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THE FUTURE OF THE WORKER-CARER MODEL IN NORWAY

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THE FUTURE OF THE WORKER-CARER MODEL IN NORWAY

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Introduction

1. Modern dual breadwinner practices generate tensions in the confrontation with structures and cultures in work life built around the traditional male breadwinner model and the industrial time regime (Hörning et al. 1991). In the Norwegian welfare state work-family conflicts have been sought to be modified by state policies. In order to assess the impact of social policies, however, it is crucial to understand how policies interact with other societal conditions in generating change. State policies interact with structures and cultures in the labour market; particular set of national policies may generate various responses in different segments of the labour market. Moreover, a dynamic perspective on policy models is required, as policies are shaped and reshaped over time, through varying degrees of consensus, conflicts and compromises.

2. One of the interesting features of the Norwegian model is the systematic differences in time flexibility generated between women and men and between the public and the private sector. This paper focuses on the societal forces shaping these differences, addressing the potential of institutional, structural and cultural factors in expanding flexible employment models in the future.

The Norwegian worker-carer model

3. In general there are several policy models for solving the conflict between employment and child care. Time, money and services are the three central policy elements: (1) Time to care, (2) Money for care and (3) Care services. These elements appear in different mixes in national welfare state policy models, they change over time, and they have different implications for the transformation of gender relations.

4. The Scandinavian countries have taken considerable steps away from a traditional male breadwinner model towards dual breadwinning. Characteristic is the high employment rates among mothers; 73 percent of Norwegian mothers of pre-school children were employed in 1995 (Ellingsæter & Wiers-Jenssen 1997). Political commitment to women's right to work and the recognition of mothers as earners, and legislation and services to support this commitment, are present to a considerable degree. The large majority of women are employed for a substantial part of their lives, and the majority of Scandinavian employed parents support an egalitarian provider model (Ellingsæter 1998).

5. In recent years Norwegian family policy has been directed primarily at changing the institutional structures of parenthood. Policies are based on a model of a symmetric family of two worker-carers, in which time to care for children should have a high priority among both mothers and fathers working. The worker-carer model of shared employment and family responsibilities implies a departure from the traditional male norm of full-time, lifelong continuous employment, towards more flexible employment models. A main principle of the policies supporting the model is the opportunity to pursue parenthood

within the work contract, and time flexibility is crucial. Policy measures such as access to reduced work hours and parental leave schemes, including innovative measures such as a father "quota" and a time account system, are central to the model (for an overview of policies, see Ellingsæter & Hedlund 1998).

6. The parental leave of absence in connection with child birth was significantly extended in the 1980s and 1990s. Currently, the leave consists of 52 weeks with 80 percent compensation, or 42 weeks with 100 percent compensation. This leave has a *mother quota* which is directed at protecting biological motherhood, altogether 3 weeks before and 6 weeks after birth. There is a *father quota* of 4 weeks, which will be lost to the parents if not taken by the father. The rest of the leave may be shared between the parents as they prefer. The rights of fathers are linked to the mothers' employment relations prior to birth, women must have worked 50 weeks or more (Likestillingsrådet 1996). In addition there are two weeks of unpaid "daddy leave" in connection with the birth, which aims at establishing the social father-child relationship as early as possible. The parental leave can be taken according to a time account system; which in principle gives a high degree of time flexibility.

7. In general, parental leave rights apply both to the private and public sector, but the public sector employees enjoy extra benefits in connection with child birth and child care. Mothers in the public sector (both state and municipalities) receive full wage compensation in connection with paid leaves; they are also entitled to extra unpaid leave (maximum of 3 years) before the child is 12 years old. Concerning the father quota, there are differences between the sectors: Fathers in the private sector are only compensated economically up to a certain threshold, compensation beyond this level depends on negotiations with the employer.

8. Parents have the right to get back to their work when the leave is over. Parents with small children have the right to reduced work hours without compensation, if this is not at the disadvantage to the employer. Moreover, parents have the right to leave of absence to care for sick children; ten days per parent per year (for children younger than 12 years old).

