child allowances to all children prevents discrimination and stigma against children, protects children's rights and dignity, and promotes equality.
3. Regular monthly child allowances allow families with children to have a guaranteed income and plan and manage their consumption.
4. Today, the real amount of child money is declining. In 2012, 20,000 MNT was equal to \$ 14, but today it is equal to \$ 7. Today, the amount of goods purchased by citizens for 20,000 MNT has dropped sharply compared to 2021. Therefore, the amount of cash benefits needs to be increased in line with inflation.
5. Any cash benefits provided to households, in turn, circulate in the economy and increase growth. Research has shown that every \$ 1 given to households in the form of cash benefits brings \$ 1.3 to \$ 2.5 to the economy.
6. Giving money to every child is a powerful weapon in reducing poverty. In Mongolia, child money plays an important role in reducing income poverty. According to a study by ADB, the government has taken a number of measures to combat the COVID-19 epidemic that includes an increase in child allowances, which has had the most positive impact on reducing poverty and inequality.
7. It has not been proven that giving cash increases people's dependence on welfare and reduces their interest in employment. Conversely, households that receive cash benefits that depend on the average household's income seek employment opportunities to earn additional income. This is because it is possible for the household to continue to receive cash benefits even if their income increases.
8. There is no evidence that cash benefits increase alcohol and tobacco purchases. Studies in other countries have shown that alcohol and tobacco purchases account for 1-2% of total food expenditures. According to a survey conducted by the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare and the United Nations Children's Fund on social protection measures during the pandemic, only 0.2% of all households spent their child allowance on alcohol.
9. With a child benefit system in place, the government was able to reach 98% of households with children in a timely manner during the pandemic and deliver cash benefits most effectively. As a result, almost 80% of households with children avoided adverse measures

during the pandemic, such as reducing food consumption, cutting health and education costs, and borrowing more.

10. Equal access to child benefits for all children is a politically viable and cost-effective option, given its importance, benefits and impact on household livelihoods. Mongolia has spent 0.7% of its GDP on child benefits, and even if the benefits are doubled, their share of GDP will be close to the previous level, which would be the best investment for the country's future.” (UNICEF, 2022)

5.2. Children’s money program and the COVID-19 pandemic

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the government of Mongolia has increased the amount of children’s money from 20.000tugrug to 100.000tugrug per month.

Children’s money program in 2022

From the first January of 2022, the government of Mongolia implemented a new decision about the children’s money program and its changes. According to the government’s decision, the children’s money program would distribute as usual from January to June. Parents were asked to inform the administration including the way in which way they preferred receiving the money, as cash or transfer into the state’s savings under the child and/or children’s name.

After July 2022, 50 percent of the children’s money will be saved under the child’s names in the state’s savings. Only half of the children’s money will be provided as a cash transfer to the people of Mongolia. The finance minister has brought up this change a few times since 2021. He explained about the financial situation of Mongolia, which is decreasing, and that the welfare policy of the state budget should gradually decrease.

There are currently no policies and information from the government on how these changes will affect the food security and other social welfare situations for children living under the national poverty line.

In 2015, the ILO declared the national child money program as the country’s flagship social protection program essential for social welfare: ‘Mongolia’s universal Child Money Programme (CMP) is one of the country’s flagship programmes and is an essential part of its social protection system, which is among the most progressive and comprehensive in Asia.’ (ILO, 2015, p. 1) But from 2022, the Mongolian government decided to lower this programme little by little.

After the COVID-19 pandemic, social inequality will rise. How will these young generations survive these inequalities without the support of the children's money program in Mongolia?

How much does bread cost in Mongolia? How many loaves of bread can one buy for children in need with the children's money? I make a comparison on the data of Mongolian yearbook from 2005-2022, to describe how much actually costs the children's money program. (NSO, 2005-2022)

Fig. 8 Purchasing power of the children's money program comparing with bread's cost 2005-2020

Он		Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Explanation
2005	How many bread?	9.4	9.4	9.4	9.4	9.4	9.4	9.4	9.4	9.4	9.4	9.4	9.4	for poor family with more than four children
2006		9.4	9.4	9.4	9.4	9.4	9.4	9.4	9.4	9.4	9.4	9.4	9.4	Every children
2007		17.4	17.4	17.4	17.4	17.4	17.4	17.4	17.4	17.4	17.4	17.4	17.4	One time for a season
2008		10.6	10.6	10.6	10.6	10.6	10.6	10.6	10.6	10.6	10.6	10.6	10.6	One time for a season
2009		34.3	34.3	34.3	34.3	34.3	34.3	34.3	34.3	34.3	34.3	34.3	34.3	
2010		33.3	33.3	33.3	33.3	33.3	33.3	33.3	33.3	33.3	33.3	33.3	33.3	
2011		32.6	32.6	32.6	32.6	32.6	32.6	32.6	32.6	32.6	32.6	32.6	32.6	
2012		30.2	30.2	30.2	30.2	30.2	30.2	30.2	30.2	30.2	30.2	30.2	30.2	
2013		24.8	24.8	24.8	24.8	24.8	24.8	24.8	24.8	24.8	24.8	24.8	24.8	
2014		21.8	21.8	21.8	21.8	21.8	21.8	21.8	21.8	21.8	21.8	21.8	21.8	
2015		18.1	18.1	18.1	18.1	18.1	18.1	18.1	18.1	18.1	18.1	18.1	18.1	
2016		17.3	17.3	17.3	17.3	17.3	17.3	17.3	17.3	17.3	17.3	17.3	17.3	
2017		17.1	17.1	17.1	17.1	17.1	17.1	17.1	17.1	17.1	17.1	17.1	17.1	
2018		17.1	17.1	17.1	17.1	17.1	17.1	17.1	17.1	17.1	17.1	17.1	17.1	
2019		15.6	15.6	15.6	15.6	15.6	15.6	15.6	15.6	15.6	15.6	15.6	15.6	
2020		15.6	15.6	15.6	23.3	77.8	77.8	77.8	77.8	78.4	78.4	78.4	78.4	
2021		78.4	78.4	78.4	78.4	78.4	78.4	78.4	78.4	66.8	66.8	66.8	66.4	
2022		66.8	66.8	66.8										

The universal children's money program has been one of the reasons social protections in Mongolia have reached people and children in need. However, the program is not well researched, nor is the actual purchasing power of the cash benefit known. In 2020, the ILO published that the children's money increased, but inflation and rising prices also grew (ILO, 2020). As a result, the actual purchasing power of the children's money program should be available to the public and compared.

