



Gender Equality Policy in Sweden: 1970s–2010s

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to give an overview of gender equality policy in Sweden from the 1970s until today. A number of political measures and whether these measures individually, as well as combined, have promoted gender equality and the dual-earner/dual-carer model are described and analyzed. The conclusion is that the right to part-time work, publicly financed child care, parental leave, and tax deductions for domestic services make it easier for mothers to reconcile work and family, but do not challenge the distribution of family responsibilities between women and men. However, the individual right for fathers to 2 months of parental leave does challenge the gender order, to a certain extent, and fathers today participate more in care and domestic work than earlier. The dual-earner/dual-carer family is closer at hand when women have a higher education and earnings and thereby greater bargaining power. Employed work is more conditional among women with a lower education level, i.e., they may be employed but under the constraint that they are still responsible for care and domestic work in the family. Another constraint in this group where many work part-time is the lack of available full-time positions in the labor market.

KEY WORDS

Gender equality policy / part-time work / publicly financed child care / parental leave / tax deduction for domestic services / employment / time use

Introduction

The main goals of gender equality policy since the 1970s in Sweden have been to increase women's employment and men's participation in unpaid care and domestic work and at the same time to introduce the dual-earner/dual-carer family model.¹ The aim of this article is to give an overview of the gender equality policy in Sweden from the 1970s until today. This is first done by studying the introduction, development, and outcome of a number of political measures and analyzing whether the effects of these measures individually as well as combined have promoted gender equality and the dual-earner/dual-carer model or only women's conditional employment. The measures studied are the right to shorter working hours for parents, publicly financed child care, parental leave, and tax deductions for domestic services. The article is mainly based on official documents, and data are collected from official sources. The next part of the article discusses the dual-earner/dual-carer model and conditional employment for women, after which one chapter of each of the different policy measures and a presentation of the development of the employment rate of women, men, mothers, and fathers from 1960 until today and comparison of mothers' and fathers' use of time for employment and domestic, care, and repair work between 1990/91 and 2010/11 follows. The

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article ends with a conclusion concerning the combined effects of the measures taken to promote gender equality.

A dual-earner/dual-carer model or conditional employment for women

In the beginning of the 1970s, the dual-earner/dual-carer family as a model for policy was introduced in Sweden (Abukhanfusa 1987; Bergqvist & Nyberg 2002; Hinnfors 1992; Klinth 2002; Lundqvist 2007). This alternative did concern not only women but also men, and represented new thinking. The government should support not only mothers' employment but also fathers' care responsibilities. For this to come true, publicly financed child care was needed, but additionally maternity leave should be transformed into parental leave. Choice and equality were important arguments. Publicly financed child care and parental leave would strengthen gender equality as far as employment and care work were concerned, and they would increase parents' choices since both the father and the mother could be on leave when a child was born and both could be employed. Gender equality was conceptualized as based on sameness, with new norms for both women and men, which meant not only a stronger position for women in the labor market but also that men should take greater responsibility for domestic work and child care, i.e., not only a dual-earner but also a dual-carer model.

Choice and gender equality are often used as arguments when promoting policies aimed at providing parents with conditions to reconcile work and family. However, considering the strength and resistance of structural gender orders, these policies might not—at least not in the short run—change the gender division of labor in the labor market and in the family. Women might only be able to choose under constraints and the measures might only lead to “women’s conditional liberation.” This was the title of an article written by Eva Moberg, a Swedish journalist and feminist, in 1961. She argued that we should stop hammering in the concept of “women’s two roles.” Both women and men only have one role, the role as human being. If this is not accepted, then women’s liberation is only conditional. The new line of thought in the article was that women’s biological function to give birth and breast-feed children should not be confused with the “function of washing their clothes, cook their food and try to raise the child to a good and harmonious person. Not to speak about the function of scrubbing floors, wash windows, sew clothes, buy milk and polish furniture” (Moberg 1961, p. 70, my translation). The last mentioned tasks should be shared between the parents, only then can women and men become equal in reality, and not only formally, and gender equality in the labor market and in the family can be achieved.

If the policies do not specifically induce men to share care and domestic work, there is a risk that the result of gender equality policies will be conditional employment for women and not a dual-earner/dual-carer model. Women may be able to enter the labor market, but only if they at the same time take responsibility for child care and domestic work, while no or very limited demands are made on men and fathers concerning these tasks.

Current studies of the effects of gender equality policies usually find the Nordic countries to be the most gender egalitarian, and far-reaching supply of high-quality public day care, flexible terms of employment, and parental leave have all been found to

increase women's—especially mothers'—labor force activity and work continuity (Daly 2000; Gornick & Meyers 2003; Korpi 2000; Misra et al. 2007; Orloff 2002). However, other researchers point out that “mother-friendly” policies facilitate women's employment, but that these policies at the same time might contribute to the reproduction of gender inequality since they do not seriously challenge the unequal distribution of family responsibilities between men and women (Mandel & Semyonov 2006; Stier & Mandel 2003). Gender-neutral reconciliation policies in reality mean adjusting the demands of employment to women's responsibility for domestic and care work.