9. Norwegian family policies have put the question of *political fatherhood* on the agenda. While employed women was the main issue of policies in the 1980s, the caring father is a new issue of the 1990s. The father quota is based on the assumption that in order to change the care practices of men they have to subjected to (mild) structural coercion. The element of coercion, and the allocation of reproductive rights as "fathers' only" entitlements, and not as mother's or gender neutral rights, is a new construction. The underlying idea is partly a family policy concern; to strengthen the father-child relationship, and partly it is a gender equality policy concern; mothers' expanding involvement in the labour market need to be followed up by changes in men's family involvement.

10. The other main policy measure is the access to high quality public child care. Public day care plays an important part in everyday life of parents, although mothers entered the labour market way before the supply of public day care had expanded sufficiently to affect their employment decisions (Leira 1992). Still the supply is short of the demand, particularly among the youngest children: 31 percent of children 1-2 years old, and 72 percent of those aged 3-6, were enrolled in publicly supported day care in 1995 (Statistics Norway 1996). From 1997 the 6 years old are enrolled in the primary school system, creating some more capacities for younger children in child care institutions.

11. The development of the worker-carer model has been strongly influenced by social democratic governments. But family-work policies is contested terrain in the modernisation of gender relations in Norway, making it potentially fragile. There is a historical legacy of a lack of political consensus and pressures from political quarters supporting traditional values or liberal anti-state interventionism. The most contested issue has been the question about subsidised public child care. As a result of the change of

government in 1997, an extensive cash benefit reform was introduced in 1998. Parents with small children who do not use public child care will get paid in cash the amount equivalent to the state subsidy to a place in the services. The reform clearly diverges from the main principle in the worker-carer model in that benefits are not tied to the employment contract. The proponents argue that the reform increases the flexibility of individual choice in child care and fairness in distribution of state subsidies to families with children. The reform has also been framed very much as a "time issue", claiming that this reform is taking parents time pressures seriously. Arguments against the reform are related to the potential weakening of women's labour market relations, the limitation of choice when there still is an unmet demand for public services, and a potential increase in the unregulated informal market of private childminders.

Worker-carer time flexibility: Gender difference

12. The expansion of the worker-carer model has had a major impact on increasing the continuity in Norwegian mothers' employment practices in connection with births. The significant increase in the late 1980s in mothers' returning to work after giving birth is clearly affected by the extension in parental leave schemes (Ellingsæter & Rønsen 1996). The speeding up of mothers' return to work involves an increase in both full-time and part-time work, but particularly to full-time work. Access to public child care does not have the same direct impact on how soon mothers go back to work after giving birth (Rønsen 1993).

13. Parental leave is mainly taken up by women. In 1996, 73 percent of mothers were entitled to paid parental leave, of those 67 percent chose 52 weeks leave with 80 percent compensation (Ellingsæter & Hedlund 1998). About one in every three mother receive only a lump sum parental grant, as they are not eligible for parental benefits. Those not eligible belong to households with much lower incomes and higher shares of social assistance, than mothers receiving paid leave benefits. Parental leave benefits contribute to equalise women's and men's incomes, but do increase differences between families.

14. About 80 percent of fathers have the right to paid leave in families where mothers are entitled to leave (Ellingsæter & Hedlund 1998). In 1996 close to 80 percent of the entitled fathers took up some leave, in 1995 and 1994 the corresponding rates were 70 and 45 percent. Among the leave-takers in 1996, most fathers (68 percent) took up one month, "the father quota". Only 9 percent took up two months or more. Before the "father quota" less than 4 percent of all fathers took some of the parental leave (Brandth & Kvande 1992). Interestingly, the main factor explaining the practices of the men taking up leave was not the father's work situation, but the mother's income and educational level (Brandth & Kvande 1992). Parents sharing leave of absence included a high proportion of couples in which both had high social status. The father quota has institutionalised new norms for the time use of a large group of fathers. The earlier socio-economic bias is significantly weakened, although there is significant variation by educational level. Among fathers with university education 83 percent used the father quota compared to 71 percent among fathers with primary education (Brandth & Øverli 1998).