5.3. Care systems and the welfare state

The government of Mongolia decided that children under the age of four should stay at home during the 2020-2021 academic year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. 77,235 children between the ages of two and three years were not allowed to enroll the kindergarten. (D. Tumurbaatar, 2021) During the interviews, interview partners shared in detail their thoughts on the state's decision and how it has affected them. In these interviews, the diverse interview partners provided insight on different gendered perspectives of care, as well as their challenges, decisions, and strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic. Further information of each interview partner and their demographics are featured in the graph below and further elaborated on in this chapter.

Fig. 9 The interview partners' information

№	Participant	Gender	Age	Family status	Profession	Education	Children, Age
1	Interview participant 1	Female	29	Married	Translator	BA and MA	Two children: 3 and 2 years old
2	Interview participant 2	Female	31	Married	Lawyer	BA	Two children: 6 and 3 years old
3	Interview participant 3	Female	35	Married	Accountant	BA	Two children: 4 and 2 years old
4	Interview participant 4	Male	38	Married	truck driver	Secondary school	Three children: 13 , 7 and 2 years old
5	Interview participant 5	Male	26	Married	Historian	BA	Two children: 5 and 3 years old
6	Interview participant 6	Female	35	Single	Pediatrician	BA	One child: 2 years old
7	Interview participant 7	Male	37	Single	Driver	Secondary school	One child: 2 years old
8	Interview participant 8	Female	33	Divorced	Biologist	BA	Two children: 3 years old and 6 months old
9	Interview participant 9	Male	32	Engaged	Marketing manager	BA	One child: 3 years old

5.4. Result Analysis-Code

Care-System (11)

R: What do you think about the anti-pandemic legislation, which does not allow children under four years old in public kindergartens?

Interview participant 1 (Female, 29 years old, married, with two children, 3 and 2 years old):

"I do not fully support this decision, but at the same time not against this decision. Because it is a hard decision to make, there are some advantages if children do not attend kindergarten. The most significant advantage is that if children stay at home, they will not risk being infected by covid-19. If we summarize it, it is the only benefit. Other disadvantages are education, more especially kindergarten's education is essential. It is sad. These children are not attending kindergarten and do not have enough knowledge, socializing experience in these years. These years are gone, and it is problematic." (1, 2022)

The new generation born shortly after the COVID-19 pandemic grew-up and were raised in their homes with little social life.

"Nevertheless, single parents are affected more intensive than me. Because they do want to have a kindergarten, they do not have the opportunity to stay at home and look after their children like me. They should work and provide life. I am just lucky to be at home without any financial difficulty, and I know that. It is a privilege I have during the Covid-19 pandemic." (1, 2022)

Interview partners, who are college-educated and stay-at-home mothers, mention the privilege to stay at home and their financial opportunities during this time. Moreover, this interview participant is aware of losing years of kindergarten education, which can influence one's education and future. Plenty of research was published about how preschool has influenced academic success and inequality:

"Grounded in developmental psychology, the argument is that the crucial cognitive and behavioural foundations for learning are cemented very early in childhood. What occurs in the preschool ages is fundamental for children's ability and motivation to learn when they subsequently embark on formal education." (Esping-Andersen, 2009, p. 113)

Interview participant 2 (Female, 31 years old, married, with two children, 6 and 3 years old):

"In general, the government do not allow us to work because women must take care of their children. We do not have a proper school or kindergarten. They named that online schooling, but it has to be someone in these early years of children and women as a mother have to do that. Our government is making no opportunity to attend to every little child in any social community;

for example, children cannot enter restaurants or even grocery shops. Little children must be only at home because there is nowhere to go. Furthermore, it has lasted last 2-3years. Because of the decisions and situation, not only me, but every mother has also been staying at home and not working. It is not only about the financial opportunity but also about developing themselves has been impossible in the last two to three years. Overall, it is wrong because every child has the right to have education from birth and the government banned it until three years old. Still, these children have the right to develop. Although from the other side, Mongolia is a country with low, middle-income, and they do have 50 children in the public kindergartens. I can understand and accept the decision in this situation." (2, 2021)

During the interview, what was highlighted was the Mongolian financial inability to have sufficient childcare facilities and the economic situation of low-middle income countries. Also, most interview partners knew of public kindergartens with more than 50 children in a class and do not provide quality childcare. Quality and access are acknowledgeable to parents. The impossibility to establish smaller classes did not result only from the COVID-19 pandemic but also from the situation and outcomes of the country's economic and care system.

In the last few years, before the COVID-19 pandemic, Mongolian kindergartens have implemented an 'uncommon' system through a '**kindergarten lottery**'. This system decides who will be provided access to public kindergarten in the capital city. More specifically, public-funded kindergartens have only 146,000 spaces for children between the ages of two to five years old. In addition, the number of children living in the capital city doubled or sometimes more than doubled. However, it did not take long for people to find gaps and loops in the lottery system. Individuals could circumvent the lottery if preschool facility registered all the children, who needed and wanted to attend a kindergarten until the age of five. Then, the school holds a lottery and informs the parents if their child has won the lottery to enroll in the kindergarten. (France-Presse, 2017) "There are concerns over corruption in the lottery system in place to allocate kindergarten spaces in Ulaanbaatar. Some reports raise questions about the transparency of the allocation by lottery system with suggestions of bribes, connections or positions being used to secure enrollment" (the Ministry of Education, 2020, p. 18). There is no other country where children over the age of two years old can only hope and not guaranteed a place through the kindergarten lottery.

