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Lone Mothers between
Work and Care**

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Birte Siim

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This paper is written for Jane Lewis ed.: *Lone Mothers in European Welfare Regimes*, London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 1997

Introduction

During the last 30 years there have been dramatic changes in women's position as mothers, workers and citizens. The Danish welfare state has during the same period undergone profound changes in the policies, organisation and values of work and caring. From a feminist perspective, one of the most far-reaching changes has been the move from a male-breadwinner to a dual-breadwinner norm, that is the public and cultural expectation that both women and men are waged workers. From the beginning of the 1970's the dual-breadwinner norm has been the guiding principle in public policies and has gradually become an accepted aspect of the political culture and of people's daily lives.

The dual-breadwinner norm is manifested in the dramatic increase in the labour force participation of women during the last 30 years, with the result that women's activity rates are today approaching the activity rates of men: 79 per cent of all mothers with children under 10 have wage work compared to 95 per cent of all fathers in the same group, the highest proportion of working mothers in all EU countries (Stenvig, Andersen & Lauersen, 1995; 37). From the European context, it is surprising that mothers with small children today have higher activity rates than women in general. As a consequence mothers - as well as fathers - face new problems of balancing wage work and care for children. At the same time there has been an increase in the number of lone mothers who are in Denmark called *eneforsørgere*, or single breadwinners. The Danish term is gender neutral and focuses on the roles of single parents as waged workers.

The Danish welfare state is, like the Nordic welfare states, built on a universalist welfare system where the public sector has from the mid-1970s played a crucial role in providing and financing social services. Danish, and Nordic, family policies have been described as *child-oriented*, because they have been concerned with the well-being of children. Historically, policies toward lone mothers were part and parcel

of welfare policies directed toward children in poor and low-income families. Social policies have certainly had an *implicit* family dimension but there has been no tradition for *explicit* family policies directed exclusively towards married couples¹.

In Denmark during the last 20 years there has been is a high degree of *universalism* in access to transfers and services, which are tied to citizenship, rather than labour market performance or the needs of the family. Universalism is combined with a high degree of *individualisation* of social rights and duties of citizens in the sense that the *individual* has as a rule replaced the family and the household as the legal unit in public policy (Koch Nielsen, 1995). In the Danish welfare system, the principles of universalism and individualisation have been accompanied by an expansion of social citizenship and the state has taken on new obligations towards the individual citizens in the form of social service provisions, especially child care services and caring for the elderly, sick, handicapped and disabled (Siim, 1993).

There is a public debate about the implications of the changes in the relationship between working life and family life, and the Equal Status Council has initiated a project to generate a debate on future equality in this area². Feminist studies have pointed out that there is a dilemma associated with the dual breadwinner norm for women in Denmark: On the positive side, women have gained the right - and obligation- to work and consequently mothers are, in general, expected to be wage workers and they, in turn, expect to have access to publicly provided, high quality day care. On the negative side, caring work for children is still unequally

¹ Borchorst differentiates between direct and indirect familism. Direct familism exists when married men and women have different rights and when legislation focuses on men as the head of households. Indirect familism exists when the housewife-male-breadwinner family type is supported by legislation, so that married women are made financially dependent on their husbands (Borchorst, 1995, p.169)

² The relationship between working life and family life is also an area of special priority in the Danish Governments Action Plan on Gender Equality. The anthology "the Equality Dilemma. Reconciling Working Life and Family Life viewed in an Equality Perspective - the Danish example", 1994 is one of the important contributions to this debate published by the Equal Status Council.

divided and sex segregation in the labour market is a barrier to gender equality. Segregation means that women work predominantly in the public sector and men in the private sector, and women on average work fewer hours and earn less wages than men.

In Denmark, lone mothers and their children were from the 1930s targeted as a vulnerable social group in need of economic support and their income has historically come from the labour market, the state and from the absent father. After the Second World War, the Danish welfare state gradually moved toward universal social policies and the provision of child care in particular has become a key element in family policy. After the oil crisis in 1973 unemployment has increased in Denmark and during the 1980s was above the OECD average. The social and economic problems of two-earner families became a public, political issue and a new political consensus between Right and Left was reached about an "income package" that included both an increase in direct cash benefits and social service provisions. Since 1987, child/family benefits have included a family allowance per child, independent of income and labour market attachment, and on top of that lone parents receive an extra benefit (Knudsen, 1990).

The change from a male breadwinner to a dual breadwinner model has equalised the situation of all mothers and the cultural image of lone mothers has changed from that of a weak and dependent group to a strong and autonomous group. During the last 20 years there has been a gradual increase in the proportion of lone mothers to 18 percent of families with children in 1995. Lone mothers have not been singled out as an ideological problem or as a political issue, but there has been public concern about the growing number who are either unemployed or marginal to the labour market. Danish research has illustrated that the general problems of combining wage work and care for children are experienced more acutely by lone mothers. Wage work is crucial for the incomes of all mothers, but unemployment is a special problem for lone mothers who are dependent on one wage. The investigations indicate that lone mothers do not form a homogeneous group: there has from the 1980s been a growing differentiation between a well-educated, employed

group, who often lack the time to care, and a low-skilled, unemployed group who lack material resources (Gamst & Thalouw 1987; Larsen & Sørensen 1994). The tendency toward polarisation among lone mothers can be interpreted as an expression of more general polarisation among well-educated and unskilled women, caused by unemployment.

The Danish case illuminates both the importance and limitations of universalist public policies vis-à-vis mass unemployment. There has been a general growth of public expenditures for the elderly, children and families during the 1980s, in spite of mass unemployment and a Conservative-Centre government with the explicit objective of cutting the size of the public sector (Plovsing, 1994). There has also been a growth in public expenditures for all families, both in terms of cash benefits and in terms of provision of social services (Kenneth Hansen 1990). On the one hand, public policies have not been able to prevent mass unemployment, including an above average unemployment rate for lone mothers. On the other hand, there are no signs of a general tendency toward social marginalisation among the unemployed, lone mothers included (Goul Andersen, 1996).

Feminist scholars have suggested that the problems single mothers face balancing work and caring obligations are common to all mothers (Lewis, 1993). The Danish case is a good illustration of this thesis. Here the situation of lone mothers can be interpreted as a concentrated expression of the general dilemmas of universal citizenship connected with the dual breadwinner norm. The chapter suggests that in Denmark the dual breadwinner model is not only based on the *explicit* norm of the two earner family institutionalised in public legislation, but is in fact based on a political *consensus* about state responsibilities for caring for the

elderly, sick and disabled, and caring for children³. And the dual-breadwinner norm rests on an *implicit* and invisible premise about the necessity for parents to share caring work that contrasts with gendered practices.