The right to part-time work for parents

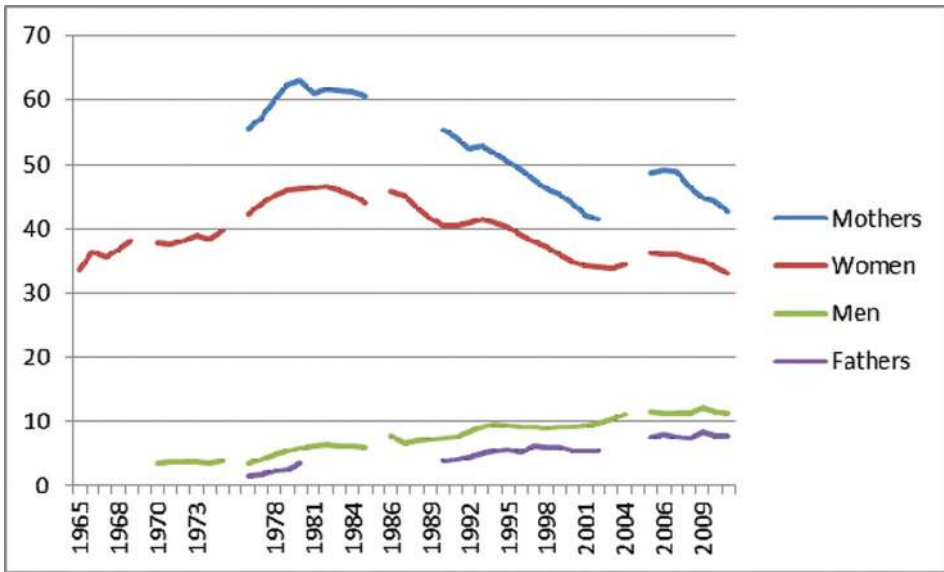
As married women's and mothers' employment increased in the 1960s and 1970s, the long working hours emerged as a problem. In 1975, a commission report showed that parents did not have enough energy and time to care for their children to the extent wished for, and the children were in child care for too long. More than 50% of the children were in child care for at least nine hours a day (SOU 1975:62, p. 99ff). A part-time parental allowance was proposed. Each parent with a child less than three years should be given the right to a six-hour working day for ten months. It was thought that this division of part-time parental leave would lead to a leveling out of care and household work between parents. However, no proposals were made by the government as a result of the report.

In 1978, the government introduced a right to a special parental allowance for 90 days (SOU 2005:73, p. 109ff).² This special parental allowance could be used as full, half, and a fourth of a day of parental allowance. Also this time an obligatory division of time between the parents was discussed. But many objections were made and it was argued that there were many situations when exceptions were motivated. A combination of a rule of obligatory division and possibilities of exceptions was considered leading to too much administrative trouble. The allowance was divided equally between the parents, but one parent (usually the father) could transfer the time to the other parent (usually the mother). Since then additional rights for parents to shorter working time have been introduced. Today parents can take one-eighth, a fourth, a half, three-fourth, and full day of parental allowance and be on leave correspondingly. Additionally, a parent has a right to leave for a fourth of a normal working day without compensation.

The introduction of the new laws in the 1970s increased the share of women who changed from full-time to part-time employment, but at the same time the share changing from full-time to not employed decreased and a large share of the women who entered the labor market did this on a part-time basis (Pettersson 1981, chapter 3.4). As seen in Figure 1, the share of part-time employed women and mothers increased between mid-1960s and mid-1980s, and at the same time their employment grew dramatically. Since then the share of women and mothers employed part-time has decreased, while the share of part-time employed men and fathers has increased continuously but very slowly. In 2011, over 40% of mothers, one-third of the employed women, around one-tenth of the men, and 8% of the fathers were part-time employed. It should be pointed out that the data in Figure 1 underestimate the share of working part-time. The reason for this is that in addition to those employed part-time, some of the full-time employed only work part-time (Nyberg 2003).



Figure 1: Share of part-time employ of the employed, mothers, and fathers with children 0–6 years, women and men, 16–64 years, %, 1965–2011*



*1965–1975, 16–74 years. Observe that there are breaks in the series. Statistics Sweden (SCB) cannot explain the big difference in the share of part-time working mothers between 2002 and 2005. There is no change in the definition (Daniel Samuelsson).

Source: SCB, AKU (Arbetskraftsundersökningarna), 1965–2011.

Part-time work is also a question of class among women, but not among men. Half of the women belonging to a union of blue-collar workers, one-third of the white-collar workers, and one-fourth of professional women are employed part-time (Larsson 2010). Among men, it is 7–9% in all three categories.

Today, the Social Democrats and The Left Party see part-time work as a problem for gender equality and have proposed a right to full-time employment, while the right wing and center-right parties see part-time employment as a manifestation of choice (Tollin 2011, p. 106). Part-time unemployment, i.e., part-time employed who want to work more hours, but are unable to find such work, is seen as a problem by all parties. It is notable that the number of part-time unemployed women in 2011 was almost as high as the number of (full-time) unemployed (SCB 2012a; http://www.scb.se/Pages/The_maticAreaTableAndChart_334806.aspx).³ The problem of part-time unemployment is much bigger among women than among men (Nyberg 2003).