However, the lottery does not make decisions on a child's educational access in public schools. Education is mandatory and is protected under national constitution law. Under this law, the state must provide secondary education to children six years old and above. There is a gap between public and

private kindergarten; some call it "poverty"; others call it "family education". Both are not forms of the national educational system, but they exist and have a strong influence in Mongolian society.

Interview participant 5 (Male, 26 years old, married, with two children, 5 and 3 years old):

We need to live separate as a family, we send our children to their grandparents, to the countryside, because of this decision. People did not notice they live separately from their children because we are connected all the time with the internet. We ask: What are you eating, what are you doing, why are you crying? Nevertheless, the physical connection is so essential for the little one. Furthermore, people have forgotten that lately. It (this decision) makes it hard for young families, who have to work and at the same time pay the private kindergarten, especially if you have two children and pay that, we cannot afford that, we cannot live out of that bill. So, we decided to go without kindergarten. ' (5, 2022)

Result Analysis-Code: Sending children to countryside, Air pollution:

Depending on the family formulation, young parents are affected by this decision more clearly. They have specific options to deal with the anti-pandemic decisions. One of them is **sending their child** to the countryside, their grandparents, and working with young family members.

Because most Mongolian young parents have a child early in their twenties in comparison to western countries, young parents need to settle professionally and financially with their children. At the same time, it is harder to do this during the pandemic. So, most interview partners have access to support systems for childcare from their extended family. The parents bring their children to the countryside and build connections with their young grandchildren. Children's physical health relates to their emotional state -in Mongolian traditional culture. For example, mothers sleep with their children until they are three years old. Therefore, giving children space for physical contact with family's members and play is valued for their emotional needs and building physical connection. Mongolian upbringing is culturally different from other western countries. Although now the traditional upbringing is changing because of the COVID-19 measures and decisions of the state.

The second reason for this option is air pollution. *'We send them to the countryside because the city is extremely air polluted, it is dangerous.'* (5, 2022) What has been not enough researched is how bad the situation of air pollution is. This information has not provided enough for the population of Mongolia like the COVID-19 pandemic and its effect or outcomes. Everyone in Mongolia talks and are aware of air pollution in everyday life. Nobody does know exactly how to prevent it. Because it is a joint problem, it does not result from one problem or source: "Air pollution in urban Mongolia has become a public

health crisis, and every child and pregnancy are considered at risk. In winter months, the levels of PM2.5 pollution in Ulaanbaatar city (UB) can reach 1,985 micrograms per cubic meter — nearly 80 times the level WHO recommends as safe." (Bohle, 2022) Everybody in Mongolia hears similarities to COVID-19; it is harmful and could destroy everything. Some parents send their children to the countryside during winter. Some other parents stay only at home for a long time without going out during winter with their children. That issue, in general, has been not explicitly researched, but many examples, such as sick children and pregnant women resulting from the heavily polluted air, have been spread through social media and conversations in Mongolian society.

Result Analysis-Code: Fear of getting sick and the public health care institutions

The anti-pandemic legislation and its decisions were followed by fears of COVID-19. During the interviews, most of the interview partners explained or mentioned the risk of getting infected; at another level, things will worsen when their children got infected. Moreover, sometimes, the researcher should ask how these fears have originated for confident parents when the interview participants mention the fear of COVID-19.

[Interview participant 2](#) mentioned her fears that her children would be sick with COVID-19; she responded worse when asked more specifically about this fear:

"I did not take this information or fear especially only about children, just about dying people's number in general and then afraid. First, the Mongolian health system is not good; it is problematic if the child gets sick just in the standard time. I cannot imagine if my children get sick during Covid-19." (2, 2021)

The fear of getting sick during the COVID-19 pandemic is one of the significant challenges for parents because, as in many other countries, the Mongolian health sector was also in crisis before the pandemic. As mentioned in the interview, before the pandemic, most of the interviewed parents had been conflicted or found it difficult to connect with the public health system and access health care. This explanation demonstrates that the challenges in the care work affect childcare and the public health care system. In the midst of a global pandemic, parents with children feared the possible outcomes if their children were sick.

[Interview participant 6](#) (Female, 35 years old, single, one child, 2 years old)

"I think it is a good decision because I do have someone who can look after my child. However, it is hard for others who do not have the help system or parents. Until I get covid-19, it has been only a month. Until then, I thought it was a big risk to

get my child infected. Now my child has Covid-19, has not had any symptoms. So now I am thinking about it a little bit different. However, still, I think it is a good decision. Because now some private kindergartens are allowed to have children. I do not consider bringing my child to the kindergarten, even though I'm a doctor.” (6, 2022)

Interview participants also added comments about the public healthcare sector and their work situation. As they explained, it is the worst scenario for parents or mothers with little children, especially if young children get sick. Employers see the absence of mothers with sick children from work as a huge problem.”. Based on this situation, business owners asked applicants about their family situation and personal family planning. It brings many gender-targeted problems and discussions to the workplace and work demands. The anti-pandemic legislation has also been one of the leading 'resolving points' for those who did not have the support system or opportunity to give their children a kindergarten education. They do not have any other option than staying at home due to childcare, healthcare, and work demands. These triple demands cannot meet and have never been possible for anyone with children under five years old in Mongolia.

“If I choose some private kindergarten or find someone to look after my children and go to work, maybe my child will get sick. This could be the worst scenario during this pandemic. And I did not say anything about this decision or situation on social media or to others because I am a mother. If I have a job and my children get sick in the early years, I must take days off from work, which happens more often than you expected. From my first child, I have experience in that area in the workplace. It was bad. Also, I did not want my children to get Covid-19 and get worse, I am afraid. As a mother, I am just waiting for this pandemic to end.” (2, 2021)

Thus, Interview participant 2 explained the parent's biggest fear during and before the pandemic. As every parent's biggest priority is their children health, it has been difficult and worsened for families with children during the pandemic. Between March to October 2020, five mothers from the Bayan-Ulgii aimag region died of childbirth complications in Mongolia. Maternal mortality rates increased significantly because people are afraid of going to the hospital and potentially getting infected with COVID-19. (Ulziisuren, 2021). *“I think children whose parents are stay at home mother's/fathers are do not get sick. It is rare to get sick if children stay with their parents at home.”* (1, 2022)

One thing led to another, the childcare gap and healthcare gaps affect one another. The people of Mongolia should have access to good information instead of 'just fear' of the public healthcare system.