The *first* section discusses the new dilemmas for women in the Danish welfare state centred on wage work and caring work from a feminist perspective. The *second* looks at the development of family forms and asks what are the implications of dual breadwinner norm for dual couple based families and lone mother families? What does it mean for lone mothers that they are, like all mothers, expected to engage in wage work? The *third* section asks what has been the policy logic behind the caring dimension in social policies, looking both at developments in social services and at cash benefits for children and families. What has been their relative importance for two parent families, and for lone parents? The *fourth* section asks what have been the main tendencies of policies and debates in the 1980s and 1990s? What are the challenges from unemployment to the Danish model of work and care for women and men? The *fifth* section discusses the interplay between public policies and the strategies and values of single mothers. How do single mothers perceive the dilemma between work and care? The *conclusion* sums up the development of the policy logic of the Danish case in relation to work and care, and discusses the strengths and weaknesses of the Danish welfare state from the perspective of women in general, and of lone parents in particular.

³ The Danish welfare state has during the last twenty years been based on a remarkable political consensus between Right and Left about what has been called the “caring dimension” of the welfare state. Feminist scholars have defined different models of caring in relation to the welfare state. The notion of a caring dimension of the welfare state that includes the right of individuals to receive and give care has been introduced in a recent paper by Trudie Knijn and Monique Kremer (1996). The different obligations of individuals, families and the state to caring is a useful aspect of comparative studies of the interplay between work and care in different welfare states. The “caring dimension” is a useful concept, because it captures an important aspect of welfare, but there is a need to develop the feminist notion of caring to incorporate a differentiation between the public and private dimensions of care and the way the two interact in different welfare states.

Women's Autonomy and the Dual-breadwinner Model

The institutional structure, policies and values of the welfare state can explain why lone mothers have not been either an ideological issue or a political problem during the last 25 years. The gendered notion of the welfare state can explain which institutions, policies and values contribute to and hinder women's autonomy as mothers, workers and citizens.

From an institutional perspective, the Nordic countries have been characterised as welfare states in which social policies are based on the principle of universal benefits to all citizens financed primarily by taxes. The Danish welfare system is universal in the sense that services and transfers are tied to citizenship and it includes a comprehensive system of cash benefits and an extensive public system for the delivery of services in the area of health, education and welfare. In terms of the state-market relationship the principle of universality in social policy based on citizenship is differentiated from principles of insurance and means-tested benefits based on previous occupation, income or contributions (Rold Andersen, 1993; 110).

Feminist scholars have generally evaluated the Scandinavian welfare states positively. Helga Hernes' claim that the Scandinavian welfare states have the potential to develop into "women-friendly" states, based on her analysis of the growing public commitment to social service provision described as "reproduction going public" has been influential among feminists (Hernes, 1987). From this perspective, it has been suggested that social welfare policies have empowered women in their daily lives as workers, mothers and citizens (Hernes, 1987; Siim, 1988; Skjeie, 1992). A small group has been critical of the "state regulation of daily life" arguing it has produced new forms of gender segregation and hierarchy in the labour market (e.g. Hirdman, 1989).

Feminists outside Scandinavia have generally commented favourably on women's high level of labour force participation and the extended public responsibilities for caring for children, and on women's ability to form autonomous households (Orloff, 1992; Lewis & Ostner, 1994). Some

have, however, been critical of the employment-oriented model that tends to subsume caring work under wage work. It has been argued that the Scandinavian “model” is not “friendly” toward caring work, because it tends to force all mothers, including lone mothers, to have wage work. The alternative is presented as a caring model based on public support that enables lone mothers to give priority to caring for children in the family for a shorter or longer period, as in the Dutch case (Ostner, 1994; Knijn, 1994).

Scandinavian scholars have pointed out that there have in fact been important differences in the development of the “Nordic model” from a gender perspective as well as from a family or caring perspective (Borchorst & Siim, 1987; Leira, 1992). In Sweden and Denmark there has, from the 1960s, been a parallel expansion of women’s wage work and publicly provided day care. This contrasts with Norway, where the entry of women into the labour market on a large scale happened later and was not accompanied by an expansion in publicly provided day care until the 1980s⁴ (Leira, 1992). Unlike Denmark, first Sweden, and recently Norway, have pursued explicit public care policies aimed at changing the sexual division of work in the family. However, during the 1980s, there was a tendency towards convergence in Scandinavian family policies (Knudsen, 1990).

Feminist historians have argued that the male breadwinner norm has never been strong in Denmark in public policies, in practice or in the cultural ideology⁵ (Rosenbeck, 1989). Denmark was during the last 100 years dominated by a strong agrarian economy and industry did not become the dominant sector until around 1960. The majority of women of the working and peasant classes have always had to work to support their family, including married women. After the Second World War, the

⁴ Hege Skjeie has shown that there has been an uneven advance in the position of Norwegian women. In terms of political representation, Norway has been ahead of the both Denmark and Sweden, but in terms of wage work and child care Sweden and Denmark have been ahead of Norway (Skjeie, 1992).

⁵ There was, for example, never a ban against married women’s wage work in the 1930’s and no ban against women working at night (Rosenbeck, 1989).

ideology and practice of a male breadwinner-housewife family form gradually spread from the bourgeoisie to the working classes but its impact was time-limited to the 1950s and the early 1960s.

The dual breadwinner norm was never adopted as a conscious public policy but became institutionalised step by step in legislation from the beginning of the 1970s. One of the driving forces behind this has been the expansion of women's wage work, especially the growing labour force activity rates of mothers with young children. There has been a parallel change in the rights and obligations of citizens vis-à-vis the state as spouses, parents and children which has been expressed in social policies, tax changes, family law and political culture. The dual-breadwinner model today rests on twin assumptions that individual women and men have the obligation to take care of themselves through wage work, and that the state will provide financial support for citizens who cannot do so themselves, as well as providing high quality services for children, the elderly, the sick and the disabled.

Lone mothers are, like all mothers, expected to be able to provide for themselves and their children through a combination of wage work, family benefits and social services. It can be argued that the dual breadwinner-model is in principle favourable to lone mothers, because they do not constitute a special category but are provided for via universal policies toward families with children. Thus, while it is presumed that lone mothers, like all mothers, must provide for themselves by earning, the state has taken on new "caring" obligations in the form of child care and financial support for all mothers that are unemployed, sick or disabled. Lone mothers also receive a substantial child/family benefit to supplement their own earnings, a payment that since 1987 has been part of a universal family allowance. In sum, lone mothers' dependency on wage work is in Denmark combined with a high level of benefits and services to lone mothers.