To sum up, we can establish that the attempt to individualize parents' right to shorter working time has failed. Instead a gender-blind right for parents was introduced. Part-time work increased at the same time as mothers' employment grew in the 1960s–1980s when there was not enough publicly financed child care and, in the beginning of the period, maternity/parental leave was short. The right to shorter working hours for parents resulted in a big share of mothers using this right, which made it easier for

mothers to reconcile work and family, but it did not impact on fathers' part-time work and participation in household and care work, i.e., it has not contributed to a gender equal distribution of household and care work. On the contrary, it served to perpetuate women's responsibility for this work and supported women's conditional employment, especially among women with a low level of education in the working class. Since the middle of the 1980s up until today, the share of part-time employed mothers/women has decreased. One problem today is women's part-time unemployment.

Publicly financed child care

In 1963, the central state allocated grants to the municipalities in order to expand child care. This was done again in 1966 (Antman 1996, p. 126f). However, the resources were mainly used to increase the number of children in part-time playschools (Nyberg 1995, table 1). In 1968 the government appointed a special commission, the National Commission of Child Care (Barnstugutredningen), which laid the foundation for today's Swedish preschool model—day care centers and playschools were to be combined in a preschool system that would service the interests of children as well as allowing parents to work or study. Care and education were to be merged in a new way. The old-fashioned view that full-time day care was something for the poor, or at least less well-off, while educational activities in part-time playschools were for the stimulation of better-off children was to be wiped out (SOU 1972:26; 1972:27).

In the middle of the 1970s, the central government decided on an extensive publicly financed child care program. However, the municipalities were responsible for the supply of child care and the expansion was slow. Since many mothers with preschool children were already in the labor market, demand for child care far exceeded the supply. In 1970, about half of the mothers with preschool children (0–6 years) were employed, while only around 10% of the children were enrolled in public child care centers (Nyberg 1995). Many employed mothers engaged private family day care in the informal market. The lack of publicly financed child care was one of the reasons why “child care for all children” was a main demand by the radical feminist organization Group 8, other women's organizations, and working mothers in general.

The gap between supply and demand for child care was one important reason why in 1985 the parliament decided that all children 1.5–7 years with working or studying parents and children, who for different reasons need special support for their development, were to be entitled to a place in public child care by 1991 (Nyberg 2007). Yet, the expansion of child care places was still too slow, and far from all parents who needed a place were able to get one. Legislation was therefore tightened in 1995, when local authorities became duty bound to provide child care without undue delay (3–4 months) to all children aged 1–12 years with working or studying parents and children in need of special support.

In the 1970s and 1980s, publicly financed child care expanded, but as already mentioned, all children were not granted a place. Those who were granted were mainly professional and white-collar families. The proportion of working class children, who went to publicly financed preschool, increased from 13% to 25%, while the proportion of upper class white-collar children increased from 16% to 54% in the cohorts born between 1966 and 1981 (Jonsson 2004, p. 105ff). One important exception to this



was single mothers, whose children were given priority to publicly financed child care over children of married/cohabiting parents. The biggest difference is seen in the cohort born in 1966–1969, where almost 40% of the children born to single mothers were in publicly financed child care, but less than 10% of the children born to married/cohabiting parents. These differences between children from different categories have now almost disappeared since almost all children are in preschool. But some differences still exist. For example, children of parents with a university education spend about three hours more per week in child care than children whose parents only have a nine-year compulsory school education and they are also more often in child care run by parental cooperatives (Skolverket 2000).

Not only is the supply of publicly financed childcare important for mothers' employment, but so are the quality and the parental fees. During the economic crisis in the beginning of the 1990s, the municipalities tried to reduce the costs per child, something which could entail lower quality child care. Measuring the quality of child care is no easy task and there is no general agreement as to how this should be done. Still, if quality is to be measured in terms of the child/staff ratio, it has been found to be deteriorating over time. In 1990, there were 4.4 children per full-time worker in publicly financed preschools and 5.3 in 2010. Group size is another indicator of resources and quality. The average number of children per group also increased: from on average of less than 14 children in 1990 to 16.8 in 2010 (Skolverket 2006; 2010). This means that both in terms of number of children per staff and number of children per group, quality has deteriorated.

In addition to increasing the number of children per staff member and group, in order to handle the financial situation in the 1990s, the municipalities increased revenues by raising child care fees and some also made the fee conditional on parental income. In 1990, parents paid 10% of the total gross costs of child care. By 2000, this proportion had increased to 19%. The constantly rising rates, the large differences in rates between municipalities, and elimination of the marginal effects of fees on parents' (mothers') income, i.e., if the cost of child care increases, it may affect women's employment and working time, were reasons why the central government introduced a maximum fee in 2002 (Nyberg 2007). For the municipalities, the introduction of the maximum fee was voluntary; however, today all municipalities apply maximum fee.

