

Working Women Pressure: Social Attitude and Government Policy

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the comparison of workplace social attitude on working women and support policies of working mother on the level of government between Sweden and United States. Their official policies towards working women are extremely different and their social attitude are based on their theme of their nation. We discuss multi-policy contradiction to determine how maternity leave and child care would affect working women's pressure. In addition to the government-policy-level factors, social attitude not only the level of supportive attitude from the whole society but also how the family member, men would affect working women's pressure would be noticed and discussed. We eventually find support for our hypotheses and also our conclusion: Government policies and social attitude would base on different national views which would eventually lead to different responsibilities towards work-family conflicts for working women.

Keywords: Working women, Gender Inequality, Career Obstacles, Government Policy.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, more and more women in the workplace are reluctant to marry. According to the article "56 Marriage Statistics: 2020/2021 Global Data, Analysis & Trends", more people are delaying marriage whether in Europe or the United States [1]. Considering escape from marriage can be reflected in attitudes toward married women from different countries, therefore, we will take Sweden and the United States as examples to analyze the maternity leave policies, child-care and social attitudes toward married women in the workplace.

Sweden is a social democratic welfare state. Over the past few decades, Sweden's governments promoted gender equality and strengthened dual-worker model, so that they provided lots of welfare and policies to support [2]. On maternity leave, in 1974, the government replaced maternity leave with parental leave, which means fathers have been included in the child-care policy [3]. They have to share responsibility for earning money and raising children with mothers. In 2018, Swedish parents are entitled to 480 days of paid parental leave. After the child is born, of the 480 days, each parent must take at least 90 days off, with the remaining 10 months split between paid parents [4]. For child-caring, Sweden is famous for its public childcare system. 95 percent of Swedish parents place their children in nursery care between the ages of 3 to 5 [5]. One of the benefits of the Swedish childcare system is that it is not expensive.

Parents pay only 11% of the cost of childcare, with the state making up the rest [6]. For social attitude to working women, the government is more supportive of women going out to work. From the perspective of the work system, women are supported to go out to work, with the maximum working week or salaries guaranteed. With the support from the working system, married women are more likely to enter the workforce and combine work and family. Sweden is a country that values equality, in which bosses and colleagues are supportive or encouraging when women announce they are pregnant. Thus, working women don't have to worry about getting pregnant.

The American federal government does not support family policy, which means there is not an exact standard for paid parental leave or subsidized child care in this country [7]. Nevertheless, some of developed and progressive states may decide whether to provide subsidies or not. The only leave policy is the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), enacted in 1993. Under the policy, only companies with more than 50 employees who work 1,250 hours or more are eligible for 12 weeks of job-protected unpaid leave to take care of family or children [8]. However, most Americans with low-rise incomes cannot exactly take all 12 months of unpaid leave because they can't afford to go without a paycheck. Child care benefits are not available to children of any age. These limited childcare facilities are available only to children from low-income families. However, these low-income parents must be employed or engaged in

work-related activities in order to receive the childcare allowance [9]. Families without government support are left to fend for themselves. In this case, these families turn to childcare facilities with varying quality and fees [10]. The social pressure on married women is enormous. Data on happiness show that parents are less happy than people without children [11]. Most Americans support family policies, which include paid leave, parental leave, child care, and guaranteed hours at work. Without the support of federal family policies for women, it is difficult for married women to combine family and work.

Sweden and the United States are two countries which have completely different political systems. Thus, the two countries differ their treatment of working women, with the amount of welfare provided, or how the government takes importance to family policies. In the following content, we will focus on the comparison of maternity leave policies, child caring and social attitude toward married women in the workplace, between Sweden and the United States.

2.ROOTS FOR WORKING WOMEN'S PRESSURE

2.1 Social Pressure & Family Support

The workplace crisis that mothers suffer should not be an irreconcilable contradiction in contemporary life, and the burden of work-life conflict are not all relied on women themselves. A study conducted in 20 countries implicates women who enjoy benefits including maternity leave are considered to be indifferent to their work to some extent, and their superiors will try their best to avoid hiring or promoting such women when more important management positions are vacant. This also means that working mothers with children are less competitive than men in these high-income positions [12]. Some other family-friendly policies, such as flexible working hours, working from home, etc., all mean fewer opportunities for women to show up in the office, which their positions will be considered 'special and relaxed'. Under such policies and prejudice, women will not be considered dedicatedly to work and be hard to pursue their career [13, 14]. In addition, we need to focus on the men's contribution in the family. Based on the conventional thought that men earn the living and women take care of the family, the role of father in parenting is often overlooked in the society decade ago. Lack of fatherhood-paternity are usually understood by society. Women are often educated to tolerate men, which has led to the consequences that these men take granted to think that if they don't do housework and don't care about children, women will take the initiative to take over these tasks. However, with the awakening of female consciousness, the role of fathers in work-family conflicts of female has also been noticed.