Nevertheless, there is, in practice, an underlying dilemma for women connected with the dual bread-winner norm, that is manifested both in the sex segregated labour market as well as in the unequal gendered division of caring work in the family. Like men, women have become

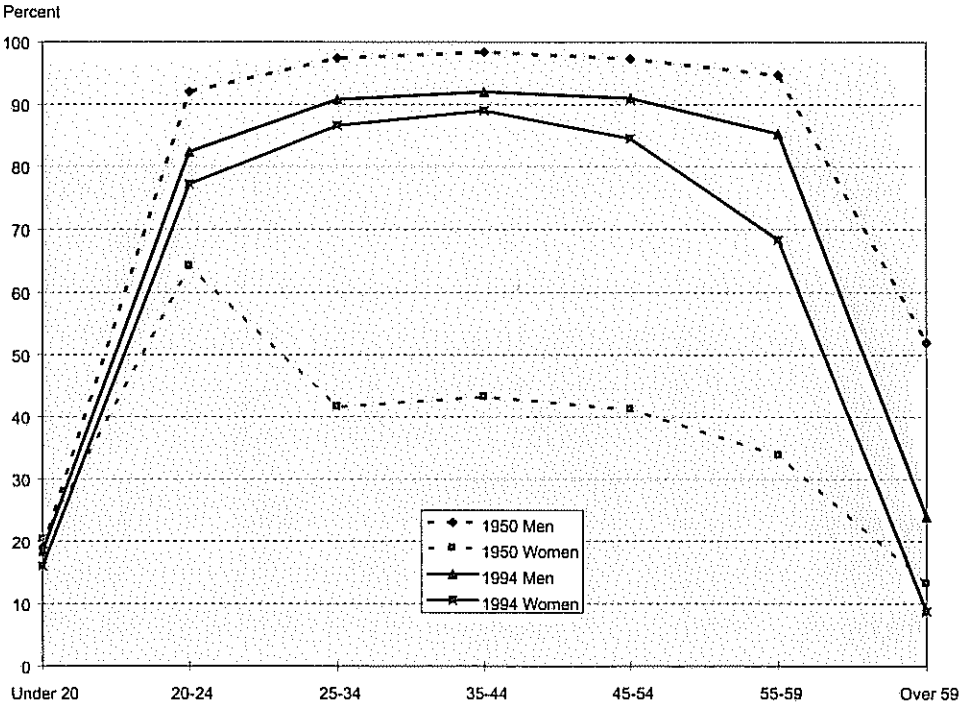
dependent on the dynamics of the labour market. Segregation is a barrier to gender equality, because women in general work fewer hours and earn less than men. Research has shown that low wages and unemployment are serious economic problems for lone mothers who are dependent on one wage, especially for unskilled mothers who have the lowest average wages and the highest risk of becoming unemployed. Furthermore, the sole responsibility for caring for children presents serious time problems for women, both in relation to the labour market and in their daily lives (Larsen & Sørensen, 1995).

Lone Parent Families and Couple Based Families

The dramatic changes in women's situation as mothers, workers and citizens during the last 30 years have had an impact on the situation of lone mothers. From the 1970s, lone motherhood has been regarded as a life-style choice, and has been neither an *ideological* nor a *political* issue. Instead there has been a positive, and even heroic, image attached to lone motherhood and the women who struggle to combine wage work and caring for children. The proportion of children living with lone parents has been growing: From 11 per cent of 0-17 year olds in 1980, to 16 per cent in 1995 (Statistical 10 year review 1995; p.15).

General changes in family structure mean that families have become smaller and that the relative number of families with children has decreased. This is also a consequence of the decrease in the fertility rate between 1965-1975 in Denmark, in common with other EU countries. The birth rate began to increase slightly from 1983 for women aged between 25-34. However, the number of children being born in Denmark is still not big enough to reproduce the population (Stenvig, Andersen & Lauersen, 1995; 34). There is a general tendency in all EU countries for the number of first marriages to fall and the number of divorces to rise, which has in Denmark been accompanied by a dramatic increase in the number of cohabiting couples. In 1960 only 7.8 percent of all children were born outside marriage; in 1994 the proportion had risen to 46.8 percent. Twenty seven per cent of all families with small children were not married (Statistical 10-year review 1995; 15).

Figure 1: Employed Men and Women, by Age 1950 and 1994



Source: 50-årsoversigten, Danmarks Statistik (50-year review, Danish Statistical Bureau)

Another important change is the dramatic increase in women's labour force participation, especially among married women. The gap in labour force activity rates between men and women has been gradually closing during the last forty years so that today there is only a small difference between the activity rates of women and men that decreases with age (Stenvig, Andersen & Lauersen; 36)

The employment rate for women with children under 10 is 79 per cent, which is the same as that for women without children (Stenvig, Andersen & Lauersen;37, table 3.4). The implication is that marital status and the presence of small children no longer significantly affects labour force activity. The role of housewife with small children has almost disappeared, and about half of all mothers with small children (under 10 years) today work full time.

As a result of the dynamic changes in family types and the political ambition to create equality between different family types, a new definition of family was introduced in family statistics in Denmark in 1991 that made it easier to gain information about couples living together as man and wife⁶. Family statistics today count various types of families within the categories *lone parent* families and *couple based* families. Couple based families include families with and without children: a) married couples, b) registered partnerships (homosexuals), c) cohabiting couples who have or have had children together or by other people. There has been a gradual decline in the number of families with children. In 1995, families with children accounted for only 23 percent and families without children for 77 percent of all families (ibid.; 33).

⁶ The objective of the new family definition was to give a more realistic picture of couples living together as man and wife. One result was to change the age limit for children living at home who counted as members of the parents' family from 26 to 18 years. Another change was to create a new category of men and women living together with children that only belong to one of them. (Stenvig, Andersen & Lauersen, 1995, p.33).

The sociological picture shows that during the 1970s and 1980s there has been a small increase in the number of lone parents, due to the rising number of divorces (Christoffersen, 1987). In 1970 lone mothers accounted for just over 10 per cent of families with children (Qvortrup, 1995; 123). Table 1 and figure 2 show first that the proportion of lone parent families has gradually increased, due to the fall in the number of two parent families with children. Second, only thirteen per cent of all the single parent families in Denmark are lone *fathers* and this percentage has been stable during the last decade. In 1995, the total number of single parents with children was 119,535, which is eighteen percent of all families with children, and there were 104,500 lone mothers with children and 15,035 single men with children (Larsen & Sørensen, 1995; 144).