Result Analysis-Code: Benefits of staying at home with their children:

What is the best benefit of staying at home for mother/ father? [Care- Benefit \(3\)](#)

[Interview participant 3](#) (female, 35 years old, married, two children, four and two years old)

*“The most significant benefit was **developing my children and teaching** them some basic education. Also, I had time to spend making their food. Now I realize how significant a benefit was after I began to work.”* (3, 2022)

The benefit question always encourages people to think about no longer being able to enjoy certain benefits. Interviewee 3 mentioned that she spent most of her time in traffic jams since she went to work. Due to the poor infrastructure of Mongolia's capital, Ulaanbaatar, she cannot spend time with her children like a stay-at-home mother. *“I am not giving my care responsibility to others. It means my children do not **depend on the third person's character or temper**. They do not have to expect them to be as nice as their mother.”* (2, 2021)

This answer also highlights the worry about a third person's character or temper, which has been discussed a lot in the media, or discussion about the kindergarten teacher's temper or professional problems. Many interviewees have reported cases in which overstressed teachers in overcrowded classes have exploded or taken their anger out on a single child. The Child-teacher ratio is 29 in Mongolia, compared to the USA where the child-teacher ratio is 16. (Myagmar, 2010). The child-teacher ratio doubled in Mongolia because of the baby boom after the world financial crisis in 2008, when the Mongolian economy started to grow.

“Mhmm, it is nice to see how your children grow more closely and create them is admirable. Also, I think to stay at home mother's/father's children are do not get sick. It is rare to get sick if children stay with their parents at home.” (1, 2022)

This is a common belief and "logic" conclusion during Covid-19 in Mongolia. This belief has been reproducing and made the gender perspective stronger than before the pandemic. For example, most interviewees have mentioned their gender role as a mother or father, a provider or protector, who always must meet the need of care takers in different forms no matter how the state has been organizing.

These gender norms such as woman having the burden of care, may also have influenced the families who have decided to decrease their working hours or to quit their job. From a survey during the pandemic, members of every fifth family abandoned their jobs or decreased their working hours according to school closure or kindergarten situation in Mongolia. (Ulziisuren, 2021)

Result Analysis-Code: Care need and extended family

Mongolian culture is a circle culture different from western cultural mind. (Munkhbadral, 2021) It means the family takes care of the people who need help. When people can care for others, they have to care as much as they can. When a person cannot care for her- or himself any longer, this care will come back. The ideology is that not only will people get (back) what they give, but it has also been a tradition that taking care of the children was not only the parent's responsibility. Most grandparents have been taking care of their grandchildren. It is most usual in the Mongolian care system. Also, when people get older, they stay at home or stay at their children's homes—elderly care is provided mostly in the family circles.

In the interviews, participants have explained how their care gap or care needs have been implemented. The extended family system was the main answer for most interviewees during COVID-19, when the kindergartens were closed.

[Interview participant 7](#) (Male, 37 years old, single, one child, 2 years old):

'My mother has been taking care of my child since she was born.'

R: What do you think about the anti-pandemic legislation, which does not allow children under four years old in public kindergarten?

“I think it is a good decision because I do have someone who can look after my child. Although to others who do not have the help system or parents, it is hard for them. As a children's doctor and mother, I think it is a good decision for the children. Maybe I am not taking things seriously or problematically because I have my parents' support system.” (6, 2022)

New forms of the family, single parenthood, and other childcare needs arise from the various number of family formulation, have been filled the care gap with their extended family in Mongolia. In most cases, the grand-parents step in, especially if they were able to retire at the age of 65.

[Interview participant 4](#) (Male, 38 years old, married, three children; 13, 7 and 2 years old):

“We do have extensive help from my wife's parents. Furthermore, our children are grown up, and he (the big one) is thirteen. So, they should look after their siblings.' So, my wife and wife's parents are taking care of my children. I mean my children's grandparents; they raised my big one by themselves because we both had to work at that time.”

One of the traditional ways of coping with care needs is older children looking after their siblings. Taking care over younger siblings greatly increased during the Covid-19 pandemic. 'Unpaid care work has increased, with children out-of-school, heightened care needs of older persons and overwhelmed

health services.' (UN, 2020) The care-takers of younger siblings in Mongolia are 51.9% girls and 38.1% boys (Mongolia, 2020)

Though not every participant, not even every family, have extended family support. Single parents, or even young families without extended family support systems, do not have many choices. Option number one is staying at home, the second option is giving their children to private kindergarten, while the third option in form of alternative childcare services is not enough developed in Mongolia.

“Secondly, there is no other childcare in Mongolia than kindergarten, otherwise it is closed. For someone like me, who does not have a support system, mothers, or sisters, who come to my house and look after my children, I do not have so much choice to protect my children other than staying at home.” (2, 2021)

Cancer: Three of the eight participants have been affected by cancer directly, or a close family member has been diagnosed with cancer. As mentioned above, the Mongolian public health system was already under pressure before the pandemic, and it is clear from the interview partners how it will become during the pandemic. The cumulative risk of death from cancer in 2020 for all cancers and females of all ages was 34.8 in Mongolia. (Cancer, 2022) The Mongolian cancer rate is the highest in the world. Mortality rate can also be influenced by the health care sector.