Working Swedish mothers rarely experience

conflicts between work and family. Women generally believe that their national policies and social attitudes will give them a high degree of support. 80% of women in Sweden claim to be satisfied with their job [15]. Women also generally believe that becoming a mother and pursuing a career coexist all the time. For social attitude in Sweden, the research of the International Social Survey Programme on family and gender role changes pointed out that in 2012, only 3.1% of women and 9.3% of men agreed that general responsibility of men is to earn money, and women is responsible of taking care of housework and children [15]. The Swedish government strives to protect parents in the workplace from being excluded and marginalized. Swedish mothers also clearly understand that the supportive policy environment makes it possible and normal to both be a mother and take care of work. The vast majority of them believe that independent women should work full-time while rearing children. In 2012, only 0.5% of women in Sweden were housewives [15]. Women in Stockholm are also not afraid to announce their pregnancy to colleagues and companies. This is because most work units in Sweden have collective agreements signed by the union and employees, which stipulate wages and working conditions. Contrary to the fact that American organized labor had already begun its decades-long decline, about 90% of employees have same form of collective labor contract protected by the trade unions [16, 17]. Because of the support of the government and trade unions and the embracement of the social family concept, Swedish women have greater autonomy in the balance of childbirth and work, and they are more confident while taking care of family and career.

Historians and sociologists think that the United States regards individualism as the basement of their country [18]. The idea that everyone is responsible for their own life, is the principle of personal responsibility. The core of the operation of American society also constitutes the foundation of this country's social policy. Sociologist Alison Pugh refers the operation of the American workplace to the one-way honor system, where employees believe that they should work hard and contribute to the company and should not ask for anything in return [19]. The United States is also one of the few countries where the term 'family' is not mentioned in the Constitution [20]. Unlike most industrialized countries, the federal government in the United States does not have a department that specializes in family-related issues [21]. According to the Federal Government's "Family and Medical Leave Act" (FMLA), if a woman chooses to take 12 weeks of unpaid maternity leave, her boss is not obligated to reserve her position [22]. In such an environment, American mothers would refer legal rights such as employers providing milk pumping venues are preferential treatment, which is very different from the ideas of Swedish mothers. They personally account for the conflict between parenting

and work and believe that work-family conflict is a problem they need to solve by themselves, rather than the help of their husbands and society like Swedish. They have not formed a 'help culture' yet. This is mostly because they are in a terrible environment that overemphasizes personal responsibility [23]. On the other hand, according to the survey data of the US Department of Labor, 70% of dads will take ten days of leave or less after their children are born or adopted [24]. This is of little help to mothers who need to recover after childbirth and do not have maternity leave. This has also deepened women's view of work-family conflicts as personal responsibility rather than family issues.

Sweden not only supports women in their national policies and social attitudes to take care of family and career. Under the liberal welfare policy of the United States, conflicts between family and work are all relied on mother alone. The fulfillment of the father's job is also better in Sweden, while in the United States, with the progress of society, some men have gradually realized the importance of sharing, but it is far from enough to share the pressure on their wives.

2.2 Maternity Leave

Maternity leave is also an important factor that impacts women's status and right. Sweden is one of the most gender equal countries with almost the best policies for women in the world. Sweden offers 480 days' paid parental leave, which is divided into 90 days for each parent with the remaining 300 days shared. In Sweden, parents receive a mixed entitlement with an 80% salary allowance for 390 days and the final 90 days at a flat rate. The length of maternity leave recommended in Sweden is 14 weeks [25]. Sweden government also offers children care service at a low price, which frees women from the role of care taker and enables women to pursue career. In Sweden, many other similar policies also support women to work while looking after their children. With the help of the policy, women in Sweden think that it is strange to give up their job for children. According to International Social Survey Programme's survey in 2012, less than 0.5% of Sweden women works as housewife at home. Moreover, in Sweden, the concept of gender equality has been taught since people are small. Most employers would understand the situation of professional women and would not treat pregnant employees differently. In Sweden, women agree that taking care of children is the responsibility of everyone in society, and they expect to get help and subsidy from government.

