

Problem of Single Mothers and State Provisions: A Case of Sweden and Denmark

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Abstract: Present study aims to explore the problem faced by single mothers. A comparison of the contemporary situation of the state of Sweden and Denmark has been made. It has been inspected how the family policies of the both states are helping to eliminate the problem of single mothers. For exploration the problem of single mothers and policies and provisions provided by the states a content analysis method of research has been used. The secondary data has been used that is the research articles, official documents, fact sheets database reports and research articles about Sweden and Denmark. For analysis and comparison the contemporary situation of these two countries three indicators have been used that are the parental leaves, childcare allowance and the child maintenance support provided by the states. It has been found that the welfare state provisions for the solution of single mothers problem in the form of parental leaves and child maintenance support in Sweden are better than Denmark whereas the childcare allowance are better in Denmark as compare to Sweden.

Key words: Problem • Provision • Single Mothers • Parental Leaves • Childcare Allowance • Child Maintenance Allowance • Sweden • Denmark

INTRODUCTION

A single mother is an unmarried woman aged between 18 and 55 living on her own with her reliant kids younger than 18. Though there are a lot of issues concerned to settle a precise definition of single mother family. For exact someone needs to decide the age limit for the children to involve single father, the matrimonial status of the family head, it may also include the single parents who are living together with other relatives for example the grandparents of the children. The main definition, presented above is composed of only mothers whose children (in the home) are all under 18 and who are not married, not living together with a spouse and not living together with other relatives [1].

“Mothers without fathers in the home suffer the most far more than you ever thought. Father’s historical role in the family has been breadwinner. So the single mothers are plunged into poverty” [2]. The economic position of women who live alone with their children remains precarious and single motherhood is a major reason for poverty among women and thus their over-representation among the poor [3].

Table 1: Percent of Children in Poverty among Single Mothers

Country	Single Mother Family
Sweden	5.2
Denmark	7.3
Finland	7.5
Belgium	10.0
Italy	13.9
Norway	18.4
Netherlands	39.5

Source: David Perdeu (2006) [3], children of single mothers suffer from poverty when dad is absent

A universal trend for all the countries is the rising percentage of single mothers. In all countries single mothers bear a stressed financial situation, which in part is due to their situation in the labor market and their chances for providing for themselves [4]. A research conducted all through the developed countries in 1990 verified that lone mother families are at larger risk of poverty. The data shown in the table according to the research conducted in 1990-1992 indicate the percentage of children who are living under the poverty line.

In industrialized countries, one of the most widespread and persistent features of work is that jobs are gender typed as women’s or men’s work [5]. Women’s job options are limited. Mostly women work in same sex

dominated occupations. Such as secretary, nurse, shop assistance cleaners and childcare takers, home helpers, teachers and kitchen staff [6].

The reason why these two states have been chosen for the comparison is that they have a lot of commonalities. Both are Scandinavian countries. Both Sweden and Denmark have the same labour market and welfare state characteristics. Similarly the labor market in both states is described by a high level of incorporations, high comparatively minimum wages, democratic wage distribution, very high female labour participation and an open public sector as a major employer. A material change has been experienced by both states from low-skilled industrial jobs towards service area jobs. Tax rates of the both states are very high and which are retrieved on the disbursement side by the general lively based advantages for unemployment housing children and old age. On the same instance the municipal sector provides a broad variety of services in the sectors of education childcare, elderly care and health either free or at less prices. Similar immigration policies have been followed by the both states that are the migration from countries has been controlled to joined movers and refugees [7].

The income maintenance law was passed in Sweden in 1938 for the children of divorced or never married mothers, in which the state guaranteed payment for child support and sought to collect the money from father. In looking at the specific content of the Swedish income maintenance scheme, it is useful to keep in mind that it was one of many reforms during a period of welfare state expansion in the areas of family policy. Social development during this time was closely incorporated with population policy, which influenced the framing of social welfare legislation in such varied policy fields as housing, social insurance, child welfare etc. The population policy of Sweden was intended for the welfare of the family and indirectly designed to encourage parenthood. In Sweden during the 1990s biological fathers have gained more rights with the widening powers of the state to enforce mutual custody and the hegemonic ideology that children need equal access to both parents even after divorce. But majority of the fathers never did it in practice [8].