In general the characteristics of lone mothers do not differ from those of all mothers. Denmark has, (like France, Germany and the Netherlands) a very low number of teenage mothers compared to some other EU countries (Ditch et.al. 1995; 31). This is explained by women's high labour market participation and the rise in women's educational attainment, together with better possibilities for planning births. The rather high average age for single parents in Denmark is similar to that of other families with children; 37 years for women and 41 for men in 1987 (see Larsen & Sørensen, 1995; 144).

The cultural portrayal of lone mothers is positive, as in many other countries. This is connected both with the spread of feminist ideas and with the trend towards equalising the treatment of all Danish mothers during the last 20 years. Research has documented that in most cases it is women who take the initiative to divorce (Koch Nielsen, 1983). Studies have also confirmed that divorce is often experienced as empowerment for women who wish to leave a difficult relationship and who want to live an autonomous life (Bak, 1996; 104). However, there are, broadly speaking, two different groups of women who divorce and become lone parents: at one extreme a group of university educated women in employment and at the other extreme a group of young unskilled, unemployed women (Larsen & Sørensen, 1995; 144). The first

first of these groups is able to live an autonomous and independent life on the basis of their own wage work, while the other group becomes dependent on unemployment benefit or long-term public support. It is interesting that education also divides lone fathers into two groups: a minority of single male providers have little by way of education, while the majority of lone fathers have more educational qualifications than men in other families, and compared to women (Larsen & Sørensen; 145). Several studies have confirmed that the group of single parents is not a homogeneous social group in Denmark and they show that there are more similarities between better-off two-parent families and better-off lone parents than there are between lone parents generally (Gamst & Thaulow, 1987, Larsen & Sørensen, 1995; 143).

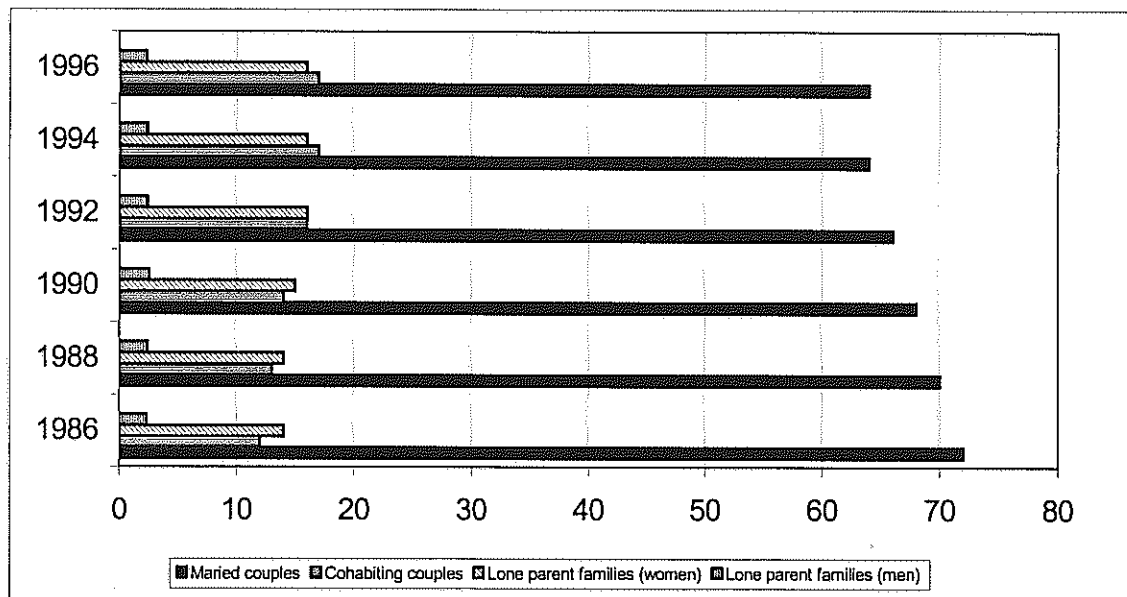
Table 1: Families with children, number and proportion (%) for selected family types, 1986 – 1996

	1986	1988	1990	1992	1994	1996
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Married couples	72,0	70,0	68,0	66,0	64,0	64,0
Cohabiting couples*	12,0	13,0	14,0	16,0	17,0	17,0
Lone parent families	16,0	17,0	18,0	18,0	19,0	19,0
women	14,0	14,0	15,0	16,0	16,0	16,0
men	2,3	2,4	2,5	2,4	2,4	2,3
% in total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0
Total no.	680.775	672.174	661.151	651.349	642.848	644.444

* The group co-habiting couples has since 1989 been divided into three subgroups; registered couples (homosexual couples), cohabiting couples with children that belong to both of them and cohabiting couples with children belonging to only one of the couple.

Source: Statistical 10-year review 1996.

Figure 2: Families with children, 1986 - 1996, Percent



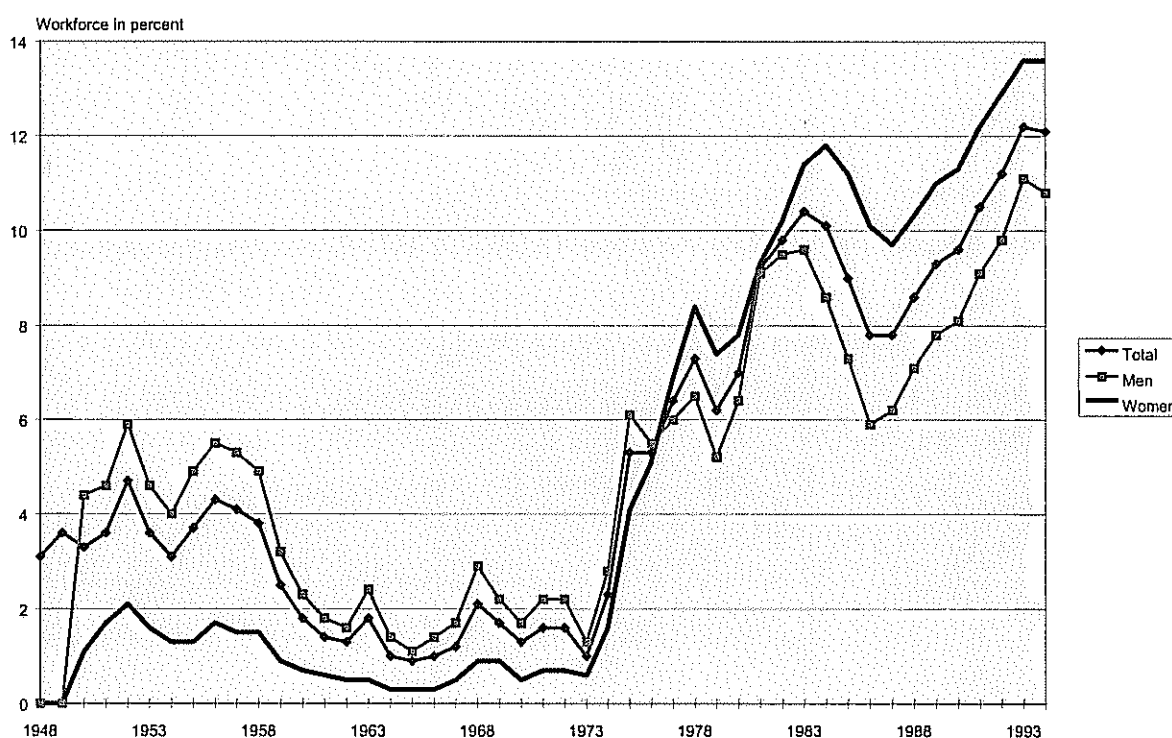
Source: 10 års oversigt, Danmarks Statistik 1995 (10 year review, Danish Statistical bureau) 1996