15. Fathers are generally positive toward taking up leave (Brandth & Øverli 1998). Some fathers taking up leave report some negative reactions from employers, however. But the general picture is that the reform is widely accepted. Among fathers, 61 percent want an extension of the paternity quota to 8 weeks, and 72 percent think that fathers' leave entitlements should be derived from their own employment record and not their spouse's (Brandth & Øverli 1998). Obviously, the father quota is not only something which is forced upon fathers, it is also a right they want.

16. An equalisation of working time among mothers and fathers is the new trend of the 1990s, as fathers' work time declined slightly and mothers' somewhat through more full-time work (Ellingsæter &

Hedlund 1998). While the proportion of fathers working excessively long hours increased simultaneously with mothers' increasing employment rates in the 1980s, this trend has been somewhat reversed in the 1990s. There was a decline in the proportion with long work hours (45 hours per week or more) from 1991 to 1995 (Kitterød & Roalsø 1996). Whether this was a mere effect of the economic recession, or a more consistent trend remains to be seen. Yet, while only 5 percent of mothers of pre-school age children have weekly work hours of 45 or more, 34 percent of fathers have such long work weeks. Those fathers who have the longest work hours have the lowest share of paternity quota users (Brandth & Øverli 1998). Although declining, a substantial proportion of mothers work part-time, 52 percent of those employed in 1995 (Ellingsæter and Wiers-Jenssen 1997). There are large differences in work hours among women following mothers' educational levels, however. Full-time work is the dominant practice of highly educated mothers. Access to part-time work is an ambiguous indicator concerning gender equality.

17. Changing attitudes towards work hours might indicate a shift in the normative climate. From 1991 to 1996 there was an increasing share of employed parents wanting shorter work hours (under the provision that wages are proportionally reduced). The strongest increase was among mothers of pre-school children and among single mothers, the two groups in which work hours actually did increase in this period. Particularly mothers with full-time work prefer shorter work hours; about 50 percent of those working 35 hours per week or more (NOU 1996). Among fathers, those working long weekly hours (more than 45 hours) most often would like to reduce their work hours, one in three. The right to stay home with sick children is used extensively by parents, but women are twice as likely as men to stay home with sick children. The likelihood of absence decreases with increasing age of children (Mastekaasa 1992). Absence because of sick children is lowest among part-time workers and increases with increasing work hours, suggesting that unplanned absence in connection with children's illness is reduced for men by their partners' working time flexibility (part-time work). It is likely that men are less absent because they more often have jobs which are considered more difficult to stay away from; as men often have jobs of higher status than their partners. Women's absence thus is at least in part an effect of their structural position in the labour market, as they are overrepresented in part-time work and low status jobs.

Worker-carer time flexibility: Sectoral difference

18. Flexibility in worker-carer practices vary by sector, both among women and men. Indicators of flexibility in work contracts in Norway generally indicate that most flexibility is generated in the public sector. Mothers' new flexible and continuous employment patterns is less prevalent in the private sector. Having a job in the public sector is shown to speed up the return to work after birth, all other things being equal (Ellingsæter & Rønsen 1996). Part-time work is most prevalent in the public sector; 44 percent of women in the public sector work part-time, compared to 32 percent among private sector women. Part-time work in Norway has been considered as mainly supply led, although in recent years the increasing proportion underemployed among part-time workers suggest that particular types of part-time increasingly are employer led. Underemployment among part-time workers seems to be growing most in welfare sector jobs (Ellingsæter & Wiers-Jenssen 1997). In both sectors part-time work is most prevalent among salaried employees with low skill levels, 46 percent in the private versus 60 percent in the public sector.