In the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, women's right to employment was a strong argument for the expansion of publicly financed child care. However, child care has also been motivated by concerns about equality among children from different social backgrounds and a good social and pedagogical upbringing for all children (Bergqvist et al. 1999; SOU 1972:26; 1972:27). As an increasing number of children have been included in public child care, the focus on support for children's development and life-long learning has increased. The terminology has changed from *day care centers* to *preschool*, and in 1996, the responsibility for publicly financed child care was transferred from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health to the Ministry of Education and Science and a special curriculum was developed for children 1–5 years of age (Bergqvist & Nyberg 2002).

Since the beginning of the 2000s, not only children with working or studying parents but also children with parents on parental leave and unemployed parents have a right to a place in publicly financed child care. At the same time, all 4- and 5-year-olds became entitled, free of charge, to 525 hours of preschool yearly. This is also the case with all 3-year-olds since 2010. The proportion of 2-, 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds enrolled

in publicly financed child care increased from 55–65% in 1990 to 91–97% in 2011 (Nyberg 2012 forthcoming). Virtually all (95%) six-year-olds since 1998 have been found in so-called preschool classes (Skolverket 2010, p. 2). Together this means that publicly financed child care has become more or less universal in Sweden. At the same time, hardly any children below the age of 1 are in publicly financed child care since they are at home with a parent on parental leave. This is also true for a large proportion of the 1-year-olds since parental leave is longer than one year, and can be spread over a longer period of time.

To sum up, early investments in publicly financed child care took place mainly in part-time playschools and not in full-time child care centers. Up until the middle of the 1970s, there were many more places in playschools than in child care centers. Playschools suited at-home mothers better than employed mothers. It took until the 1990s for demand and supply for full-time child care to be more or less in balance. The use of publicly financed child care is more general among professional and white-collar families than working class families. Today neither the lack of places nor the fees pose a problem, since there is a maximum fee. The problem is rather that quality has deteriorated. Publicly financed, affordable child care of good quality furthers women's employment but does not increase fathers'/men's contribution to this work. Therefore, publicly financed child care facilitates women's conditional employment rather than the dual-earner/dual-carer model. Women are dependent on other women for child care and publicly financed child care creates employment for women. The share of men in publicly financed child care is very low.

Parental leave

Publicly financed child care was, from the beginning, an important foundation of the dual-earner part of the family model, while the transformation of maternity leave into parental leave was an important part of the dual-carer part of the same model. This change took place in 1974 and meant that the leave following the birth of a child was no longer reserved for the mother, but could also be used by the father. However, the father could transfer his right to the mother. In 1974, parental leave was 6 months, but already in 1975 it was lengthened to 7 months and by 1990 parental leave reached 15 months and today parental leave is 16 months (Nyberg 2007).

When parental leave was introduced in 1974, parental allowance was 90% of earnings. At the same time, the benefit became taxable and was considered when pension rights were calculated. In the wake of the economic crisis in Sweden in the 1990s, parental allowance was lowered and has since then been 80% and there is a ceiling. Non-employed parents receive a guaranteed amount.

Even though fathers were entitled to parental leave in 1974, hardly any father used the opportunity. This led to new mobilization around the question (Klinth & Johansson 2010, p. 59ff). Some argued that there should be an obligatory division of time between the parents. The debate was heated. What should happen with the sailor on his way to Japan? Did he have to return home to be on parental leave? In August 1975, a new governmental investigation proposed one "father's month" of the parental leave. Among social democrats, there were those who questioned "parents' (fathers') freedom to choose" and the Liberal Party's youth league and other liberal politicians



pushed for a mandatory division of the parental leave. However, the political decision makers decided to continue as earlier and the problem with the unequal gender division of child care was defined as a problem of attitudes, rather than as a structural order in society. Since then there have been numerous campaigns to encourage fathers to use parental leave by ministries, governmental authorities, trade unions, etc.

Over time, the share of fathers taking parental leave grew, albeit very slowly. In 1991, Sweden elected a right/center/liberal/Christian democrat government and a “father’s month” was promoted by the Liberal Party as a means of encouraging fathers to take parental leave and stimulate gender equality. A father’s month (and corresponding mother’s month) was introduced in 1995. At the same time, cash-for-care was launched as a result of a compromise within the government and primarily as a concession to the Christian Democratic Party. One month of parental leave could no longer be transferred to the other parent, which in reality meant that the father could not transfer that month to the mother. In 2002, parental allowance leave was increased with an additional non-transferable month by a Social Democratic government.⁴ This meant that if the parents wanted to use all 16 months of parental leave, each parent must take at least two months. However, the use of this right was not mandatory.