Family and Work in Different Family Types

The dual breadwinner model has made all families crucially dependent on married women's wage work for their income. Thus the relation between work and family has become central for all mothers, not only for lone mothers. In terms of *wage work*, there is, however, a difference between lone mothers and all mothers. The employment rate for lone mothers is lower than for all mothers but a higher proportion of lone mothers work full time: 66 per cent of all lone mothers work full time compared to 44 per cent of mothers in families with two parents. This is especially important for lone mothers with small children (0-6), of whom 80 per cent work full time against 50 per cent of mothers in families with two children. The reason for this is probably that most lone parents cannot afford *not* to work full time. A 1986 survey showed that lone fathers had a longer average working week than lone mothers (42 and 38 hours per week respectively) while lone mothers had a longer total working week than mothers in two parent families (38 1/2 and 34

hours respectively). As a result, both lone mothers and lone fathers have a higher income than men and women in two parent families; however, the most significant wage difference is between lone mothers and lone fathers. The average earnings of lone fathers before taxes were significantly higher than that of lone mothers (Larsen & Sørensen, 1995; 145).

Figure 3: Unemployment, 1948 – 1994



Source: 50 års-oversigt, Danmarks Statistik 1995
(50-year review, Danish Statistical Bureau)

A number of studies have concluded that the high unemployment rate in Denmark following the oil crisis in 1973 affected lone parents disproportionately. As a result, the economic and social situation of lone mothers has deteriorated during the 1980s: In 1985 25 per cent of lone mothers were unemployed, while men's unemployment rate was 9 per

cent and women's 12 per cent. In 1990, the rate for lone mothers had risen to 39 per cent, whereas that of men and other women remained almost the same (LO, 1991). In 1990, 40 per cent of all lone mothers received public support in the form of either unemployment benefit or social assistance, compared to 10 per cent in 1974, and another 10 per cent received State support because of long-term illness or disability. Thus almost half of lone mothers are today supported by some kind of state benefits. Unemployment was highest for lone mothers with small children but there is a general tendency for mothers compared to other groups to be unemployed. For men it is actually the other way around: fathers with small children have a lower unemployment rate than all men (Larsen & Sørensen; 146).

A recent study of *unskilled* women has concluded that for lone mothers the conflict between the need for wage work and their caring responsibilities for children is acute, and that there is in general no opportunity for part time work (Ibsen, 1993; 48). Therefore, lone mothers tend to be either full-time workers or unemployed. The study shows that lone mothers have higher unemployment rates than all mothers where there are children under seven, but that they have a lower unemployment rate than all mothers when the children are older. We do not know the reason for this, and it is not possible to say whether the high unemployment rate is a manifestation of marginalisation, or whether it represents women's own attempt to solve the conflict between wage work and caring.

Since the late 1970s, Danish women have had higher unemployment rates than men, and one of the crucial questions is what unemployment for women means in the Danish system. The unemployment benefit system has till recently been described as probably the most generous in the world in terms of easy access, long periods of support, high level of compensation and little by way of surveillance. One remarkable effect of the unemployment programmes has been the fact that Denmark has the lowest proportion of long term unemployed in the EU (Goul Andersen 1996). The question is whether the high unemployment rate of lone

mothers in Denmark is accompanied by social and political marginalisation. This question will be explored in the last section of this chapter on the basis of qualitative case studies of lone mothers.

The creation of a unique statistical database (IDA = Integrated Database for Labour Market Research) by the Danish Statistical Bureau has made it possible to analyse the relationship between family and work for different types of families in greater detail (Emerek, 1994). On the basis of material from IDA, the sociologists Stenvig, Andersen and Lauersen (1995) have shown that between 1980 and 1987 there was a general growth in the labour force activity rates for women by five per cent for all types of families, and a corresponding decline for men of one per cent (Stenvig, Andersen & Lauersen 1995; 38). As regards the connection between families with children and the labour force activity rates, the study confirms the difference between lone parents and couples. It is remarkable that the labour participation rate fell by four points and three points respectively for both single fathers and single mothers with a youngest child aged under six. The study confirms that lone parents have been disproportionately affected by unemployment and that a small group of lone parents has experienced growing difficulties in relation to the labour market, because they have become long-term unemployed (i.e. unemployed for six months or more between 1980 and 1987). In comparison, couples with children under 12 have generally experienced a growth in the labour force activity rates during the same period.⁷

Thus in terms of *unemployment* the primary difference between lone parents and two parent families is the higher unemployment rate of lone mothers, although mothers with small children in general have higher unemployment rates than fathers with small children. The high degree of unemployment creates serious economic problems for single mothers who need full-time work to provide for themselves and their children.

⁷ The labour force activity rate of men in couples where the youngest child is 0-6 or 7-12 years old is still the highest for men (i.e. 97 per cent in both groups). However, there has been a significant rise in the activity rates for women in couples with children in the same groups age groups (from 87 to 92 and from 88 to 93 per cent respectively) (Stenvig, Andersen & Lauersen, table 3.5).

The detailed study based on the integrated data base (IDA) has shown the position of a growing number of lone parents in the labour market is vulnerable compared to other groups. First, a large proportion of those who have been unemployed for more than six months are lone parents; second, a large proportion of single mothers are not in the labour force; and third, the study found a growing polarisation between single mothers who are either employed or in education and those who are either unemployed, have retired early or receive social assistance (ibid.; 40).

The conclusion is that in Denmark it is not the fact of being a lone mother that *in and of itself* creates economic difficulties. The Danish model is premised on full employment and the growing tendency toward marginalisation of lone mothers in respect of the labour market is a result of mass unemployment during the 1980s. The key factor is a tendency towards a *polarisation* in the group of single parents according to education. It has been a matter for growing public concern that it is predominantly unskilled mothers without vocational training who are either long-term unemployed, on social assistance, or live from disability pensions (Stenvig, Andersen & Lauersen, 1995; 38-39). During the 1980s, there has been political consensus about policies to (re)integrate mothers in the labour market and in society, through active labour market and educational policies targeted toward unskilled women and lone mothers, and by increasing public services and transfers for all families with children.

