BASIC INCOME AND GENDER EQUALITY IN PARENTING

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Abstract

It is often said by scholars that implementing a Universal Basic Income will erase gendered divisiveness in labor markets, the familial sphere, and childcare. In many cases, the principles of Universalism are overtones of Basic Income yet structural discrepancies often outweigh its benefits. Traditional gender roles and norms for women complicate this issue, thus, perpetuating a cycle of gendered divisiveness. Yet through our research, we have come to understand that the issue of women’s liberation does not specifically draw its conclusion from the introduction of a universal basic income. The introduction of new care legislation and parental leave models (such as the triple six model) under the Universal Basic Income Model encourage women to step out of the domesticated sphere and into new avenues of independence. Monetary stipends have also contributed to the success of women in their contribution to market economies and adequate preparation of their children in the classroom and beyond. While our research paper may not offer concrete methods to end gender inequality, new universalist practices pave the way for new conversations to be held.

Introduction

We live in a gendered society, where unpaid labor such as care work and household work is not divided equally between genders. Workplace structures and social policies in most of the industrialized world are still based on the assumption that men will commit themselves to full-time employment while women provide unpaid domestic work and caregiving in the home.

Work in the domestic sphere often fails to count as ’real’ work. Often it is also unpaid - even though work in the domestic sphere makes the public sphere possible. In this essay we will concentrate on the gendered division of parenting and child-care. Parental leave arrangements have quite an impact on parents’ career development and thus on their position in society.

Even when both parents are entitled to a paid parental leave, it’s much more likely to be taken up by mothers. Thus, women are less able to build a pension income to support them due to their role as care-givers in the family, heightening the risk of poverty later on in their lives. It also causes statistical discrimination towards women in hiring.
In this essay we will discuss if a universal basic income could promote gender equality in parenting. Universal basic income in itself is equal, as it is the same for everyone, but we will discuss if would have an effect on the equality in parenting. We will also study the effects a universal basic income could have from the point of view of women and children.

We will introduce the Swedish 6+6+6 parental leave model and discuss how should we regulate parental leave in a society where the basic income is implemented.

Universalism, basic income and gender equality

The developed economies of the planet, the civilized western world, the industrialized first-world countries all are considered to be welfare states. These welfare states – most notable the Nordic countries – were established by the idea of universalism. For further understanding the term universalism can be translated as “for all” (Sipilä & Anttonen 2016).

The core idea of a welfare state is to provide a decent standard of living for all of its habitants. Consequently, such services as education and health care are provided through public funding. Additionally, the state can provide economical support for those in need via subsidies e.g. pension, child support, unemployment benefit etc. A functioning welfare state alongside the examples of the aforementioned public services and forms of monetary aid were established in order to facilitate and further the general well-being, create cohesion and eradicate inequality amongst the individuals and the demographic groups within the country. (Sipilä & Anttonen 2016; Halmetoja 2016.)

The global financial crisis started in 2008 has urged countries to re-assess their increasing debt and cut public spending, thus forcing welfare state to alienate itself from the ethos of universalism (Saari & Taipale 2013). However, implementing basic income any given state – welfare or other – would cling back on the fundamental idea of universalism. As a government provided subsidy, a paid-all, unconditional and full (or partial) basic income seems to abide by the principle of universalism to its absolute zenith. (Sipilä & Anttonen 2016.)

As demonstrated in the first paragraph, a universal benefit is thought to create equality. On the surface, universal basic income does not promote gender inequality amongst the recipients. Furthermore, it does not directly support gender equality neither – but gender
neutrality more so (Zelleke 2011). However, the outcome of paying an equal amount of money to all people and its actual effects on equality should be examined by the generated actions; how a man, a woman, a husband and/or a wife of a household – with the addition of care-demanding child or children – take part in labor market and in care-giving (Vanderborgth & Widerquist 2013).

Conclusively, the arguments for the effect of basic income on gender equality differ and vary. It is difficult – if not – impossible to determine what the definite outcomes are as the implementation is lacking. On the other hand, basic income demonstrates that the very core idea of universalism as a creator and enhancer of equality within a country, is not as solid as it might have been thought to be. Subsequently, basic income as a mean of universalism can enforce or hinder (or have little-to-none effect) the equality between genders.

Progress or stagnation?

Basic income could potentially enhance gender equality in dual-caregiver families since it is found that paid caregiving leave given to individuals fosters the even distribution of parental leaves, as opposed to a paid caregiving leaves given to families. Therefore, it includes incentives for men to take up more prominent roles in caregiving activities. Making material incentives for caregiving truly equal for men and women with the basic income might generate progress in the dismantlement of socially constructed gender division of labor. (Brighouse & Wright 2008, 360, 361, 363.)