“Besides my two children, I should care for my husband, which is clear. After that, I have to take care of my mom. My mother was diagnosed with breast cancer in September 2019, and I must take care of her all the time. During this process, she got operated on and chemotherapy. She needed more specific care because she was exhausted. No matter how young or old, all the people going through chemotherapy require special care. Every 21 days, she got chemo, and all these times, I had to bathe her, make food for her, wash her clothes and be with her. For one year, this chemo was very intensive. Furthermore, after this year, it has been a little better.” (1, 2022)

Some Interview participants have no extended family, such as an only child or do not have parents who might help with their care responsibility. Sometimes, a woman has been affected by the childcare and the 'extended care responsibility' such as cancer patients of their family or themselves during Covid-19.

Result Analysis- Care needs and problems resulting from the decision

Care- Problem (11)

Interview participant 8 (Female, 33 years old, single, two children, 3 years old and 6 months old)

R: Has this decision affected your life somehow or in some way?

“It is just too much to do for me. Other family members do not have a baby, so they just go to work, and I stay at home with the children and must cook and clean. My big child and sister's child stay at home, and it is sometimes difficult for my son and me. Because he is watching his phone regularly, if he were in kindergarten, he would not have seen the phone all the time.”

R: Can you describe the biggest obstacle arising from this decision?

“Phone addiction for my big one is a big issue for me. However, at the same time, I have a baby, and I cannot give the attention to my big son needs because I cannot make it at the same time with my baby.” (8, 2022)

Extended family can be helpful and supportive but can also be a burden. Women often take on supporting these care needs as mentioned and experienced by one of the interview partners:

“Sometimes, I cannot find someone who can take care of my child. It is the only obstacle for single mothers.” (6, 2022)

R: When you cannot find someone to take care of your child, what did you do? Are you not going to your work, or will you work with your child?

“Sometimes I take her with me. Not going to work is not an option because I am a single mother, I must earn money alone, so I cannot say I cannot find a nanny. It is certain that, we needed money, so not going to work is not an option for us. Even one time, I left my child alone while she was sleeping. I was making a Facetime (videocall) by my notebook to my phone, and when I am working, I was watching her. It was a short time, but it was intense for me.” (6, 2022)

Single parents have been directly affected by the decision, especially if they cannot find someone to look after their child. They felt pressured and stressed.

Although not only single parents, but most extremely Mongolian children have also been affected. From October 2019 to April 2020, 1,133 children suffered from smoke inhalation. (D. Tumurbaatar, 2021) 75.5 percent of the children who died due to burn injuries were under five years old. Lack of supervision or lack of care has more specifically injured, killed, and harmed many children under five. The kindergarten care for children under four years old is not only for economic outcomes or supporting parents and families. It is not only for the education of children but also for protecting these age groups.

The second point is for single parents. As seen especially in the interviews with single mothers, they do not consider not working as an option because of the economic situation of a single-headed family. Economic pressure and care pressure has doubled during the pandemic. As a result, single parents are trying to figure out various ways, although some have failed, and children have been affected and

injected. *'Financial difficulties, I wish I could start to work as soon as possible.'* (8, 2022) One interview participant answered for what is the main obstacle of this decision. Economic pressure on single parents intensified even if they had a newborn baby.

Kindergarten is not only an educational sector for these group children or families, because it is child protection system, which should have to exist in these certain situations, from the not planned or not figured social system.

Until now, not only in Mongolia but also in the international care system primarily providing care for the 'normal' family, 'traditional' family-style, or system. Although a new type of family is emerging, single parents have been challenging the care system and economic system. It has been bringing many problems because it is new. Governments or social systems do not know how to figure that out. How can they work and survive under the economic and care pressure if extended family help or care system has not been provided?

To this point, Esping-Andersen has been writing about the kindergarten and childcare sector as the only way to equalize the social inequality between single-parent families and traditional families or even between rich and poor families and inequality in general.

“It makes it hard for young families, who must work and at the same time pay the private kindergarten, especially if you have two children and pay that, we cannot live out of that bill. So, we decided to go without kindergarten” (5, 2022)

The anti-pandemic legislation of Mongolia leads to economic difficulties and even pressure in every form on the family.

Stay-at-home mothers explain their feelings on care work during the pandemic. Some topics were repeated in more interviews, such as 'overwhelmed, helpless and stuck.'

R: If you judge yourself as a mother, are you judging yourself as a good or bad mother?

I am not good mother. I was a good mother, when I was with the father of my big one (8, 2022).

R: Why are you feeling this way? When do you feel this way? Who is giving you these feelings?

“People do not say to me directly, but somehow, I felt it. I wish I did not do anything wrong or at least have an average family for my children. Maybe if I do not live with my parents with my two children. I do not know. Financially it is hard perhaps I could have money during Covid-19, all my life has changed. I am exhausted from this life. But I do love my two children.” (8, 2022)

During the pandemic, some families' life has changed extremely, some experienced emotional and physical pressure, stress or even faced violence. But they do want to talk about it more specifically. *“Sometimes I want to go out and cannot go out when my children are at home and no one taking care of them instead of myself.” (3, 2022)*

This happened not only to Mongolian mothers, but all the mothers or people who are giving care during Covid-19 have experienced such situations.

“I was just exhausted. I must go between three houses. First, I have to take care of my mom for five days, and then I have to go to the husband's parent's house and come back to my own home with my two little children. My children have missed me so much because they are still a baby. And I stayed for two days in our home with my children. During this time, I have also to clean the house and take care of my children. Most of the time, my husband is abroad for a business trip. This routine lasted for a year. In the end, after my mother's chemo, I just realized how tired I was, and I was getting angry. Because I was stressed, and I did not have time to sleep.” (1, 2022)

Care needs and care supply have been ignored before and during the pandemic. Most governments worldwide decided that families should cover their own care needs during the pandemic. As a result of this care burden, many people, especially women who are mothers and care providers, are stressed and burned out. These psychological consequences have not yet researched.

“Somehow, it is hard to go out whenever you want. Because no one could take over me with my children and care responsibility during pandemic” (1, 2022)

Most of the interview partners who have full-time care responsibilities have experienced these needs and problems as they explained their main problems.