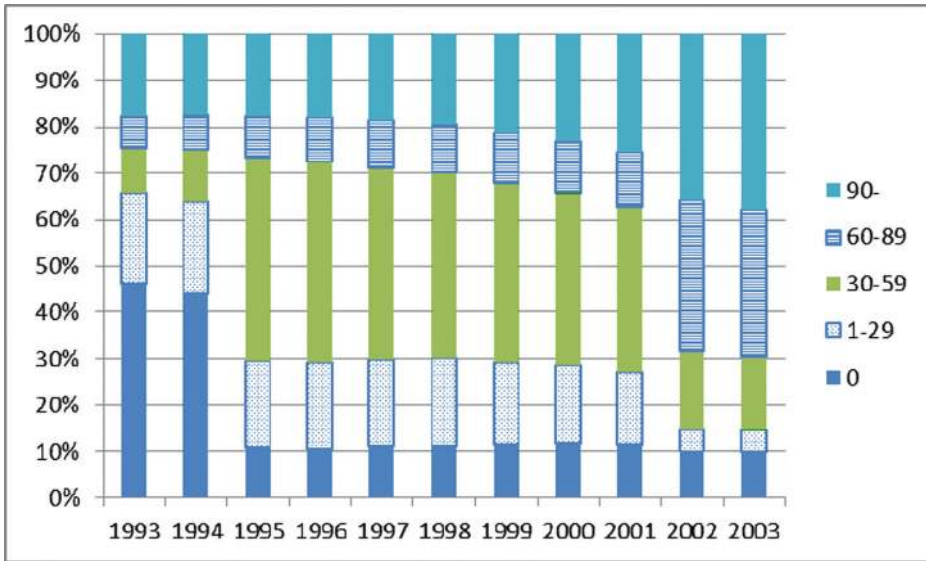
Of the total claimants to parental leave in 2010, the ratio of fathers was 44% and mothers 56% (Försäkringskassan 2011a). While this seems to be a rather gender-equal division of the parental leave, the proportion of all parental allowance days used by fathers is not equally impressive. Fathers’ share of parental leave days has increased from 0% in 1974 to 24% in 2011. However, it might be more interesting to investigate this from the perspective of the child and especially to investigate if the introduction of the father’s month in 1995 and the second one in 2002 made a difference. Information is available about how many days of parental allowance fathers used for children born between 1993 and 2003 and up until the child was eight years old (Försäkringskassan 2012), which is the age limit for using parental allowance days.

Figure 2 shows that 44–46% of the fathers of children born during 1993 and 1994, which is before the introduction of the father’s months, did not use one single day with parental allowance. This proportion declined to 10–11% for children born in 1995 and afterward, i.e., after the father’s month was introduced. The proportion of fathers who took 1–29 days was around 20% the two first years and then decreased to 17–18% and to around 5% in 2002 and 2003.⁵ The share of fathers who took 30–59 days increased from around 10% in 1993 and 1994 to more than 40%, of which many probably used 30 days. When the second “father’s month” was introduced in 2002, the share of fathers who used 60–89 days increased from 12% in 2001 to around 32% in 2002 and 2003. The share of fathers who use 90 days or more has grown from 17% in 1993 to around 38% in 2003.

These data show that the introduction of an individual right for the father had a rather strong effect on the share of fathers using parental allowance days and the number of days. It can be pointed out that the first father’s month reduced the number of days the mothers used. This was not the case when the second father’s month was introduced since the parental leave then was prolonged, and both mothers’ and fathers’ parental allowance days increased (Duvander 2012, p. 30f).

Parental leave furthers women’s employment. Women can be absent from employment to take care of the child and after the parental leave have a right to return to work. However, long parental leave, which is mainly used by mothers, does not contribute to an equal sharing of unpaid household and care work, on the contrary.

Figure 2: Percentage of fathers who use parental allowance days for children born from 1993 to 2003 based on days used until the child was 8 years old.



Source: Försäkringskassan (2012).

Research shows that the gender division of labor in the household becomes less gender equal when children are born. This unequal division of labor remains also when the children have grown up and moved out (Ahrne & Roman 1997). Women with little education take parental leave for a longer period of time than women with a high educational level; among fathers the situation is the reverse (Försäkringskassan 2011b). Up until 1995 no demands were made on fathers in this respect. They could use the parental allowance days if they wanted to or they could transfer them to the mother. In 1995 and again in 2002, limited demands were made on fathers when the so-called father's month was introduced. Individual rights for fathers to parental allowance days did influence both the share of fathers who used parental allowance and the number of parental allowance days used by fathers. However, they still use less than one-fourth of the total parental allowance days. Today parental allowance is mainly furthering women's conditional employment but the introduction of father's months has furthered fathers' care work, more so in high-education families than in families with a lower educational level.

Tax deduction for domestic services

When researchers investigate political measures in order to further women's employment, child care is in focus. Household work receives much less attention, while at the same it is pointed out that women's responsibility for unpaid household work is the main factor behind women's and men's different positions in the labor market. Women



spend more time doing unpaid work and less time doing paid work than men. Thereby, women receive wages for fewer hours than men, their wage is lower for the hours paid, they have less possibility to have a career, and they receive lower sickness, unemployment, parental benefits, and pensions than men. One way for women to increase the number of paid hours in the labor market and thereby increase their wage and other incomes is to spend less time doing unpaid domestic work by buying such services in the market. In Sweden, gender equality has been one argument for the introduction of tax deductions for domestic services, together with expanding employment opportunities and turning informal (“black”) work into formal (“white”) work.

