

Children in Moral Danger due to their Mothers' Employment: The Case of State Care in Early State Socialist Hungary

Studies examining child welfare provisions in state socialist Hungary have already drawn attention to the insufficiency of both the quantity and quality of daycare, kindergarten and crèche services during this time period. Although promises were made by the Communist Party as early as 1945 to support women's labor force participation by the socialization of reproductive work and especially that of child care, research highlights that especially in the first half of the 1950s, government initiatives in fact contributed rather to the "collision" of women's productive and reproductive roles than their balance. It has also been underlined that this situation contributed to women's limited inclusion into the worlds of waged work and politics.

My research on child protection and residential care between 1949 and 1956 amends these findings by pointing out that authorities working in the field described women, especially single mothers, in terms of caretakers who were hindered in fulfilling their reproductive responsibilities due to their more important commitments as wage earners. Relying on a sample of close to 400 case files of children placed into state care for moral reasons by the Child Protection Institution of Budapest and Szolnok between 1949 and 1956 I show that a significant number of these children were identified to be in moral danger due to their mothers' employment. In single mothers' case especially, women were defined as the sole but occupied providers of child care work. Although working parents due to a lack of other alternatives for socialized child care were pressed to ask for or accept the placement into state care of their children for moral reasons mothers remained to be identified by authorities of child protection as those responsible for child care work.