Policies toward Families with Children

In Denmark, the general principle of the modern welfare state of *universal* benefits directed towards *all* citizens was institutionalised through legislation after 1960, replacing the earlier system of social insurance against old age, sickness and unemployment for *selected* groups that had been introduced in 1922 (Knudsen, 1989). There has been a dramatic increase in public expenditure on social welfare since 1960 and in spite of political attempts to reduce the scope of the public sector, social expenditure has continued to rise during the 1980s. Public

expenditure on social policies has grown to 33,2 per cent of GNP in 1993 and expenditure to families makes up around ten per cent of all social expenditure (Abrahamsen & Borchorst, 1996). The decrease in total spending on families (from 18 to 10 per cent between 1950 and 1990) appears in spite of a general rise in public expenditure per child during the 1970s and 1980s (Knudsen 1990;116-125). One reason for the fall is the gradual decline in the number of children during the period. Another reason is the expansion of other areas of public care, such as care for the elderly and handicapped. Today expenditures on those with disabilities and on elderly people comprises the largest category of public expenditure, (i.e. around 50 per cent of all) (ibid.; 118).

In a comparison of public support for families in the Nordic countries, Knudsen has shown that despite similarities in the general principle of universal benefits, the Nordic welfare states have historically chosen somewhat different policy solutions for families with children. From the 1950s, Finland, and to some extent Norway, granted relatively high levels of cash benefits for families, and generous tax deductions, while Denmark and Sweden gave priority to the provision of child care services to families with children (ibid., p.116). Nordic family policies have gradually converged over the last 30 years, although there is still a difference between the relative importance of cash benefits as opposed to the provision of services to families with children. In Denmark and Sweden provision of services today make up around half of all public provision for families, whereas in Norway and Finland they only make up between 23 (Norway) and 37 per cent (Finland) (ibid.; 118).

Development of Benefits in Cash and Kind for Children and Families

In Denmark, the understanding of child-oriented family policies today includes provision of day care services as well as cash benefits. Family policies have been characterised as child-oriented, because the political objective has been to improve the well being of children rather than to favour a specific family form. From 1937, Parliament regulated the obligations of unmarried fathers in such way that their children were

given the same rights as legitimate children in regard to inheritance and the right to bear the father's name, and to receive maintenance from their fathers (Rosenbeck 1989, Koch-Nielsen 1995) Social policies were historically directed primarily towards low income families, for example, lone mothers, but over the last 30 years family policies have gradually become inclusive of all families.

The economic crisis of the 1930s gave rise to a political alliance of workers and peasant parties that emphasised the social needs of children and families. Reforms in social policy were introduced in connection with the Population Commission and population policies were introduced that were designed to improve the situation of poor and unprivileged families. The Population Commission proposed a new benefit for all mothers, including lone mothers, but this was rejected. Instead, the voluntary organisation 'Mothers Help' that assisted young pregnant women, became state funded.

Since the Second World War, there has been a gradual shift from *indirect* economic support via tax deductions for children to *direct* support through cash benefits. Cash benefits were originally targeted towards specific groups of families in need? but were gradually converted to universal benefits for all families. Tax allowances for children, first introduced in 1901, were gradually increased during the 1940s, and in 1950/51 were supplemented by a small cash benefit to families, called the "*children's grants*". From 1966 a number of new family related benefits were introduced, including a special cash benefit for lone parents. The direct cash benefits for all children independent of family income and of the number of children were, however, not introduced until 1970 (Borchorst & Siim, 1984; 75-90; 154). The explicit objective of these policy initiatives was to improve the situation of families with children in general as well as that of those of lone parents in particular.

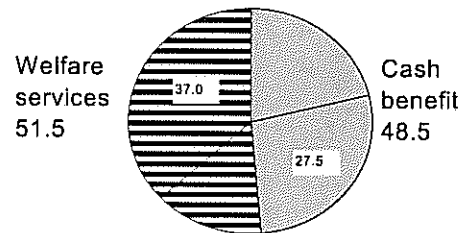
From 1964, publicly provided day care for all families with children, not just for poor families, became a key element in Danish family policy. During the 1970s and 1980s, there was political agreement to expand the number of places in childcare institutions for all children. The political objectives behind this policy were a mixture of a) *pedagogical* goals to

all children in a common programme, and c) *employment*-related goals to increase the improve the up bringing of all children, b) *egalitarian* ideals to integrate labour market participation rates of women (Juul-Jensen, 1995).

Figure 4: Family expenditures, 1978 - 1987, Percentage

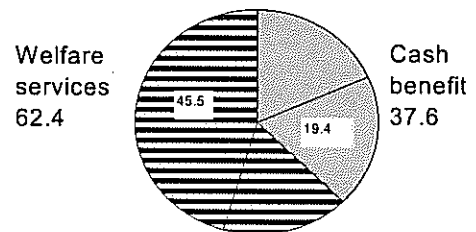
1978:

1. Cash benefit	48.5
from this child benefit	27.5
2. Welfare services	51.5
from this child care	37.0



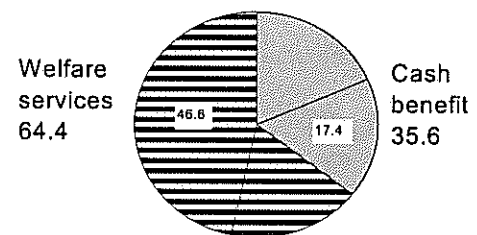
1981:

1. Cash benefit	37.6
from this child benefit	19.4
2. Welfare services	62.4
from this child care	45.5



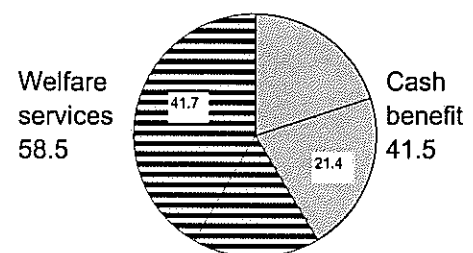
1984:

1. Cash benefit	35.6
from this child benefit	17.4
2. Welfare services	64.4
from this child care	46.6



1987:

1. Cash benefit	41.5
from this child benefit	21.4
2. Welfare services	58.5
from this child care	41.7



Source: Rita Knudsen (1989;123)

Family Obligations in Social Legislation

At the beginning of the 1970s new objectives for social policy were introduced that formed the guidelines for social policy during the next 20 years. The 1976 *Social Welfare Act* was a complex piece of legislation that set out the provisions for the social services directed towards children and families, and new rules for cash benefits. The legislation was premised on the decentralisation of responsibilities for social issues from the central to the local state. The new ambitious objectives for social policy, which involved securing the safety and well being of all citizens, were adopted during a period of expansion of the public sector and welfare services (Plovsing, 1994).