A heated debate about tax deductions for household services started in the beginning of the 1990s (Bowman & Cole 2009; Öberg 1999; Platzer 2004). It was early on named “the maid debate” (“pigdebatten”), which, of course, referred to the class society of the early twentieth century when a big proportion of young women were live-in maids. Women working in other persons’ homes more or less disappeared in Sweden around the 1960s. The politically correct norm was that one should not employ people for household chores, and very few people did (Nyberg 1999). However, in the 1980s, an informal market for household services started to grow. Reasons for this might be that income differences increased, both in general and also between women. Women’s employment rate was almost the same as men’s, and women’s working time became longer (Nyberg 2005). Professional women who worked full-time had a relatively good and increasing salary, and in addition they were (perhaps) married to men who also worked at least full-time and had a good and rising salary. The problem here was not money, but the lack of time. Cuts in the public sector, especially in care for the elderly, placed new demands mainly on daughters and daughters-in-law. At the same time, unemployment increased, and young people, people with less education, and immigrants had a hard time finding their way into the labor market.⁶

Toward the end of the 1990s, the parties in the Alliance government (the Moderate, the Center, the Liberal, and Christian Democratic Parties) agreed on tax deductions for household services. The aim was to increase employment, to turn informal work in the market into formal work, and to further gender equality. The Red-Green Coalition (the Social Democratic, the Green, and the Leftist Parties) were against. They argued that there was a risk that the costs would be high and the employment gain limited. High-income earners would benefit, but not gender equality since it would preserve the pattern where men do not need to take responsibility for children and household work. A tax deduction for household services was thus against both class equality and gender equality.

After the Alliance won the election in 2006, a tax deduction for household services (RUT-services) was introduced in 2007. The tax deduction is 50% of the costs for cleaning, babysitting, cutting of grass, snow shoveling, etc. However, household services consist of almost 90% of cleaning. The number of households that used the tax credit doubled between 2008 and 2009 and increased also in 2010. In 2009, 3.5% of households in Sweden made a tax deduction (SCB 2011a). Evidently, one has to pay taxes in order to be able to make a deduction. Not very surprisingly, households with high incomes use the deduction more often than households with low incomes. But this is not the whole story. Women use the deduction more often than men. This might be not only because of the gender division of labor in families, which means that women report such tax deductions, but also because more single women than single men use

it, which is related to the fact that a big group of buyers is found among the retired, of which most are women. Another big group is married/cohabiting people working full-time. Almost half of them state that they work more than normal time and half of them state that their spouse works more than full-time (Skatteverket 2011, p. 8 and 44). Judging from the two most prominent groups using the tax deduction, furthering gender equality in the labor market seems unlikely. Retired people have left the labor market and the second biggest group already works long hours. According to a study from Denmark, the extra time gained when buying domestic services was used for leisure activities with family and friends, and a very small share for more paid work (Pedersen 1999).

RUT-services have possibly increased economic gender equality marginally, but not because women who buy RUT-services have increased their employment, but because the number of employed in the formal domestic services sector has increased some. A number of these employees were unemployed earlier, or worked in the informal sector. Now they work in the formal economy, which means better salary and they are part of the social security system (Gavanas & Darin Matsson 2011). According to the Swedish Tax Agency (Skatteverket), the tax deduction for RUT-services corresponded to 5,000 full-time annual workers in 2010. Almost two-thirds of those who bought RUT-services did the job themselves earlier, one-fourth bought services in the formal market, while only a very small share (6%) had changed from informal to formal help in the household (Skatteverket 2011, p. 8). The tax agency's assessment is that the main part of the informal market is still in place.

RUT-services have not contributed to a more gender-equal distribution of household and care work in the sense that they further men's efforts in this area. On the contrary, in families where RUT-services are used, the demand on men's participation in household work most likely diminishes. It is often claimed that one reason for buying domestic services is to limit the arguing about who should do what in the household. This measure fits very well into a model of conditional employment for women. That a limited number of women with relatively high incomes but limited time are able to buy domestic services has nothing to do with a weakening of the gender order, but with increased income and class differences between women and in general.

Employment

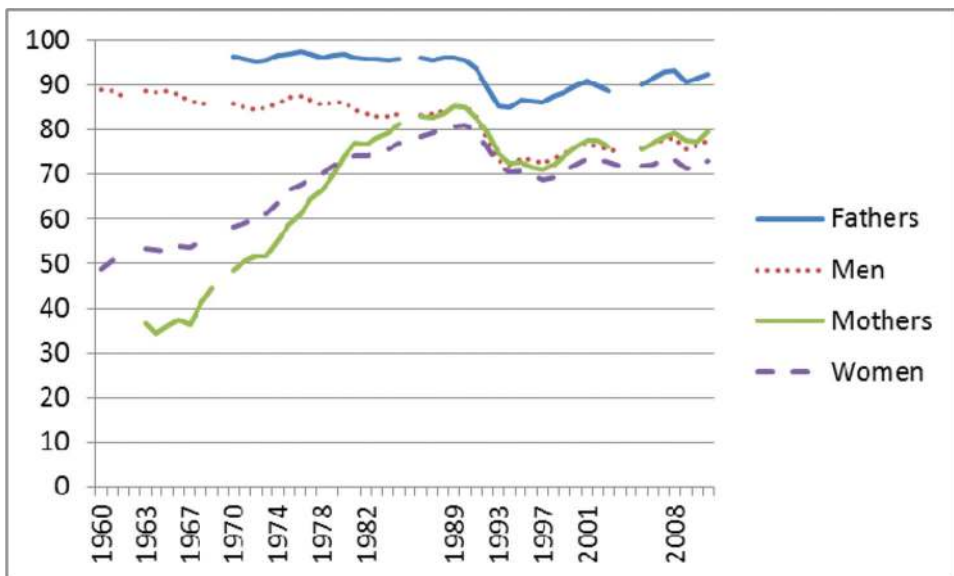
One important reason for gender equality becoming a topic on the political agenda in the 1960s in Sweden was that women's labor was perceived as needed in the labor market (Fürst 1999; Hirdman 1994). One prognosis after another showed that Swedish economy would be held back if the problem of labor shortage was not solved. To keep up production, married women were needed in the labor market. The scarcity of labor was aggravated by the shortening of working hours from 47 hours per week in 1958 to 45 hours in 1960 and 40 hours in 1973; additionally, a four-week vacation was introduced in 1963 (Nyberg 1996, table 1). A strong belief in the future, the need for married women's labor, and the fact that married women and mothers were already entering the labor market meant that the change in women's position involved an inner circle of powerful actors in the labor market: trade unions, employers' organizations, and public authorities (Florin & Nilsson 2000).



