NYE FÆDRE PÅ ORLOV

En analyse af de kønsmæssige aspekter ved forældreorlovsordninger

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fædre giver udtryk for, at de ønsker at have både et lønarbejdsperspektiv og et familieperspektiv og arbejder på at skabe en tilværelse ud fra dette dobbeltperspektiv. Det er imidlertid et perspektiv, som ofte er præget af ambivalens i forhold til forældrenes umiddelbare lyst, men i høj grad også i forhold til deres omgivelser, som kan stå uforstående over for deres valg.

Fædrene, der kommer gennem nåleøjet og tager orlov til et spæd- eller småbarn, uden moren også er hjemme, gør virkelig noget usædvanligt. De er oppe imod stærke konsensualistiske kræfter. Det er så som så med det frie valg, der formelt ligger i orlovstogivningens liberale udformning, som både tilgodeser fædre og mødre. Det er meget svært at foretage et andet valg end det, der repræsenterer mor-barn-duaden på trods af den nye diskurs om den nye nærværende far i familien. De dualistiske kønsskronstrukturer trækker et usynligt bånd ved gennem forældrelivet, der på samfundsplan efterlader det indtryk, at faren opfylder kravet om nærvær ved at være tilstedevedende i forhold til lidt større børn, mens moren i kraft af sin biologi forbindes med op væksten for både det spæde og det lidt større barn.

Summary

The theme of this thesis is parental leave schemes and their users seen from a gender perspective. Recurring issues include fathers’ reluctance to take advantage of their right to leave of absence, and the social and family consequences of the different uptake patterns for mothers and fathers.

The thesis opens with a chapter on theoretical perspectives. This chapter draws on socialconstructivist theories based on the writings of Pierre Bourdieu and Peter Berger/Thomas Luckmann, and on gender theories which explore the social aspects of gender. The gender researchers referred to include Yvonne Hirdman, Hanne Haavind and Øystein Gulvåg Holter. The theory chapter is followed by three chapters that describe leave of absence in Denmark based on three different analyses. The first analysis describes the rise and development of Danish leave of absence schemes and focuses on the gender conceptions that the schemes represent. The second analysis examines the different ways fathers and mothers make use of child-rearing leave and focuses on an equal-opportunities perspective. The third analysis is based on a qualitative interview survey and describes what is at stake in families when the father opts to take leave to rear a small child and be solely responsible for the child’s care during the daytime. The methodical aspects of the interview survey are discussed in a separate chapter.

Berger and Luckmann’s concept of reification is described in the theory chapter. Reification means that socially created phenomena manifest themselves differently because people perceive them as biological, essential or universal and not as socially conditioned phenomena. The gender perspective is not directly included in the theory propounded by Berger and Luckmann, but they do suggest that marriage and the family are the institutions through which the reification works. A discussion of Bourdieu’s analyses of gender differences and male dominance ensues, and his naturalisation concept is explained, which, to a certain extent, corresponds to the reification concept. Bourdieu brings together the concepts of naturalisation, symbolic dominance, intellectual makeup and practical sense to form an analytical model of how socially created differences are exploited to legitimise the power certain groups hold over others. Symbolic dominance allows the holder to define arbitrary differences on the basis of
principles which both the repressor and the repressed acknowledge as natural and universal. This chapter also provides an account of more specific theoretical works about parenthood, including the following: Haavind’s proposal that fathers and mothers interpret themselves from two different frameworks of gender comprehension, and that this plays a vital role in their negotiations about the allocation of wages, housework and care within the family; Holter’s theory about the family as a household organised on the basis of barter and exchange; and Hirdman’s theory regarding the gender system. Finally, the chapter contains a discussion of different forms of masculinity and fatherhood from a historical perspective. This chapter is followed by the three chapters that analyse parental leave in Denmark.

The first analysis examines developments throughout the almost 100-year history of pregnancy, maternity and parental leave schemes. The emphasis is on the last 25 years, the period during which the rights of fathers have been discussed, and, since 1984, been a reality. The progress in Danish legislation is put into perspective by a comparison with the situation in Sweden. In 1974, Sweden became the first country in the world to grant fathers the right to paternity leave, and the Swedish parental leave scheme is still one of the world’s most generous pieces of legislation. The historical developments are analysed in relation to the way different gender conceptions influence Danish parliamentary debates and legislation. The analysis was inspired by Yvonne Hirdman’s model for analysing the significance of historical progress.