19. Also temporary work contracts are somewhat higher in the public than in the private sector. This is in part the price for the flexibility granted to the permanent public employees. The more generous leave of absence rights in the public sector creates a higher demand for temporary employees (Torp 1990). Thus generous rights for one group of women require that other groups of women have to work on less favourable contracts.

20. There is a significantly higher proportion of fathers taking up the father quota in the public than in the private sector, 83 versus 77 percent in 1995 (Brandth & Øverli 1998). Mother's sectoral employment affect father's leave patterns in a similar direction. Fathers in the private sector are more likely to work long hours than men in the public sector (Ellingsæter 1990). Fathers' employment contract is particularly important: Fathers who have permanent employment have significantly higher take up rates than those on temporary work contracts or self-employed.

21. However, there are also significant variation in flexibility *within* the two sectors. In the private sector it is particularly the male dominated manufacturing industries which exhibit very traditional work time patterns. An interesting finding is that mothers who are manual workers in the private sector have lower shares of part-time work than mothers who are professionals in the public sector. In the public sector it is the welfare sector, and not so much in government bureaucracy, where part-time jobs and temporary work contracts are found (Ellingsæter & Wiers-Jenssen 1997). This might in part be explained by access to different types of time flexibility in welfare care jobs versus jobs in welfare bureaucracies. Care occupations generally have little daily flexibility, while access to reduced work hours is extensive. This might indicate that there is a trade off between the two types of flexibility.

22. There are indications that women's time flexibility is punished more in the private than in the public sector. Hansen (1995) concludes her analysis that there is a "care deduction" in the private sector, that is, women who reduce their work hours are punished in terms of wages and promotion over time. Thus the public sector is a better employer to mothers than the private sector. A recent study of career trajectories in the public sector also indicate that absence from work do not affect earnings (Barth & Yin 1996). A case study of a large private company confirms on the other hand that working reduced hours and having taken up parental leave has a strong negative effect on the probability of promotion (Longva 1997). However, an other study found that work hours and stability in employment relations were significant in explaining promotion in both the private and the public sector (Hoel 1995). A traditional female pattern was "punished" in both male dominated occupations in the private sector and in female dominated occupations in the public sector.

23. Moreover, having a career position restricts the proportion of women who go into part-time work, independently of their family situation (Hoel 1995). However, the work time reduction in connection with child births do not differ much, but the ways time reductions are arranged vary: Part-time is most frequent in the female dominated occupations in the public sector, while women in male dominated occupations in the private sector more often leave their jobs temporarily. The total reduction in work time thus might not be that different, but rather how the reduction is organised temporally (Hoel 1995). This might indicate that structural differences in the access to part-time work in the two sectors explain the patterns rather than differences in preferences.

The future of the worker-carer model

24. The Norwegian worker-carer model has facilitated a flexible combination of employment and care among parents. Public policies have been accommodated in work life, time flexible practices have increased significantly over a quite short time span. This suggests that there is a considerable potential for time flexibility. Expansion in the parental leave arrangements demonstrates how policies contribute to the institutionalisation of new time norms for both mothers and fathers.

25. However, the dominant pattern is a two tier model of parenthood in work life - one model for mothers and one for fathers: The shared worker-carer practice remain largely a "women-only" practice,

thus cementing gender inequality. When time flexibility becomes "mother only" practices, the conception of women workers as a group with "restrictions" will stick to them.

26. The flexible worker-carer model is more seldom practised, and more often "punished", in the private sector of the labour market. Public sector accommodates the greatest flexibility in its work force. Accordingly, the public sector has been of significant importance in accommodating the flexible worker-carer model.

27. Thus a crucial question is whether it is possible to improve the Norwegian worker-carer model in the future - and particularly what the scope is for expanding the model among men and in the private sector. Institutional, structural and cultural factors are shaping these gender and sectoral differences. Of particular importance to the future development in gender and sectoral divisions are the development of time politics, the direction of labour market restructuring and trends in work place time norms.