Result Analysis- Code: Gender Role

Because we are mothers, we must overcome this Covid-19 as a mother. Children in their first years are so vulnerable they should be cared for well. If I choose some private kindergarten or find someone to look after my children and go to work, maybe my child will get sick. This is the worst scenario during this pandemic. And I did not say anything about this decision or situation on social media or others because I am a mother. If I have a job and my children get sick in the early years, I have to take days off my work, and it happens more often than you expect. From my first child, I have experience in that area in the workplace. It was everywhere. Also, I did not want my children to get Covid-19 and get worse, I am afraid. As a mother, I am just waiting for this pandemic will end. (2, 2021)

Remarks such as ‘I am a mother; I must overcome this pandemic as a mother’ is somehow or somehow repeated in the interviews. It means, in the Mongolian social diaspora this kind of gender role is strong and was reproduced during Covid-19 more than before.

It was one of the moments where mothers are explaining their exhaustion, but at the same time, they also expressed their gender roles and gender norms. These sentences have shown the expectations and pressure of parenthood from their social environment. More specifically, in this interview, these findings share further insights about the single parent's gender roles. Single parents have been facing many problems, not only care or economic difficulties but also pressure from the society according to their gender roles.

Result Analysis- Code: Gender role, Care and Neoliberalism

R: Do you think it is a duty to look after your children yourself?

“Yes, but first I must earn money. A human without cash, taking care of someone is complicated. It is almost impossible in this system. So maybe the essential part of taking care of someone is making money.” (7, 2022)

Most of the interviewed fathers explained their gender role as providing their family members' livelihood as a father, who is responsible for meeting the financial needs. Even if the researcher did not ask about the gender roles, participants of both sexes addressed them extensively. Before the interview, based on other research, my expectation was that the responsibility to care for children would be assumed by mothers as a female gender role. However, during the interview, it became more apparent that most interviewed fathers felt pressured by their gender role to serve as a bread winner and father to meet societal expectations in Mongolia.

R: If this decision has not been affected your family, why it has not been affected?

“We choose private kindergartens always, so this decision can not affect us.” (2, 2021) No, because the public kindergarten always has more than 50 children in a class and do not have enough cups to drink water, have to share the cups, which is only two or three. Public kindergartens do not have enough toys to play with. So, based on these situations, we always choose private kindergartens from the beginning of our children's education. So, this decision has not affected us.”

Who has not been affected? Who is not wet from the water?

R: Has this decision affected your life somehow or in some way?

“Not directly, before the anti-pandemic legislation, we already have decided for private kindergarten. What has hit hard is that many others cannot attend kindergarten. Kindergarten felt like some personal life or privilege. It cannot be like that.” (9, 2022)

R: Why it has not been affected?

“We know about educational inequality and prepare for that. But this decision makes this inequality sharper. I never thought I would feel guilty when my child attended private kindergarten. I never thought my siblings could not have the opportunity to give their children to kindergarten and stay at home. I cannot even talk about kindergarten with my relatives because it feels awkward and uncomfortable.” (9, 2022)

Most parents are knowledgeable about the situation in public kindergarten and chosen to send their children to private kindergartens. Those who can afford private kindergarten are not affected by the anti-pandemic legislation in Mongolia. It is the new neoliberalism; it hits some hard, while others are not even affected by the situation, even in a pandemic. People are accepting it, although they do not accept these emerging and future inequalities or they know about it and try to plan to overcome these challenges.

This interview participant brings up the topic of inequality, especially educational inequality. It was not raised and discussed in public in the last few years because most private kindergartens were and are protected by the elite’s interests or direct influences.

R: What do you think about the anti-pandemic legislation, which does not allow children under four years old in public kindergarten?

[Interview participant 9](#): First, I think I feel guilty because of other children who cannot afford the private kindergarten. For example, my relatives or siblings have children like mine, staying at home. When they ask me about my child's kindergarten, we discuss what my child has learned in kindergarten. So, I felt a little bit guilt and wish the decision and situation were different from that.

The interview participant highlighted the other angle, which could show the guilt of having enough or can afford some care during this time. It is the opposition who support neoliberalism and, at the same time, chose to send their children to private kindergartens.

R: If you are employed, what are the obstacles when working and trying to find the balance between work and children?

Interview participant 9:

“Traffic jam is one of the significant obstacles. We must be in kindergarten before 09.00, and we are primarily late no matter how early I go out. The private kindergartens are mainly in the central area of the city. So, our home to any private kindergarten has been far away from our house. Based on that situation we have chosen the nearest one to my workplace. But with extreme traffic jams, every morning and evening are stressful.” (9, 2022)

This part of the interview showed how infrastructure in low and middle-income countries could affect everyday life, care, and family time.

R: What is the main advantage when you are working? Finance, a social relation, or psychological advantage for you?

“Main advantage is working, so it is financially good for us, and my child is developing. In addition, my child's verbal and physical development is better than staying only at home during that time.” (9, 2022)

Access to private kindergarten is beneficial for parent's financial well-being and, at the same time, benefits children's development.

In the interviews occurred highest number of the answers were according to Gender role (28)

During the interview, many interview partners often shared coming out of nowhere or many times repeated on their experiences and expectations of their gender roles. These gender roles intensified during COVID-19 not only for mothers; father's gender role has been sharpened.

*Interview 7: Because my mother helps me with my child and family life, which is not that good. Although my mother took care of everything, my baby is like her biological child. I am happy about that and pay all the bills as a **child's father**.*

R: Has this decision affected your life somehow or in some way?

No. My mother is a retired person, and she stays at home anyway. So, she is not bored or alone, and she is with my baby. So, it is suitable for both of us. (7, 2022)

R: Do you think it is a duty to look after your children yourself?