One of the main conclusions derived from this analysis is that the purpose of the Danish scheme granting fathers the right to leave has never been to provide fathers and mothers with equal rights in the family sphere. Putting mothers on an equal footing with fathers on the labour market and giving parents the opportunity to care for their infants at home has, on the other hand, been a recurring theme. The two leave of absence schemes that grant fathers the right to leave for longer periods are maternity leave and child-rearing leave. Parental leave does not really encourage parents to share the leave period. When parental leave was introduced in 1984, there had long been strong demand for improved opportunities for women to take leave. At that time, leave was limited to 14 weeks after the birth. The parental leave scheme allowed parents to choose which parent would take a further 10 weeks extension on top of the 14 weeks maternity leave. Only a small percentage of fathers have chosen to share in the parental leave. Colloquially, nobody differentiates between the 14 weeks maternity leave and the 10 weeks parental leave. Many parents are not even aware that the father is allowed to share in the final weeks of the leave and they are never referred to as anything other than maternity leave.

New legislation in 1994 introduced separate child-rearing leave for both parents, independent of each other and with a maximum of six months leave for each child under nine-years old. The new legislation was not based on an equal-opportunities perspective within the family either. The scheme has never been thought of as a family policy provision. Its primary objective was to introduce job rotation on the labour market and the scheme was part of a larger package of labour market reforms. Since parents on leave only receive 60% of daily allowance levels, leave is not a very attractive option for employed parents and positively unattractive for the highly paid. For most couples with children, the mothers’ wages are lower than the fathers’, which is one reason why only 8% of the people on leave are fathers. However, the tradition that it is mothers who take maternity leave also determines the low percentage of fathers among those on leave.

The way Danish parents spend their leave is studied and discussed in the second analysis, with special focus on leave for child-rearing. The analysis looks at the social and family barriers and opportunities that affect the level of uptake among fathers. Scandinavian research on parental leave is cited in this analysis. The best developed parental leave schemes are the Scandinavian ones, which makes them a suitable basis upon which to compare the Danish schemes and put them into perspective. The analysis establishes that child-rearing leave does not provide equal opportunities for women and men with small children in the family or on the labour market. Few fathers avail themselves of child-rearing leave. And, in general, the scheme has removed mothers of small children from the labour market for longer than was previously the case, because a third of all mothers take the extra period of leave on offer at the end of their maternity leave. Just under half of all those on leave are unemployed and, as mentioned above, most of them are women. In addition, a large number of the unemployed women have been unemployed for some considerable time before taking leave, but are registered as newly unemployed afterwards. They are not, therefore, sent on job creation schemes or offered retraining. Accordingly, the risk of marginalisation from the labour market increases.
for longterm unemployed mothers who opt for leave. The risk is increased further if they take leave several times with several children. This is referred to as the leave trap - women are off the labour market for a number of years because they avail themselves of all the opportunities the scheme offers parents, and, therefore, lose their links to the labour market. The analysis also discusses the fact that people on leave do not share in the welfare benefits associated with paid labour. For example, employed people on leave lose seniority and pension contributions while they are on leave, and the long-term unemployed become even more remote from the benefits associated with paid labour.

In the thesis, it is suggested that child-rearing leave be repealed and the present maternity and parental leave schemes expanded by eight weeks instead. Further, this period of leave would have to be better financed, with higher compensation for loss of earnings, the right to seniority, as well as full pension rights, and the scheme would have to be organised in such a way that part of the leave entitlement is restricted to mothers and part to fathers.

The third analysis in the thesis builds on a qualitative interview survey of 13 fathers who have taken child-rearing leave. The interviewees all took leave to look after an infant or small child and were solely responsible for the care of their offspring during the daytime. The objective of the interview was to determine how these fathers take control of the family and the home, which are traditionally part of the mothers' domain. The pattern of leave among fathers made it difficult to find interviewees. It turned out that very few fathers on child-rearing leave were looking after really small children, and if they were, the mother was often at home as well. The third analysis is preceded by a special chapter describing the methodical aspects of the interview survey.