Time politics

28. Rights to parental leave are not equalised for men and women, or for private and public sector employees. The father's right to parental leave, and level of compensation, is tied to the mother's employment situation, producing disincentives to the father's taking up leave. The father thus is considered mother's "helper", and not as an independent care person for the child (Ellingsæter & Hedlund 1998). An expansion of father's own rights, and of the father quota, might increase fathers caring time.

29. Moreover, the effects of the cash benefit reform need to be surveyed carefully. The reform might increase the duration of women's absence from work, and create a new re-entering problem for women. In Denmark a significant number of women who have been on extensive parental leave have problems re-entering the labour market. These women often have little education (Ligestillingsrådet 1998).

30. State and municipal employers are likely to continue to feel more obligated to adjust to public policy measures, as this is institutionalised as part of the public gender equality policies. The ministry of Children and Family Affairs takes a particular responsibility for integrating gender equality concerns in the state and municipal sector. Moreover, the increasing number of female public sector top bureaucrats, the "femocrats", have probably been influential agents in promoting and monitoring gender equality interests, particularly in constructing a positive normative climate toward the worker-carer model. Private sector has a very low proportion of women among top level managers, significantly lower than in the public sector (Kjeldstad & Lyngstad 1993).

31. The worker-carer flexibility reforms have been initiated by the government/state, largely as responses to demands from Norwegian second wave feminism. Further acceptance and expansion of time flexibility to the private sector will also depend on the role of time politics in the strategies of the labour market actors. Norwegian unions have traditionally focused the most on wages. There are recent signs, however, that the perception of the relative utility of money over time may be shifting. Norway's largest employee federation (LO) has been male dominated and strongly class based in its interest profile. However, women is the fastest growing group of new members, and women have recently made their ways into positions as elected representatives at the top of the organisation. LO's program (1997-2001) focuses on the need for new flexible working time reforms, that is, a flexibility which can accommodate individual needs over the life course. Welfare in terms of more time (time welfare) is an alternative route to more welfare, but it requires a reversing of the relative value attached to time versus money (Hörning et al. 1995). Growing diversity in working-time regimes/schedules may also potentially undermine the

power of unions. Employers resistance have been much stronger to reductions in standard working time than to increases in wages because it involves complex issues of reorganisation (Hinrichs et al. 1991).

32. More flexibility seems to be a pressing need in the private sector. The private sector loses out to the public sector in the competition about well educated women. Women are now in majority in higher level education in Norway, and the federal employers' organisation (NHO) realises that women comprise an increasing share of the most attractive workers of the future work force, as high human capital is seen as the most important success criterion for enterprises in the future. The danger is that this will represent a continuation of the women-only pattern, and that flexibility only will be offered the most attractive workers, leading to increasing inequalities in women's opportunities to combine employment and children in the private sector.

Labour market development

33. Labour market demand and supply influence the relative pull and push of employment versus care. The access to jobs and the organisation of jobs, defining the security and attraction of employment relative to family, play a vital role. New work forms might strengthen the individuals relation to the work place. Reskilling, that is upgrading of qualifications of workers, and new incentive systems may make work increasingly more attractive and de-alienated, shifting the relative "magnetism" between family and work from family to work (Hochschild 1997). Increasing unemployment may also reinforce the individual's involvement in his or her work. In Norway, unemployment currently is low. Low degree of job insecurity is likely to have a positive effect on flexible worker-carer practices. However, temporary work tends to hamper such practices.

34. There are several structural differences between the public and the private sector which are likely to affect time flexibility. In Norway, employment in general, and women's in particular, is characterised by a high "public sector dependency": 33 percent of all employed work in the public sector; 46 percent of all women and 22 percent of all men (Statistics Norway 1998). The public sector dependency is even stronger among mothers, 56 percent of all employed mothers work in the public sector (Arbeids- og bedriftsundersøkelsen 1993, author's calculation). Women are the numerically dominant group in the public sector, 64 percent of the employees are women. In the private sector about one third are women. During the strong employment growth in the recent years, the number of men working in the public sector actually has declined, while women increased their numbers (Statistics Norway 1998).