“Yes, but first I have to earn money. A human without cash, taking care of someone is complicated. It is almost impossible in this system. So maybe the essential part of taking care of someone is making money.” (7, 2022) *“I am earning money for my child and my mother. They must eat and live. I must **feed them as a father**.”* (7, 2022)

Most of the fathers in this research explained and discussed fatherhood and gender roles, such as providing for their families' financial needs, feeding their families, and earning money. These demands were highlighted as male gender roles in parenthood in the interviews.

*I am a good father. I provide my family **financially stable** and when I have free time or I am at home from the countryside work, I cook, clean and do housework. I support my wife.*

“My wife and my mother always said to me that I am a good father. When I bring my salary to my wife, I feel proud. When I am back from work, and I am at home when we are going out shopping with our children. I feel good. **I can afford this**, and they feel it too. They are feeling good too. I think it is **the father's feeling**.” (5, 2022)

R: What about your partner? Does your partner think it is a duty to look after his/her children by him/herself?

*“Yes. She always **put our children above everything**. Until a month ago, she **stayed at home** for five years. **She thinks being a mother is more important than being employed and I am thankful for that**” (5, 2022)*

Both sides of the partnerships reciprocate and reproduce these genders roles to one another. These roles show up significantly as economic pressures for men, social responsibility for women. Gender studies solely focused on female gender roles are not enough to grasps the gendered complexities of Mongolia and other countries. One of under researched topic of these gender roles are stress faced by male as a result of these gender roles and economic expectations during neoliberalism. One of such disparities are the number of fathers who are stressed from these economic pressures. This stresses and pressure can also include and lead to divorce, alcoholism, suicide, crime, and gambling.

“Because I was earning good money and bought everything my children asked for, we just bought a new house without debt. It is a success. When I have the house we own now, I felt like I am a good father. My wife said that she is thankful and has a good husband on Facebook. I think I felt at that moment very good about my fatherhood. Sometimes, my children have fights, and my wife is angry; I wish I were with them all the time.” (5, 2022)

R: If you judge yourself as a mother/father, are you judging yourself as a good or bad mother/father?

R: Why are you feeling this way? When do you feel this way? Who are giving you these feelings?

“I am judging myself as **a good mother** because my daughter did **not get ill**, she is **healthy**. So, I **judge myself as a good mother**. But sometimes when I cannot find someone to look after my daughter, and I must send her to my parents when my daughter should be in the countryside with her grandparents, I feel a little bit guilt of a mother. In another way, no one said

to me as a good mother or a bad mother. I just sensed from my profession because I am a children's doctor. Because of that, I do have **some certain mom's image, what makes a mother a good mom** or bad mom. Some children are always sick, and based on these cases, I am a good mother." (6, 2022)

According to the interview partner, there is a certain image of a good mother, such as children do not get sick. It also brings up the public health care system and people's fear of getting their children sick. At the same time, it describes the deeply embedded stereotype in Mongolian society that **good mothers have healthy children.**

"In general, family members and close friends say that I am a good mother. Mostly my friends, who are also mothers with one child, expressed it as: I am with one child and stressed, and how do you manage it with two children? Then my husband said, you are a good mother and good wife. After that, my husband's parents are told that you have to rest and we can take care of your children, my daughter you should be resting." (1, 2022)

"Grunow et al (2008) provide some evidence that supports the Hochchild hypothesis. Their principal finding is that partners typically display gender egalitarian behaviour prior to marriage and childbirth but revert to traditional specialization once the first child is born. And once established, the new less egalitarian regime becomes permanent." (Esping-Andersen, 2009, p. 31)

"Some of my relatives said to me that I am a good mother. **My husband said to me when I was not working and staying at home.** Lately, he does not say that. Now I realized since I am working in this company. (laughed) Maybe my motherhood is on trial." (Laughed) (3, 2022)

"Female education and employment are widely employed to describe the transformation of women's roles." (Esping-Andersen, 2009, p. 20) When this interview partner has been interviewed, she has realized somethings while she was talking. For example, "my motherhood is on the trial", which shows how her role has changed and her partner has taken the new family situation of having a working mother. This interview partner brings one of the 'good mother's' description, giving a good education to the children.

'I am a good mother. I am hardworking and organized. I gave good education to my children, when I did not work, during the last four years.' (3, 2022)

The interview partner has been working during the first child's early years and at the second child, she is not working. In other countries, mothers do not work as soon as they have their first child. In

Mongolia, my interview partners with two children were not working in the second child's early years, because they had experienced some difficulties as working mothers with their first child.

"My husband says to me that I must be a good mother. For example, When I am giving up on breastfeeding, he says: **You are a mother how could you stop breastfeeding and go to work. it is more important than just money**" (2, 2021)

All the female interview partners gave explanations of motherhood and family relations. Single mothers, however, talked more about economic difficulties and their need to go to work. Married mothers were praised as "good mothers" by their partners because they were staying at home or considered breastfeeding more important than earning money. Some of the married mothers are thankful for their economic situation. Some of them have been struggling with their economic dependency. 'Women's life course choices were traditionally made in a context of economic dependency and major societal constraints...the changing role of women has very much been driven by the quest for more autonomy and equality.' (Fuchs, 1988; Sorensen and McLanahan, 1987; Goldin, 1990; Hakim 1996) cited in (Esping-Andersen, 2009, p. 23)

After the interview, participants reaching out to the researcher while infected with COVID-19

After conducting the interviews for this study, interview participants reached out to me to tell and update me about their situation. I was just wondering, why do they keep connecting to me online? How do they want to talk about their situation with me? One significant moment is that every participant who was infected by COVID-19 contacted me about their situation and wanted to talk about how their family responded, even if our first interview was months ago. So, I talked with them again for a second interview about COVID-19 and the infection's impact on the families. One example was interview participant 2:

"I was the one first confirmed as a Covid-19 positive. And then my husband made an argument about why I got infected. He said that: You are staying at home and do not go to work or meet others, and then you are infected. Why is this so? he asked and stressed. Then explaining how everything became more complicated because of this situation, and we do have some financial difficulties because of this situation. He talked and reacted in this way."