Swedish economy developed very satisfactorily during the 1960s. However, in the beginning of the 1970s, there was a recession and industry and private employers were not as encouraging any more. But there was no backlash in the discourse of gender equality and the share of employed women did not decrease. On the contrary it increased, and married women and mothers continued to enter the labor market. This was a result of the demand for women's labor created by politicians and policy. The public sector expanded in order to shorten the queues and satisfy the growing demand for welfare services.⁷ Additionally, women's employment was boosted by the introduction of individual taxation in 1971 and increased wages for women. Women's situation in the labor market thereby changed dramatically (see Figure 3). The share of employed women (16–64 years) increased from around 50% in 1960 to 81% in 1990. The increase in the share of employed women with children aged 0–6 was even bigger: from 37% in 1963 to 85% in 1990. In 1990, the share of employed mothers with small children was higher than among women in general aged 16–64 years and was as high as men's.⁸ This was also a consequence of the fact that men's employment rate decreased somewhat between 1960 and 1990, while fathers' employment rate was about 95–97%.

This trend of increasing employment for women and mothers stopped in connection with an economic crisis in the beginning of the 1990s (see Figure 3). From 1990, women's and men's employment has a similar development, as has mothers' and fathers'. Fathers' employment rate is higher than the other three categories and mothers' is about the same as men's and somewhat higher than women's. During the second half of the 1990s, there

Figure 3: Share of employed women and men, 16–64 years, mothers and fathers with children aged 0–6 years, %, 1960/63–2011.*



*1960–1962, 18–64 years. There are breaks in the time series.

Source: SCB, AKU, 1960–2011.

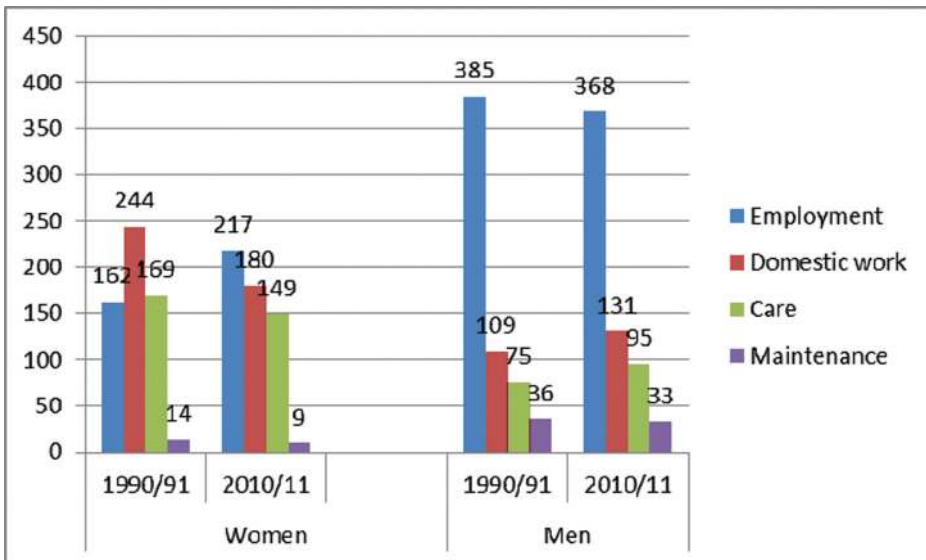
was a recovery, but the situation today is far from the situation in 1990. The decrease is partly a result of young people studying longer—particularly young women—but unemployment is also higher. Especially problematic is the situation for foreign-born and particularly for foreign-born women.

The gender employment gap is much smaller today than in the beginning of the period studied. The demand for women’s labor in the 1960s up to the 1980s came mainly from the public sector, in occupations seen as suitable for women and as part-time work. Therefore, there was little competition between women and men for the new openings. It should, however, be pointed out that since the beginning of 2000s, there is an employment gap of 12–15 percentage points between mothers and fathers, and a gap of 3–5 percentage points between women and men. These gaps do not seem to close.