Even though basic income itself does not directly pressure people into more equal caregiving activities, it entails a potential for societal change on gender norms (Brighouse & Wright 2008, 369). A guaranteed income given to individuals without any restrictions on its use supports the autonomy of caregivers and helps to minimize the power imbalances that might occur in dual-parent families (Zelleke 2011, 37-38). In other words, basic income would create a platform that enables individuals to choose more freely which parent takes up the paid parental leave, for example, but it does not inherently encourage or pressure the parents to an equal caregiving system within families.

To have a societal situation in which individuals can truly act unaffected by gender norms and there would be no clear gender-differentiated divisions of labor, the society needs policies
that actively promote gender-equality and pressure families into distributing caregiving more equally (Brighouse & Wright 2008, 361). Basic income does not directly do that and gender-divided caregiving remains unchallenged (Orloff 2013, 150).

It can be argued that a basic income would raise the status of unpaid work, thus making childcare more meaningful and appreciated in the society (Fitzpatrick 2013, 164). However, this might not help the progress of gender equality in families. It is not yet known how basic income would affect the world of gender-differentiated work and therefore it might also cause stagnation or make the segregation more and more vivid. It is debatable whether basic income implemented on its own would decrease the amount of women in the labor market even further (Fitzpatrick 2013, 166).

**UBI Implications for Youth and their Mothers**

The Universal Basic Income project has plans to counteract gender inequality in the labor market but also provide constructive human rights policies for children at risk. Thus, with women still lagging behind men in the labor market, women and children in poverty will greatly benefit of positive implications in terms of the Universal Basic Income Project.

In one case, a women’s autonomous income through a basic income gives her more bargaining power in the household that can lead to greater task sharing. A basic income stipend would also allow mothers to spend more time with their children seeing as they would not have to work full workdays. In dual-earner households, equal income across the board dissolves women of the burden of familial responsibility, thus increasing the options available to women to engage in education and training to improve their lifestyles and labor force participation. Families will also be able to take advantage of economies in their respective countries instead of compared to the lone parent who is most at risk of poverty as a consequence of gender inequality. Time spent by women during pregnancy, childbirth, recovery and nursing will also not be taken for granted as she will not have to worry about pregnancy leave.

Furthermore, enacted from one NGO in India, a UBI experiment in the form of cash transfers produced positive results in communities of at-risk youth and women. School attendance of children in cash-grant-receiving households became three times more regular than in the
control villages. Cash recipients incurred greater expenditure on schooling (including stationery, shoes, uniforms, basic equipment and school transport) of their children than households which did not receive the cash grants. Children’s school marks improved in 68% of the families that received the grants. The researchers observed some improvements in women’s status within the household and increased economic independence. (Perkio 65)

The UBI conversation is a great program that combats social exclusion, economic equality, and individualism. A basic income could make a critical contribution to increasing adequacy, autonomy, security and flexibility for women, men and families in order to improve their wellbeing, close many of the cracks through which people fall into poverty initially and enable them to rebound from setbacks. It can reduce risk for everyone and provide more options to women to balance the varied demands of their lives and help close gender gaps in income, work time and access to learning. (Regehr 15)

Basic Income and parental leave – what do we need to take into consideration?

The discussion about what effects different parental leave models would have on gender equality and women’s emancipation are quite similar to the discussion about how basic income could affect the very same things. To improve gender equality in labor market and society as a whole, we should focus on family politics and, for example, how basic income and different parental leave models could possibly affect the current situation and what we need to take into consideration so that the effect on women’s emancipation would be positive. Parental leave arrangements have quite an impact on parents’ career development and thus on their position in society.

In the current situation (note: I’ll be assuming the family, in this case, to be a conventional heterosexual nuclear family because this is the norm most institutions are modeled for), even though both parents are entitled to parental leave, it's much more likely to be taken on by mothers than fathers when parents are completely free to choose how to arrange the leave. This can have negative consequences for example women's pension due to causing statistical discrimination towards them regarding hiring and promotion decisions. This heightens the risk of poverty later on in their lives and weakens the social status and independence of working age women. And due to women's weaker position in the labor
market, it’s often economically reasonable for the couple to decide that the mother is the one taking the leave and the cycle goes on. It also promotes dominant gender ideologies where a woman’s place should be at home, in private and a man’s at work. And lastly it amounts to mothers doing the largest part of caring work in the household in the future too, as they gain better expertise about it than their working husbands. (Anca Gehaus & Ingrid Robeyn) The equality problem of parental leave, in a nutshell, derives from gendered division of labour and because of current social structures that often steer people towards more traditional choices when they are given extensive freedom of choice.