From the 1970s the principle of *individualisation* has been the main trend in social and to some extent in matrimonial legislation. In relation to the public sector, section 6 of the 1976 Social Welfare Act stated a new principle: "that every individual is obliged to provide for herself or himself, his or her spouse, and his or her children under 18 years of age" (Petersen 1995; 43). The purpose of this obligation is to ensure that the state is not obliged to take care of individuals who can take care of themselves. As a consequence the individual, not the household or the family, became the primary unit in social policy.

This principle has had far reaching implications for the relationship between parents and children, and between women and men. It follows that parents are only obliged to provide for their children until they are 18; that married or co-habiting couples have the same obligations towards each other; that women have a double obligation (or right) to work and care; and that fathers must provide and care for children⁸. As a consequence, *informal* norms about the division of caring have become

⁸ Hanne Petersen suggests that there has therefore been a shift in focus from marital status to maternal status. Women's obligations are today connected with motherhood and not with marriage as such. The obligation to provide 'private' care is laid down in the Danish Act on the legal effect of Matrimony, section 2. Husband and wife are obliged to help to provide for the family through money, work in the home or other means. There is still an expectation in many areas of society, and among women, that the woman, as mother, provides most of what Petersen calls the "status-determined care" in the family (see Petersen, 1995; 43).

increasingly important and a space has opened up for negotiations between women and men in two-parent families.

The decentralisation of the Danish welfare state meant that most social services, such as care for the elderly, nursery schools, child protection, sickness allowances, services to disabled people, the administration of public pensions and old age pensions became the direct responsibility of 275 local governments. Health services - primary care as well as hospitals - became the responsibility of 14 regional governments (Rold Andersen, 1993; 111). The local state has proved to be an excellent pressure point for the growing activities of citizens wishing to improve welfare services. Because local government is close to the problems and demands of citizens, it has been easier for local groups to influence the quality of services and to increase the level of service provision. The proximity of the state to citizens has also made it susceptible to public criticism of bureaucratic practices, and research has shown that there is a high degree of citizen satisfaction with local services (Hoff, 1993).

Public Debates about Family and Child Care in the 1980s

Mass unemployment in Denmark had negative effects on the implementation of the Social Welfare Act. During the 1970s and 1980s, the development of the welfare state was characterised both by a financial crisis and a legitimisation crisis that opened up new political conflicts about privatisation and modernisation of the welfare state. From 1982 to 1992 the Conservative-Centre Governments that followed Social Democratic minority Governments of the 1970s stated its desire to reduce the size of the (large) public sector. The government started an ideological debate that challenged some of the main objectives of social policy, such as the principle of universality. The alternative policy was to target more resources directly to those in need, and to rely more on the abilities of social networks in civil society to solve social problems and less on public benefits and state institutions (Plovsing, 1994).

The general principles of the Conservative-Centre government were *privatisation* and *modernisation* of the public sector. The main objective

of *privatisation* was to save money by moving tasks from the public sector to the private market, and *modernisation* was an attempt to make the public sector more efficient and less costly. Privatisation was used primarily in connection with transport, communication and energy, and was without any significant effect for the development of social policy (Plovsing, 1994; 82). There was some attempt to make the individuals more responsible for their own lives, for example through the introduction of small user charges for prescriptions and for dental services. Despite debate about the scope of the public sector, the level of public expenditure and taxation,⁹ privatisation of care services has not taken place other than for the contracting out of meals on wheels. There is, however, at present discussion within the government and in the press about the interplay between public and private provision of care for the elderly; there are proposals for contracting out services for the elderly, as well for introducing charges for supplementary services (Koch Nielsen, 1995; 42).

It is somewhat surprising that the new ideological developments did not seriously affect family and childcare policies. The trend toward individualisation was not challenged, and there was no attempt to bring the family back in as a legal unit in respect of financial rights and obligations. The political consensus about the principle of individualisation was explicitly confirmed by a parliamentary decision of 1987 that was part of a political package to increase public expenditure on services for families with children and universal cash benefits (Koch Nielsen, 1995; 4).

⁹ In some areas of publicly provided care, such as care for the elderly and disabled, new policies of de-institutionalization from residential care to community care were adopted in the 1980s which served to emphasize the importance of care in the home and the expansion of home help services. The underlying philosophy was not primarily to save money, although this may have been a secondary goal, and de-institutionalization of the elderly was supported by all political parties. In other areas, such as health care, there is a stronger support for private solutions within the framework of the public health system (Koch Nielsen 1995).

Universal Policies towards Families and Children

From the middle of 1970 there has been a broad political debate about the conditions of children. The *Family Commission* was formed in 1975 in order to analyse the problems of families with small children. The main “family” problems described in the Commission's 1982 Report were problems of *caring* and of material *resources*: a) lack of time to care for children with two parents out at work, b) lack of places in child care institutions, c) lack of opportunities for parents to care for children when they are sick, d) lack of material resources of parents in low income families which especially affected the children of lone parents (Family Commission 1981).

The recommendations from the Commission were put forward as policy proposals by the Conservative-Centre Governments during the 1980s, as well as by the Social- Democratic-Centre Government in the early 1990s. One of the results was the adoption of a *universal* benefit for all children in 1987 in connection with the tax reform: the *family allowance* is a benefit for all children and young people under 18, paid irrespective of family income and of the number of children in the family (about 6,600 DKK for 0-3 and 4,600 DKK for 4-17 year old in 1990). On top of this, the children of lone parents receive an additional child benefit regardless of family income (worth about 4,048 DKK per child in 1990) together with an extra benefit per family (of about 3,092 DKK in 1990) In 1990 a multiple births benefit was introduced (about 5,000 DDK¹⁰ per year). The total cash benefits are an important part of the income of lone parents, who receive about 20,000 DDK per year tax-free. Finally, the state guarantees the maintenance payable in respect of children after divorce (Plovsing, 1994; 154-159).

¹⁰ At the late 1996 exchange rates, 1 £ = 9,77 DKK

The growing political consensus in the 1980s about the importance of the universal principle of support for all children and families regardless of income and of marital status, and of increasing the number of places in child care centres, can be interpreted as a convergence in the family and child care policies of the Left and the Right. Historically, the logic of the social policies of the Social Democratic Party has been to create equality between children in different family types by providing a safety net for low-income families regardless of family type. Contrary to this, the logic of the policies of the Right has been to increase support for all families, including high-income families, through *universal* cash benefits that replaced tax deductions for children.