Domestic, care, and maintenance work

There are much less data on domestic, care, and maintenance work than on employment. However, there are time use studies collected by Statistics Sweden (SCB). In Figure 4, the time spent on different activities by parents with children aged 0–6 is shown. Mothers have increased the time they on average spend on employment, while fathers spend a little less time. On the other hand, the time mothers spend on domestic work and on

Figure 4: Time spent on different work tasks, minutes per day, mothers and fathers with children aged 0–6, 1990/91 and 2010/11.*



*Employment = employment and travels to and from work. Domestic work = domestic work, shopping, other domestic work, travels in connection with domestic work. Care = care of own children and care of others.

Source: SCB (2012b, table B:17a).



care work has decreased and the time fathers spend has increased. It can be noted that mothers spend 20 minutes less time to care for children, while fathers spend 20 minutes more. Time used for maintenance is limited and has not changed much.

Since the 1990s, there has been a movement toward a more gender-equal sharing of the time used for employment, domestic, care, and maintenance work. Mothers spend less time cooking, doing the dishes, cleaning and doing laundry, while men spend a little more time doing these tasks. Dribe and Stanfors (2007) found that while parenthood in 1990 clearly strengthened the traditional gender division of labor in the household, this was much less the case in 2000, when parenthood affected men and women in a rather similar way. This tendency seems to have continued until 2010/11. Some steps toward the dual-carer part of the dual-earner/dual-carer model appear to have been taken.

Conclusion

Gender equality policies have been characterized by caution. The attempts in the 1970s to introduce a mandatory division between mothers and fathers of the right to shorter working time and parental allowance failed. Up until the middle of the 1970s, places in part-time playschools expanded much faster than places in full-time child care centers. The first mentioned expansion was adapted to at-home mothers and the last mentioned to employed mothers. Additionally, the central state several times changed legislation in order to persuade the municipalities to expand child care. Compromise was needed in order to launch a first “father’s month” in the middle of the 1990s, and therefore cash-for-care was introduced simultaneously. When a second “father’s month” was introduced in 2002, the parental insurance was prolonged.

Part-time work, publicly financed child care, tax deductions for household services, and parental leave all make it easier for mothers and women to reconcile work and family but do not—at least not in the short run—seriously challenge the distribution of family responsibilities between women and men. Parental leave not only strengthens women’s attachment to the labor market but a long parental leave mainly used by women also tends to perpetuate traditional gender division of labor. Women’s employment can be adjusted to their responsibilities for care and domestic work. However, the individual right for fathers to two months of parental leave to a certain extent challenges the gender order and fathers participate more in care and domestic work today than earlier. But there are differences between women depending on educational level. Women with higher education are more likely to be professionals and have a higher position and earnings and thereby also greater bargaining power within the family.

A dual-earner/dual-carer model seems to be closer at hand in families where the women have a higher education than in families where this is not the case. Mothers with a high education more seldom work part-time and they used publicly financed child care early and extensively. Moreover, their parental leave is comparatively shorter, and the fathers in these families use more of the parental leave and these families buy domestic services. Women with lower education often work part-time, enter publicly financed childcare later and use it to a lesser extent, take longer parental leave, while the fathers take correspondingly shorter leave and do not buy domestic services. The reason for this is not only constraints in terms of the gender order but also constraints in the labor

market. Many women with low education work part-time not because they have chosen to, but because they are unable to find more working hours.

In order to further economic gender equality and a gender-equal division of household and care work, political measures have to include both women and men, mothers and fathers, employment and unpaid household, and care work. If they fail to do so, the measures will only serve to perpetuate the existing gender division of labor and gender inequality and will not seriously challenge the unequal distribution of paid and unpaid work between women and men. Consequently, measures that neglect the inclusion of these aspects will not contribute to the transformation of the current gender order, and to a more gender equal society. The aim should be to transform the structural gender order, and to open up for participation of both women and men in the household sphere, as well as in the labor market.

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End notes

- ¹ This is often referred to as the dual-earner model. This, however, makes unpaid household and care work invisible. Additionally, the new trend in the 1960s and 1970s was that men should participate in this work. For clarity's sake, I therefore use the concept dual-earner/dual-carer model even if it is a somewhat awkward term.
- ² From January 1, 1980, 180 days (Pettersson 1981, p. 53).
- ³ In 2011, 138,300 women were part-time unemployed and 144,100 (full-time) unemployed. The corresponding numbers among men were 57,300 and 166,500, respectively.
- ⁴ All the right-wing and center-right parties voted against a second father's month.
- ⁵ Unfortunately, the data do not include 30 days in this category.
- ⁶ The discussion and the introduction of tax relief in different forms were taking place in many countries in Europe: Germany, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, and Finland (Nyberg 1999).
- ⁷ Production of public services contributed with 10% to GDP in 1960, which in a growing economy more than doubled to 22% in 1980. During the 1990s, expansion ceased and reached 23% in 2000 (SCB 2011b, p. 303).
- ⁸ Mothers (and fathers) on parental leave are included in the group "employed." Had it only included those "at work," the share would obviously be lower, especially among mothers.