

Tensions in Aspirations, Agency and Capabilities to Achieve a Work Family Balance: A comparison of Sweden and Hungary

In this paper, we seek to develop a theoretical framework using a capabilities approach and apply it in an analysis of a unique qualitative capabilities survey collected in two societies, Hungary and Sweden. They represent two institutional contexts with different working time regimes, levels of precarious and insecure employment, and dissimilar gender equality discourse and norms. These differences shape expectations and the ways in which mothers and fathers subjectively experience the tensions between family and work demands, and the scenarios for change that they imagine. In the paper we present two models that underlie our analyses of capabilities and agency (1) a multi-layered model of a capabilities set adapted to a European context; (2) a model illustrating how subjective states of agency reflect the ability of working parents to take up European/national policies for WLB. We operationalize agency freedom in terms of a sense of entitlement to make a claim for WLB, considering leave policies, flexibility/autonomy in working times, with a special emphasis on workplace organizational culture. Comparing our two societies, we find similarities in subjectively experienced tensions involving time pressure and time poverty, cutting across gender and education. Our Hungarian parents nevertheless, have greater agency inequalities for WLB, weaker institutional resources and weaker capabilities to make claims for WLB in workplaces and in households. Our survey reveals that Swedish parents have a strong sense of entitlement to exercise their rights to care.

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