The fathers' accounts of their daily lives on leave are discussed under six themes. The first theme examines how fathers on leave relate to work and to the family in their daily lives. The way they relate to work and to the family constitutes a recurring analytical perspective in the interpretation of their decision to take leave and of the actual life they lead while on leave. Descriptions of a father who relates more to his family and one who relates more to his job were presented to illustrate the way fathers relate to their everyday lives during periods of leave. The second theme describes the fathers' accounts of birth and the way they organised the period immediately after it. The third theme discusses the negotiations between parents about the allocation of periods of leave, and three types of parents are identified in families where the father takes leave. The fourth theme examines the fathers' childhood families and whether there is a connection between their view of their own parents and their views of themselves as parents. The fifth theme analyses the way fathers on leave assume control of the traditionally female domains of the family and the home, and describes two positions that several fathers use to shape their fatherhood during their period on leave. The sixth theme is a discussion of their perception of "good fatherhood" and an examination of the prospects for legislative changes.

The qualitative interview survey reveals that the primary objective of leave for all the fathers was to strengthen their bonds with their new child, as well as to strengthen bonds with their older children (if they had any). All the fathers report that they succeeded in this and that they have enjoyed spending time with the child in a way that was impossible while they were working. Many of them did not enjoy close contact with their own fathers, and for some of them their father serves as a model of how they would like their fatherhood not to be. Concepts like intimacy are repeatedly used in their descriptions of their own fatherhood. The thesis concludes that the father figures they describe in the interviews reflect and represent the prevailing discourse about "the new father" who assumes responsibility for the care of his infant on an equal footing with the infant's mother.

Most fathers on leave find it easy to drop paid labour for a while, but there is a small group who find it more difficult. Some of them solve this dilemma by maintaining some form of contact with their workplace or colleagues and are satisfied with that. For others, this dilemma takes on a proportion that transforms their leave into a mixed blessing. These fathers do not really flourish on leave, even though they only avail themselves of the minimum period of 13 weeks. They miss the regular rhythm of paid labour, the daily routines and the interaction with their colleagues. They also have a tendency to feel bad about the fact that their colleagues often have to cover for them while they are on leave. The fathers also report that they miss adult contact during their leave because the child's rhythm makes it difficult for them to get out of the home. They also feel as if they do not get
enough done during the day because they cannot plan things in advance. The thesis asserts that this small group of fathers relates primarily to paid labour and that this makes it difficult for them to cope with leave.

Most of the fathers interviewed find it easy to relate to the family while on leave, but they do so in different ways. A small group of them are very extroverted while on leave. They spend a great deal of time out of the home each and every day, regardless of the weather, and to a certain extent this means that they lift fatherhood out of the female domain constituted by the home and the family.

Fathers on leave looking after a child under one-year old occupy a position in the family and the home that has traditionally been the preserve of mothers. The thesis reveals that most fathers relate directly or indirectly to this “unconventional” position. Many of them describe their fatherhood as being different from motherhood, but there are also fathers in the survey who do not report any noticeable differences. When describing their fatherhood, all the interviewees use a number of metaphors that represent masculinity and/or demarcate differences between fatherhood and motherhood. One example of this cited in the thesis is the way they play with their children. Some of the fathers describe the way they play with their child as more wild and active than the way the mother does. It is, however, impossible to find any evidence of this phenomenon in their specific descriptions of the way both parents actually play with the child. The other metaphors discussed in the thesis are housework, breast feeding, the fathers’ desire to get out of the house and finances. The analysis discloses that fathers use the metaphors as a framework for their interpretation of what good fatherhood is while on leave, and that the metaphors seem to endow the “new” masculine fatherhood with meaning.

The thesis concludes by collating and putting into perspective the experiences of parents on leave in Denmark, proposing certain conclusions, and discussing what we can learn from the few fathers who have been on leave compared to the many who have not.

Litteratur