In Denmark one of the problems a state seems to face when adopting a policy that react to the needs and demands of single mothers, is whether to put an emphasis on women as mothers, or women as paid workers. This can be illustrated in the way the social laws have been formulated in Denmark. The significance has changed over the years. Over the course of the time from the 1930s

up to the present, the view of women as primarily mothers has changed to one where women are seen in social policy legislation as being primarily workers. This represents both a change in the discourse of social policy as well as in the social reality and priorities of women. The change in view has come mainly since the Social Assistance Act of 1974. The Act sought to present a new focus on the needs of the whole population rather than its most needy members only. As a result, the potential of women as workers, as well as a new concept of women as individuals, could be recognized in social policy. Women were no longer seen as the dependants of male income earners, or if these did not exist, as dependants of the state. In order to provide some understanding of the shift which has recently occurred in how women have been viewed in Danish social policy it is necessary to provide a brief description of the history of Danish social policy, beginning from the 1930s [9].

There was a turning point for the development of the interventionist in the state of Denmark in 1930. A large number of economic and social laws were passed during this decade, among which one of the most important was the Social Reform Act of 1933. In the Act, a distinction is made for the first time in the 'law on public care' between different groups of single mothers. The reason for being, or becoming, single was of primary importance in the description of the single mother within the legislation. In principle it was the duty of the father, when alive, to pay at least a part of the costs of the upbringing of a child [10].

Objectives of the Study:

- To see the problem faced by single mothers in Sweden and Denmark.
- To make a comparison of the contemporary situation of Sweden and Denmark.
- To explore how the family policies and state provision of both countries are helping to eliminate the problem of single mothers.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

For the present study a content analysis method of research had been used. The secondary data was used that is the newspapers, books, manuscripts existing fact sheets; case studies, family policies, data base reports about the welfare state of Sweden and Denmark had been analysed to determine the frequency of specific objectives. For analysis and comparison of the

contemporary situation of both countries three indicator had been used that are parental leaves, child care allowance and the child maintenance support provided by the states of Sweden and Denmark. The results of the content analysis had identified the specific objectives and their associated trends and patterns how they occur within a specific community of single mothers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

To remedy the problem of single mothers the comparison of the state benefits provided to every mother by the welfare state of Sweden and Denmark has been done by the following 3 indicators. That is the Parental Leaves, Childcare allowance and Child maintenance support.

In Sweden the details of the parental leaves can be seen as the maximum number of weeks in which maternity benefit will be payable is 69 weeks. Maternity benefit to mothers before birth is 9 weeks. The maternity benefits for each mother and father are 8 weeks, for either mother or father is 52 weeks and father together with mother is 2 weeks. The amount of parental leave is 80% of earlier wage for 16 months [11].

The parental leaves in Denmark can be seen in the following ways. The maximum no of weeks in which the maternity benefits will be payable is 50 weeks. The maternity benefits only for mothers are 18 weeks and maternity benefits to mothers before birth are 4 weeks. For either mother or father are 32 weeks and father together with mother 2 weeks. Amount of maternity benefit in percent of previous income is 100% (when the joint leave period of 32 weeks is extended to 40 or 46 weeks, daily cash benefits will be reduced accordingly, so that they correspond to 80 per cent for 40 weeks and to about 70% for 46 weeks) [11].

Childcare allowance in Sweden for the support of single mothers is measured in the following ways. Child endowment is a cash benefit provided to families with at least one parent living in Sweden for at least 6 months, based on the existence and age of the child. The first and present law was ratified in 1947 and affected to Swedish residents with one or more children under age 16 (or 20 if a student, 23 if attending a special school for the intellectually disabled). Child allowance is payable at the rate of 109.96 Euro a month which is a universal benefit [12].

