

My name is Jannice Jansson and I represent the European Association FEFAF – European Federation of Unpaid parents and carers at home – Federation Européenne des Femme Active Au Foyer. Whose main subject is valuing women’s caregiving work.

Introduction The trap...



There are many types of traps, there is the traditional wooden mousetrap, fancy plastic ones and there are cages, where the mouse or rat is caught alive. I have seen various contraptions as I have lived in a countryhouse with mice in the attic.

In Sweden we have a trap called “kvinnofällan” which is a trap for women or a women’s trap. Everything that risks women taking any majority of the unpaid work at home is called a women’s trap.

This term signifies how unpaid work is valued in Sweden.

Like a trap, unpaid work in the home has become something that ties you down, and there is no publicly acknowledged worth in unremunerated work.

What is a trap? It is a device with which you can lure, normally an animal less intelligent than yourself, with a decoy into captivity or death.

Calling parttime employment, extensive parental leave and doing the majority of the unremunerated work in the home, a trap for women is

implying them to be less intelligent as they are easily lured by the sentimentality of overestimating their personal value to their children and everything revolving a home. Feminists in Sweden states very clearly that they have no confidence in the common womans ability to choose wisely for herself. Women need to be saved by a rather small group of enlightened *avant gard*.

Governmental tactics in the labormarket:

Sweden has come very far when it comes to gender equality in the labor field. The Lisbon targets (2000) express the following as a goal for the European Union:

60% percent of women in each country have to have a paid job by 2010. And already in the 70' Sweden did reach this goal and today it is more than 80%.... An astonishing fact though is that only 1,5 % of higher executive positions are held by women, compared to 11% in USA. There is also a magical line in Scandinavian wages, that 80% of women are under and 80% of men over. This is of course due to the fact that women work low income jobs in our huge public sector. (source Key issues in women's work, Catrine Hakim London School of economics).

The Swedish so called success of women doing what was formerly performed in the homes, for low wages, has been reached by certain governmental tactics; extensively subsidized daycare with highly educated leaders and from -78 it was no longer possible to tax couples together. Everybody are taxed individually witch makes it harder for a woman to be dependent financially on a husband. These tactics coupled with the notion that putting your child in daycare is for the sake of the child, they need friends and teachers more than they do you as a parent, this has effectively nearly eliminated so called housewives.

Governmental tactics in the private sphere:

Now that the major gender goals have been met on the labor market the next phase is to make the private sphere more gender equal. We have a very generous parental leave of one year, but after that you get nothing, and with our huge tax rate it's almost impossible to manage on one income after the parental leave. Many countries look at Sweden as the model country when it comes to parental leave and childcare. But what others don't see is that over the last 30 years all

options, and abilities to choose how to care for your children, have been taken away.

Women mostly use this parental leave, and this is seen as a huge problem from the perspective of gender equality. These women are accused of destroying for other women, by bringing wages down, and by bringing the fight for equality, backwards.

The left wing political solution to solve this, is to condition the parental leave. The mother will get 6 months and the father will get the other half. As mentioned earlier; If parents get to choose for themselves they choose wrong. Conditioned parental leave makes it possible for the government to control who does the unpaid work. It is of course a good thing that fathers take a more active part in the homes, but the origin of the problem is that unremunerated work is valued so little that it is only seen as a burden, and a problem for the woman doing it. Another problem is that when men does unremunerated work, they are looked upon as heroes, when women do it they get caught in the trap. The cost of reaching gender equality can not be to lessen womens abilities to choose.

The will of the Swedish women;

There is a big discrepancy between what Swedish women want and most politicians goals for them. According to a survey 70% of Swedish women are not at all interested in this conditioned 50/50 parental leave. They want to be able to choose for themselves.

Another survey shows that; 93% of Sweden's women consider themselves to live in a gender equal relationship. This result caused our former gender equality official, Claes Borgström, to say that a woman who doesn't feel oppressed has a psychological blocking in her head. Birgitta Olsson a strong feminist profile called women who are happy doing most of the unpaid work just plain stupid.

The worth of unremunerated work;

This unpaid work; taking care of our children, cooking, cleaning, washing, ironing, visiting elderly, calling friends in need, taking on non-profit responsibilities in schools, sports, churches and cultural activity centers, has lost all its value in our society.

Self-fulfillment is the thing to do, and using your time and energy for the sake of your loved ones, we are told, will get you nowhere.

But these things have to be done somehow.

As a welfare state, Sweden has made unremunerated work into a financial commodity. Effectivity is the goal. Why have one woman care for two, three or four children, when she can care for 10-12 children?

Daycares are highly subsidized, we have subsidized maids, public nursing homes for our elderly, therapists for our friends, afterschool activity centres for our teenagers, socialworkers doing the caring and helping. volunteers at school are hardly heard of anymore, no one has time for church and we pay loads of money to all the after school activities that our children stress to participate in.

There is always a paid person to take care of others. All we need to do is work and pay our taxes.

So if you make any of these parts of the formerly unremunerated work your employment, you are paid accordingly.

If you choose to do these tasks yourself, you are nothing and you get nothing.

Can these professions replace a parent?

Never do Swedish politicians discuss the worth of the small, seemingly insignificant things performed within a home. Can a daycare worker really look into your child's eyes the same way you as a parent can? With a quick call to a friend, you can achieve the same result as hours in therapy. These little things are uniquely individual and are hard to translate into monetary worth.

My biggest concern is that soon we will have forgotten how to do those important things to our loved ones.

Ursula Nuber, a German psychologist wrote in her book *Our egoistic society*; "We live in a cynical society that doesn't appreciate all the unpaid work, upon which it is completely depending."

Before I finish I would like to come back to the term we use; women's trap of being caught in unpaid work.

How do you prevent an animal of getting caught in a trap? You put up a fence, a garth. Women in Sweden have gone from being dependent upon their husband to being dependent upon the state for low paid employment. That is the Swedish success.

Social policies have been governed by finance for too long now. If calculations are made on the monetary value of unpaid work in the

home by governments maybe it will become valued and part of political agendas. But I am a bit pessimistic about my country. Most people in governing positions, have never experienced someone performing unremunerated work, and therefore have a hard time seeing the value of it.

Sweden is a model country when it comes to many aspects of reaching gender equality, but I want to raise a concern for other countries trying to reach the same level, not to take away womens ability to choose, not to disregard the value of unremunerated work, and not to ignore the risk of negative consequences for our children.

We in FEFAF welcome every attempt to increase the value of unremunerated work.