

Who does what, when and where?

The care organization in communes and women's and men's division of care work.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyses if a society's way of organizing its production of care, i.e. all kinds of care work, irrespective of who, where and in what forms it is produced, has any impact on women's and men's care work within the family, and of their opinions of how the society ought to organize this kind of work. Further the potential effects of political decisions regarding child- and elderly care on gender equality is discussed.

The study's research hypothesis, deduced from feminist exploitation theory, states that the degree of equality is higher in collective as compared to individual communes. Collective communes are here defined as communes in which the major part of care is produced in collective forms and/or in the form of wage labor.

In order to answer the questions, posed above various information (official statistics, interviews with local executives, budget records, operational child- and elderly care decisions and survey questionnaires to households with elderly persons and children) have been collected in five Swedish communes.

The results of the investigation indicate that if equality between men and women is a political and social goal, and given that equality is defined as a mutual gender responsibility for care work, it is of great importance how a society choose to organize care work. Irrespective of individual characteristics and personal life situation, the probability to share care work within the family in an equal manner is greater for those living in collective communes. At the same time a collective commune also increase the populations' support for social reforms expected to promote equality.

Six different types of political decisions having potential to change society's organization of care are identified. These are decisions about rights, demands, extent, content, productivity and organization. The thesis shows that it is more common for a commune to take decisions about child- and elderly care which can change the care structure in a direction from a collectively to an individually organized form of care than the other way around.

The analysis of the decisions, and the analytic framework developed for this purpose, could be used to evaluate different kinds of political decisions from a gender equality point of view. The chances that women and men choose to divide care work equally are greater if the care organization is collective. If the studied decisions are representative for political decisions regarding care in general in our country, the current process toward equality might be threatened.

Key Words: women, men, gender equality, elderly care, child care, care work, private - public, Swedish communes, politics.