This interview partners were in same profession and had the same level of higher education. Only the mother of the children stayed at home after giving birth to her second child. Although partners begin their lives together, the partner who stays at home is also responsible for not getting COVID-19 and bringing financial difficulties onto the family. "Partnerships are increasingly homogamous in terms of

education and, almost certainly, of preferences and tastes. This is especially pronounced among the highly educated (Blossfeld and Timm, 2003; Schwartz and Mare, 2005)". cited in (Esping-Andersen, 2009, p. 29)

R: What changed in your family and for yourselves after you were infected and recovered from Covid-19?

"For my personal life, I just realized in every step of myself, in every situation, I must take care of myself by myself. I have to have self-confidence in every phase of my life, no matter what is happening in the world." (2, 2021)

Voice

As a researcher, what I oftener wonder before my interviews and also during my interviews: How are these mothers or fathers, parents not saying a word against their will and interest according to the anti-pandemic legislation? How are these voices not reaching state decision-makers? How has the anti-pandemic legislation not been faced a strong opposition from the public.

R: Would you participate against the anti-pandemic legislation about banning kindergarten or decreasing childcare money, if one will be organized?

"No, I will not participate because taking care of my children is my duty, and it is not the government's thing to provide a kindergarten and take care of my children. I am **the mother**, and I am responsible for that. I must solve this problem by myself. So, I will not participate if something comes" (2, 2021).

R: What do you think about the childcare money is going to decrease? For now, childcare money for the month is 100.000tugrug (circa 35 dollars) it will be decreased for 50.000 tugrug (circa 17 dollars) government discussing the budget. What would you do if it decreased?

"Of course, I will be against that decision, and I will say my word, but not believe it; no matter what I say, how I say, this decision will not change. I don't believe that my voice does matter." (2, 2021)

What has been occurred is, most interview participants are not believing in their voices in any form. Even one demonstration against women's right and newborn child were organized by young adults, male gender was dominant in this demonstration. Women would have participated, but they do not raise their voice during pandemic, because they have care responsibility, which cannot give to others.

Second highlighting point where these interview partners were somehow believing in their government's decision even though it is not their expectation. Reason for that could be most of the population is dependent from the government or decisions directly.

Third reason why do not raise voice against the decision is the gender role. During the pandemic traditional gender role of both gender sides has been intensified. Gender roles are the third main reason they do not raise their voice against the decision. During the pandemic, traditional gender roles of men and women have intensified. These gender roles are not only the production of the state; people around them reproduce these gender roles with the fear of getting sick or dying of COVID-19.

Most of the interview partners were college-educated participants. “Higher educated parents of both sexes contribute far more time to their children. Indeed, the gap between low and high educated is quite huge. For the highly educated mothers, it is clear that the time gained via bargaining is more than annulled because they actively prefer to spend more time with their children.” (Esping-Andersen, 2009, p. 49) It is also clear that communities with low education levels remain at home as mothers; working single mothers also do not decide on their decisions alone. It is somehow coercive due to the economic situation of the pandemic; care system problems and gender roles directly affect the outcomes. Highly educated participants from these interviews have more options. If they decided to stay at home during the pandemic, it is their chosen path and decision. For the others, the decision to stay at home or not was enforced by anti-pandemic legislation or economic pressures

6. Conclusion

Anti-pandemic legislation has affected and increased inequalities for families and women with children under four years old. During the COVID-19 pandemic, access to public childcare was reduced and, for low-income families, blocked in Mongolia. This response and action of the Mongolian government demonstrate that childcare is not considered an essential public resource to achieve gender equality. The Mongolian government had made only measures to support families through increasing funding of its national child benefit program during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, state welfare policies and public resources do not work without affordable public childcare. Women and families hold most of the burden of care work, whether or not there is a global pandemic.

Gender regime theorists, such as Walby and Fraser, argue that gender equality can be achieved when both genders are equally responsible for care. Society can accomplish these changes through paternal leave and providing equal salaries for women. Esping-Andersen demonstrates that the ‘bargaining model’ or ‘assortative mate’ with economic outcomes affects gender equality. If a wife’s income rises, her husband’s care work will increase. Access to childcare and workforce participation are essential and strongly connected to care work, specifically childcare and female unemployment. These economic inequalities are also faced by women with children, including those with high education levels, who have been out of the workforce for a long time due to childcare needs. Based on these outcomes, Esping-Andersen conclude that childcare institutions and public childcare are crucial to achieving gender equality. In the long run, high-quality childcare services before primary school affect inequality. Access to public and affordable childcare could be one of the essential resources and steps to achieving equality in the future.

Mongolia exemplifies how the childcare deficit could affect female unemployment and inequality, not only between men and women but also between low-income and high-income families and children. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Mongolian government decided on anti-pandemic legislation, which does not allow children under four years old in public kindergartens due to insufficient childcare institutions. Unfortunately, the effect of this decision could not be measured in a year. However, after this anti-pandemic legislation, the female unemployment rate increased higher than in other countries, such as Kazakhstan and China, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The childcare policy of Mongolia was ratified and implemented as national law. The ILO praised this legislation and its child welfare funding system, but in practice, the law is implemented inconsistently, and its effects on families are unequal. The government of Mongolia ignored the plight of children and families who could not afford private kindergarten and childcare. The country decided to implement lottery admissions to determine which children can and cannot attend public kindergartens. In 2022, access to public childcare services is still selected through this lottery, which faces corruption or external influence by other's interests. It is one of the unimaginable examples of capitalism and neoliberalism during the COVID-19 pandemic, which could lead to rising inequality for women and children.

Recommendations:

1. Increase public childcare institutions immediately.
2. Private-public childcare institutions should be established for low-income families and children who cannot afford private kindergartens.
3. Open other forms of childcare services, such as kindergarten with mothers at least two days a week for 2-4 hours.

For future research, the connection between childcare and unemployment rates should be analyzed further in-depth.

7. Literature

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