There is a little additional allowance for the second child in two-child families. A particular benefit for large families with 3 or more children and linked to child

allowance, was eradicated in 1996 but restored subsequently. A comprehensive child allowance is payable for children over 16 still attending obligatory school and for those attending upper secondary school. The assistance is excluded from taxable income. Children of widows and widowers may get child grant in addition to the child pension. Children of other single parents with full guardianship receive a superior allowance, either from child support payments or advanced protection allowance from the state [12].

Denmark approach towards the childcare allowance is measured in the following ways. After some testing with transfer to means-testing its benefits and other benefit differences from the 1950s through the 1980s, Denmark has reinstated its universal approach, convinced of its appropriateness for child policy [13]. The allowances for each child for the 0-2 years are 190.45 Euro per month and for each child for 3-6 years is 150.77 Euro per month and for 7-17 years 118.36 Euro per month. These all are received quarterly [14].

There are the birth and adoption grant that is 81.77 Euro per month until the children's 7th birth day. The general benefits for single parents are 49.63 Euro per month which is supplemented by an additional allowance of 50.43 Euro per month per household. There is special additional allowance for each fatherless or motherless child that is 285.95 Euro per month [15].

Child maintenance support in Sweden helps the single mothers in the following ways. Almost all Swedish parents have joint official custody after separation or divorce or if unmarried. This does not mean joint living arrangements. Child lives mostly with the mother [16]. The child support benefit was renewed, in the latter part of the 1990s in an effort at receiving non-custodial parents to provide more in the way of support. The restructuring linked the court-ordered support grant more closely to the non-custodial parent's income and get rid of the indexing of the minimum support benefit [12].

Child maintenance is likely to be rewarded by the non-custodial parent whether the parents are unmarried, separated, or divorced. Parents can formulate a contract agreement concerning the amount of the maintenance but in the case of dispute the court make a decision. Each child is allowed to a certain minimum amount, which is assured by the government. In situations where the non-custodial parent is not able to pay at least the smallest amount, the government pays it. Child maintenance can be advanced by the public social insurance office and the amount paid is then reclaimed from the parent who has to pay maintenance. The definite minimum support was

133.32 Euro per month in 2007.^[12] The maximum amount of maintenance allowance advances per child per year in Sweden is 1407 Euro [11].

The child maintenance support of the state of Denmark helps the single mothers in the following ways. There is a compulsion to maintain their children, taking into account the parents' living conditions and the welfare of the child. The duty to keep the children also applies if the parents do not live together with the children. If, however, one of the parents does not observe the duty of maintenance, the regional state government may order that parent to pay contributions towards the maintenance of the child so-called child maintenance [14].

The duty of maintenance applies until the child reaches the age of 18. However, the duty may end except otherwise provided by the regional state administration, if the child do marriage before the age of 18. The amount of the child maintenance is fixed in consideration of the welfare of the child and the parents' financial situation, including the parents' capacity for work. Besides contributions towards general maintenance, the regional state administration may also fix so called special contributions e.g. in connection with induction, verification and education^[14]. The maximum amount of maintenance allowance advances per child per year in Denmark is 1280 Euro [11].

CONCLUSION

An analysis and comparison of the contemporary situation of Sweden and Denmark has been done by using the 3 indicators. After the comparison of parental leaves provided by the state of Sweden and Denmark it is clear that the duration of the parental leaves and the benefits provided by the welfare state of Sweden are greater than Denmark. Whereas in the case of childcare allowance it is clear from the empirical data that Denmark provide more child care allowance as compare to Sweden. After comparing the child maintenance allowance of Sweden and Denmark it is found that both countries provide the child maintenance support and there is also an obligation to pay for non custodial father in both countries. However the child maintenance support provided by the state of Sweden is better as compare to Denmark. As comparison of the states provisions and other instruments of support helping single mothers has been done. It is found that parental leaves and the child maintenance provisions of Sweden are better as compare to Denmark. Whereas the childcare allowance are better in Denmark as compare to Sweden.

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