The problem with BI is similar: because of aforementioned statistical discrimination towards women, it can be estimated that some part of women with families might drop out of working life if the BI model is strong enough to support them. This is most likely with low earning women with high earning husbands and with families with conservative values. Then again individual BI would help housewives to gain independency from their husband’s earnings. However the core problem of BI, from the point of view of gender equality, is the same as with parental leave with full freedom of choice; the existing structures guide people towards culturally dominant behaviour.

So, what we need to do to change the direction regarding parental leave and basic income so that the changes would enhance gender equality? There are, of course, many different models for parental leave and also for basic income, and different combinations will naturally have different impacts on gender equality. Would the basic income be partial or whole? And could it wholly replace the parental leave benefit system or would the basic income be topped with some sort of benefit for the parent taking the leave? Or, if children start receiving BI after birth, would that replace or weaken the benefit system? How could the benefit system be arranged so that working fathers would be encouraged to take on their share of the leave? Is it is okay to restrict the freedom of choice in division of the leave? If so, how much? How about single parents? There are too many variables for them all to be discussed in this paper, so I'll be concentrating on the combination that has the best potential for promoting gender equality.

The 6+6+6 parental leave model originates from Sweden and has been propose in Finland too. The idea of the model is that the first six months of leave after child's birth are taken by one parent, another six months by the other and the remaining six by either or it can be
split. Still there’s no coercion; either parent can shorten the leave as they please and the family is still entitled to the whole 18 months of leave, but to do so they have to specifically apply for it. 6 months is the default.

If we combine partial BI and 6+6+6 model, both parents will have the same BI, which could be topped up with benefits according to their wage level. This arrangement could minimize the economical disadvantage caused by the better earning spouse taking on the leave too. The additional benefits could also maybe be replaced by the childs BI if every citizen starts having BI from birth, but in this case, would there be a relation to the parents income level?

Because the 6+6+6 model encourages fathers to take 6 months of leave, the “risk” (of employees parental leave) the employer takes when hiring a man gets closer to the “risk” of employing women. In the long run this could help lessen the statistical discrimination towards women and eventually diminish the wage cap between men and women. The model would also empower fathers’ role as a parent and provide an opportunity for more family time and bonding with their children. (THL) However the 6+6+6 model has also been criticized by conservatists for interfering in citizens family arrangements too much and by liberals for restricting citizens freedom of choice.

The BI alone is not enough to guarantee gender equality but, depending on the BI model of course, it could be a start. The more radical the introduced BI model, the more radical the changes in the structure of society, culture, and socio economics could be. To take steps towards lasting gender equality in labour market, we need to wholly reconstruct the concept of “work”. I'm going to adapt feminist theoretic Frigga Haugs' economy of time concept to this work reform scenario; Haug writes about the way we evaluate time and how we most value time spent on paid labour. Her theory is that we need re-evaluate time spent of paid labour and other activities (such as care work, leisure time, volunteer work and partaking in politics) and posit them as equally valuable, meaning less time spent on paid labour than we do now. This would help to lessen the inequality caused by gendered division of labour, as ”male” productive labour wouldn't be seen as more valuable than ”female” reproductive labour. Essentially this means devaluation of the labor market and paid labor/economical productivity as the measure of ”respectable citizenship”.
**Conclusions**

Basic income enables individuals to choose more freely what’s appropriate for their situation. Basic income could raise the status of unpaid work, making care-work more appreciated. Basic income could also increase women’s bargaining power and financial autonomy in the household, possibly leading to greater task sharing. Basic income could empower individuals and give opportunities for example in education.

When people are given the freedom of choice, they tend to go the traditional way due to the social norms and structures. The traditional way is also most of the time economically most reasonable. This is why basic income is not efficient on its own regarding gender equality in parenting. The society needs policies that actively promote gender equality and active incentives for men to take up more prominent roles in child-care. We propose that the 6+6+6 model could in time lessen the statistical discrimination women face and engage fathers in their children’s lives.

As discussed, universal basic income does not directly promote gender inequality nor equality, but rather gender neutrality. But it serves as a platform enabling parents to choose more freely, who takes up the paid parental leave. Basic income has potential to change how we view ‘work’, which in itself, could alter how we view the division of work.

**References**


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