
Changing care in Slovenia: gender, parenting and family

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Conference Changing Families in a Changing World,
16th – 18th June 2010, Edinburgh

Structure:

- social and political context
 - gendered division of family and care work with the focus on the changes in parenting
 - men's involvement in family work (mothering, fathering)
 - individual, subjective and structural obstacles of changes
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Context:

- The shift from state socialism to democracy in Slovenia in early 1990's has not resulted in a change of traditional family patterns and traditional gender roles of women and men related to family expectations and normative perceptions.
 - Slovenia is a post-socialist country:
 - gender 'equality' in public sphere (tradition of full-time female employment - socialism)
 - gendered division of work in private sphere
 - well-developed system of public daily child care
 - redistribution of care in private sphere - strong family networks
 - redistribution of care from private to public (paid services)
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- Changes in the private sphere are happening more slowly than those occurring in gender relationships in the public sphere
 - In everyday childcare practices and other family work there are essential gender differences in ways of labour division between the partners, and in terms of agreements on sharing their work
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Gender(ed) differences in parenting and family work:

More pleasant, less routine activities, often perceived as quality time:

“... when I come home from work, I spend two hours 100 percent with children, which is better for me as well, because it's also a relaxation and I relieve my partner so she can do other things” (Borut, 40 let). (Humer, 2008)

Women do more direct child care

How much who, I don't know, maybe I even do a bit more, well with the part concerning the children being done by my wife. She dresses them in the morning, changes their nappies and packs their things away, and in the evenings puts them in their pyjamas, washes them, puts them to bed. This is mainly her work (Simon, 36).

(Rener et al. 2008)

Men do work which is less time-limited or is time-flexible or time-unlimited

I'm dedicating myself to my child considerably, but as the rhythm of life dictates, unfortunately I am away often, yet I certainly find time when I engage myself in play with him; well, the little girl is only three weeks old..."

(Andrej, 31). (Rener et al. 2008)

Compared to females, male participation in childcare is more optional

... I am also absent and I also study a little in the afternoon. So I don't have so much time during the week. If there's time, I dedicate myself, at least by the way, or else more during the weekend, say, I take time so that we are really together a lot, and then we also play in the morning” (Vlado, 30). (Rener et al. 2008)

Male participation is supportive

I'm far behind her; she does the majority of work at home. Sometimes I help to hang up washed clothes, sometimes I put dirty clothes in the washing machine, I clean sometimes something, once a month, for example I vacuum. What else? We agreed upon that I work in the garden, this is my obligation, mowing, and similar. And I help with children, normally, to change the diapers, to put clothes on, and other things, which are logical to me that men need to do it” (Rok, 31). (Humer 2009).

Women often carry out child care as a simultaneous or secondary activity, while men often carry out child care as a primary activity

My games are more practical, 'let's do the laundry', 'will you help me, let's fold the clothes, red things over here, others over there', because I am always pressed by time. We also play, we draw, but I must say that if I have time and stuff we would prefer to go outside, to a playground, outdoors, with a bicycle, a ball, anything. When I am indoors I use more of those useful games
(Nina, 32). (Rener et al. 2005, 2008)


Fathers perceive their role as active and important when the child is a bit older


I often take her with me to basketball games. Now when she is older (she is 4, comment by Ž. Humer), I always take her, just two of us go and I think, when the child is not a baby anymore, I can give her much more attention (Luka, 35)
(Humer 2009)

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- the key obstacles to active fatherhood also include the *social construction of motherhood* and the mother-child relationship as the primary parental relationship;
 - a shift towards a *social ideal of an active father*;
 - the gap between the perceptions, wishes, expectations and everyday situations of women and men is also seen in negotiations regarding family and work responsibilities;
 - disagreements between partners appear because of the unequal division of domestic work;
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■ common strategies for solving the conflicts are:

 paid domestic help and

 the strategy usually used by women, which is to press down dissatisfaction for the sake of family harmony and partners' relationship and

 to accept men's small share in domestic and care work at home in terms 'better than nothing'.

Conclusion:

- trends in relocation of family and care work between women and men are more significant in the changes in values and expectations of individuals, especially in the division of household work;
 - the relocation of family and care work between women and men also occurs in parenting. Particularly the emotional part of caring has become the domain of both parents;
 - new fatherhood in Slovenia is, a supporting fathering role, which strengthens and maintains the position of motherhood and mothering as the primary care practices, and puts the fathering role into a secondary, supportive parenting role;
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- structural factors: employment and labour market requirements;
 - structural gender inequalities go hand in hand with the limiting factors of neo-liberal capitalism (precariousness of employment and intensified work requirements) creating conditions which are anything but supportive of equal division of family and care work between partners.
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