35. Public sector is a high skill sector. Gender equality practices increases by educational levels, and will thus tend to generate more flexible worker-carer practices in the public sector, both among men and women. For example, only 15 percent of women in the private sector have university level education, compared to 39 percent among women in the public sector (Arbeids- og bedriftsundersøkelsen 1993, author's calculation). A longitudinal cohort study shows that the large majority of highly educated women in the post-war birth cohorts found employment in the public sector (Ellingsæter et al. 1997). While about 80 percent of women with high educational level worked in the public sector, a similar proportion of women with the lowest educational level worked in the private sector. This is changing among younger women, a substantially higher proportion of those with high educational levels are recruited to the private sector. But the majority still works in the public sector.

36. Differences in earnings are the largest in private sector jobs, including gender differences (Barth & Mastekaasa 1993). Among men, high incomes tend to reduce the take up of parental leave or the father quota (Brandth & Øverli 1998). Nearly half the fathers in the private sector work in blue collar occupations, who often are more traditional in their practices and ideals (See Ellingsæter 1998). In

contrast, 40 percent of the fathers in the public sector are top professionals. Mothers in the private sector are concentrated among low and middle level salaried employees, while the concentration at the middle level is higher in the public sector. Moreover, compared to public sector work places, Norwegian private businesses are relatively small, which might make it more difficult to accommodate flexible time patterns. Small company size increases the vulnerability in relation to absent employees.

Work cultures and time norms

37. In the Norwegian labour market there has been an increasing tendency toward a widening gap between formal regulations and actual practices. For example, while paid overtime is formally strongly restricted, unpaid overtime has increased. Practices may generate informal norms about time use, outside the institutionalised framework. Thus a critical point is organisational cultures. Time is a cultural category; ideas, values and norms are integral to the formation of temporal organisation. A crucial point is how the temporal dimension of efficiency is operationalised in work organisations. This implies the cultural meanings of different types of "absence" and "presence" at work, how these are associated with ideas of productivity and involvement, and how such ideas are linked to various forms of time flexibility.

38. The conflict between the company's temporal claim on the worker and the child's temporal claim on its father seems to be less acute regarding a limited number of weeks away from the job than regarding usual work hours. Absence of short durations does not question an individual's job commitment in the same way as reduced time over longer periods. The father quota makes fairly limited claims on fathers' time.

39. Time norms governing working life have differed between the public and private sector. The state has had a reputation as a "good employer". It has been argued that only the private sector of the labour market is a market in a conventional sense, in which market principles, such as a profit motive and a productivity logic, operate (Esping-Andersen 1990). Although the market logic is most articulated in the private sector, the sharp distinction between the public and the private labour market is becoming blurred. In recent years the market logic, emphasising efficiency and productivity, has entered the public sector, and some would argue that there is a shift from the state as a "good" to an "efficient" employer.

40. Segments of work life are likely to be permeated by ideas which equal long work hours with company commitment (Bailyn 1993). High-commitment time regimes transform an instrumental contractual relation into an open-ended moral bond, making claims on private feelings such as total commitment, eroding the boundary between the public and the private. Long work hours among men are far more prevalent in the private sector. Some argue that the boundaries between work time and personal time is being blurred particularly in jobs where competence and knowledge is personified, and these types of jobs are also found in the public sector (Sørhaug 1996).

41. In an increasingly individualistic society where autonomy is highly valued, time autonomy is likely to be tied to social status in different ways. The degree of time control versus time autonomy differentiate between class and gender categories. The potential for self-managed flexibility is the greatest in the "good" jobs. Men more often than women have such jobs. There are indications that time flexibility is used as a reward for the most time committed workers or as fringe benefit for the most attractive workers. Thus time flexibility might act as a new source of inequality, creating larger divisions between groups in the labour market, divisions following both traditional but probably also new gender and class lines.

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