However, the policy of maternity leave in America is not as developed as Sweden and can not satisfies the needs of America Families in 21st. In America, policy for paid maternity leave varies from states, and all the states pay the benefits as a percentage of prior earnings and have ceiling. There is also one maternity leave policy

published by federal called FMLA, women chosen to follow FMLA would have 12-week maternity leave without paid, however, as a result, the women must accept that the women's company do not have the responsibility to reserve the job for them. Also, in America, the government do not provide any subsidy for children, which makes the children care problem even worse compare to Sweden. As a result, many professional women in America could hardly balance their role between mother and employee. The problem of inequality of gender thus gets worse because of the maternity leave problems. However, women play an important role in families in America in more than 38 percent of households the mother's income refers to the sole or primary source of income for the family [26], while their rights are not properly protected after they have children. What's worse, employer in America always expect women go back to workplace as early as possible instead of understanding their situation and provide them long paid maternity leave. In America, women agree that taking care of children is families' responsibility, and they do not expect to get help.

The maternity leave situation in Sweden and America shows two totally opposite ways. In the country Sweden with good welfare, women have long maternity leave and their working rights are properly protected. Government and society bear part of the responsibility for child care. Women are satisfied with the maternity leave policy and could balance their family life and work well. In America, there are no paid maternity leave and subsidy from government. Women are expected to put career as priority and are worried about their working after have children. As a result, women have to give up the job or change to a job with more free time and less paid to care for children, the gender inequality thus increases.

2.3 Childcare

Nowadays the preschool has become one of the most important part of childcare in Sweden and an essential part of everyday reality of Swedish families. About fifty percent of children between 0-2 years and seventy five percent of children between 1-5 years in Sweden will enter the preschool. [27]

The preschools have been divided into three different forms: the family daycare homes, open preschools, and leisure time centers. Family daycare homes involve tutors teaching children at home, offering a full-time care and a flexible education. The number of children who get care at home has steadily declined from the late 1980s. Open preschools are designed for parents who would stay at home to raise children. Any child at preschool-age can enter an open school with one of his parents, which does not require regular attendance for children; Leisure time centers do not provide childcare throughout the day but a specific period, like mornings, nights, and even holidays. [28]

With the democratic background, the Swedish will give children respect as an independent person. Swedish women generally believe that the daycare institutions will encourage children to get better social contacts and give enough opportunities to meet their peers.

Moreover, childcare in Sweden is financed partly by central government grants and partly by tax revenue and parental fees, leading to a relatively low cost. The cost for childcare does encourage Sweden families to adopt preschools.

Furthermore, the Swedish government has set regulations toward preschools in Education Act, requiring the quality of care provided. Thus, pre-schools have their own curriculum, and pre-school teachers are well-trained with their qualification of teaching. With the high education quality, sending children to daycare institution becomes the first choice for most Swedish mothers, supporting child development and contributing to a good condition for growth. Daycare is actually a significant part to reduce the development imbalance between children and then achieve an equal access to resources due to family issues, like their parents' incomes and education levels.

Besides, preschools and leisure-time centers organize parents' meetings, in ways of dinners and activities at which children, parents and staff can get together. Mothers then get the chances to discuss and make friends, getting opportunities to satisfy their social needs apart from family issues. The preschools in Sweden save mothers' time taking care of children to better focus on work and bring them benefits at the same time.

Mothers in United States, However, have completely different ideas toward preschools. 57.3 percent of Americans believe that family members should be responsible for childcare. Worse, 75 percent of them think that it is family that should afford the cost of childcare but not government.

Without finance from governments, the cost of childcare is extremely high. Full-time center-based childcare costs average of \$10,000 per child, which equals to about one-fifth of the median household's income in the United States. Childcare in preschools gradually becomes the service that is only affordable for middle- or high-class families [29].

Secondly, without strict government's requirements toward preschool operations, it is also an obstacle for American mothers to find an affordable preschool with high education quality. They also need to take safety issue into consideration. In fact, half of Americans reside in areas without childcare centers or places where the number of licensed preschools is far less than number of children. For the smallest population who successfully find a childcare center, though, it does not bring reliability. Any changes in teacher dismissal gives enormous pressure to mothers,

because they need to find another preschool again.

With such obstacles, it is almost impossible for mothers in United States to send children to preschools. The childcare becomes their obligation in families, leading to a further pressure.

3.CONCLUSION

Sweden and the United States are two countries with completely different political systems, leading to differences in social pressure, childcare, maternity leave, and family structure. In United States, conflicts between family and work are all relied on mothers alone. Worse, they are responsible for childcare with little help from governments and family members. Women in Sweden, however, have a better situation, as they have been supported by Sweden government to take care of both family and career. They get more choices as well as freedom.

Sweden has come a long way in reducing inequity, illustrating an exemplar case for other countries. Reflective thinking for woman status, though, is always needed, for both countries like United States and those with achievements in gender equity, like Sweden.

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