The Impact of Social Policies

The general aim of Danish social policies during the 1980s was to increase the economic support to all families, including single parents. The question is what has been the impact of these policies on different family types, especially for lone mothers?

In Denmark the main source of income of all mothers is wage work, but research has documented the extent to which state support via family benefits in cash and services are an important component of the incomes of a majority of families (Knudsen, 1990; Gamst and Thaulow, 1987). For many single parents with low cash benefits are incomes a necessary supplement to their own wages and have prevented them from falling into absolute or relative poverty. Larsen and Andersen have looked at the poverty rates by gender, age and family type and have found that women have an above average risk of poverty and that the poverty rate of lone

mothers is significantly higher than lone fathers due to their structurally weak position in the labour market (Larsen & Sørensen 1995; 148).¹¹

A comparison of different “model” families, made by the Danish statistician Rita Knudsen at the request of the Nordic statistical secretariat, has shown that benefits to children “other things being equal” have an important equalising effect on the position of working class families with two working parents and of lone parents with only one earner (Knudsen, 1990). In 1987 the total effect of cash benefits and tax allowances was to increase the real income of lone, working class mothers after tax by 22 per cent in Denmark (compared to 31 per cent in Norway and Iceland). The comparison between three model types families: a) a two-parent working class family with two children and two working parents, b) a two-parent family with two children and one working parent, and c) a single working mother with one child, shows that mothers under these circumstances lone receive about the same amount of real income per child as the family with two working parents and two children, and almost double the income before tax. When lone parents have an income from unskilled industrial wage work, Knudsen concludes that an unskilled working class family with two children and only one income is significantly worse off than a family with two

¹¹ Larsen and Sørensen show that with a very broad definition of poverty, in the sense that people are more or less precluded by a lack of material resources from participating in the life patterns and activities and enjoying the standard of living which is generally prevalent in Denmark, the poverty rate of lone parents is more than twice the average for the population as a whole, 26 per cent as opposed to 12 per cent, and the poverty rate of lone mothers is significantly higher than that of lone fathers, 28 per cent and 17 per cent respectively. Their definition contrasts with the official EC definition on poverty, according to which Denmark has the lowest proportion of households in the European Union living below the poverty line: about 8 per cent in 1990 compared to an EU average of about 16 per cent; only some 3 per cent of the households where the head of household is unemployed falls in the poverty category. The numbers that Larsen and Sørensen give are undoubtedly exaggerated, but the tendency for single parents to have a poverty rate that is above the average of the population as a whole is undoubtedly true (Larsen & Sørensen, 1995; 48 and Abrahamsen & Hansen, 1995; 45).

working parents, but also than a lone mother with one child (Knudsen, 1990; 81-90).

In practice, however, all things are never equal. We have seen that lone mothers are dependent on wage work and that mass unemployment has disproportionately affected unskilled lone parents compared to other groups. Knudsen shows that other areas of social policies, like universal health services, have been important for the welfare of lone parent families. The general housing benefit, which is a means-tested benefit for low-income families in rented homes, is especially important (Knudsen, 1990; 48).

Thus, in Denmark lone mothers have packaged income from wage work, state benefits and to a smaller degree from husbands. In spite of an increase in state benefits to lone mother, they have also profited from the generous Danish social wage in the form of childcare. In spite of an increase in state benefits unskilled lone mothers remain an economically vulnerable group, with the result that a growing group of lone mothers have come to rely heavily on transfers in the form of unemployment benefits or social assistance. Active and passive labour market policies¹² have been important for lone mothers and over the last 2-3 years there has been relatively generous leave arrangements and new opportunities to withdraw from the labour market have been introduced. Since August 1994, unemployment figures have started to decline but women's employment rates are still higher than men's (13,6 against 10,8 in 1994), and there is not yet any clear indication of what the consequences of the new leave policies will be for mothers and for lone parents.

¹² Recently a number of generous leave arrangements (educational leave, parental leave and sabbatical leave introduced in 1992/93) there have been introduced, as well as rich opportunities to withdraw from the labour market at an early age (early retirement allowances for 60-66 year olds were introduced in 1979; transitional allowances - at 80 per cent of maximum benefits - for long term unemployed aged 50-59 were introduced by 1992/93. The programmes have been open to unemployed. Roughly half of the people on parental leave were unemployed, and 90 per cent of them were women.

Recent Debates about Public Child Care

From the mid 1960s, public child care institutions have been a universal social service for all families and are arguably the key element in the caring dimension of the Danish welfare state¹³. During the last 15 years the provision of public childcare has achieved a high degree of political consensus and has increasingly been justified in terms of securing gender equality (Borchorst & Siim 1984; Juul Jensen 1994). As early as 1964, the idea of child care as a private responsibility was rejected, and during the last 20 years the trend has been for more and more children to attend public day-care schemes, either in the form of day care centres, local authority family day care, or after-school schemes. Private arrangements, such as family day care, grandparents or "mothers' help", are declining (Juul Jensen, 1994; 105).

Today public day care is exclusively a local government responsibility and there is considerable variation in how the municipalities tackle the issue. According to the 1976 Social Welfare Act the municipalities must provide the number of places that is needed, but this is left for them to evaluate¹⁴. This right to a place in a day care institution is not a social

¹³ There has traditionally been a difference between the parties on the Right (the Liberal Left, the Progressive Party and the small Christian Party), who want to increase the power of families to choose their own solutions for child care, and the parties on the Left (the Social Democratic Party and the Socialist Folks Party) who support an increase in publicly provided child care and greater equality between families. In Denmark these differences have diminished during the 1980s and during the last 25 years, there has been a large political majority around social policies toward women, children and families between the Right - The Conservative Party and the Liberal Left on the one hand, the Centre - the Centre-Democrats and the Radical Left Party - and the Left, i.e. the Social Democrats and the Socialist Folks Party (Borchorst, 1989).

¹⁴ The "municipalization" of the welfare state as led to geographical variations in the level of provisions of childcare. Provision for the 0-2 year olds thus varies between 23 per cent in the municipality with the lowest coverage and 74 per cent in the municipality with the highest coverage. Each local authority determines the objectives and organisational conditions (e.g. staffing) of the services. However, the National Ministry of Social Affairs has put forward 5 broad principles on which the social and pedagogical objectives of the services should be based. (Juul Jensen 1994;106).

right that can be pursued through the courts, but the law is used by parents to put pressure on local governments. Day care institutions are not free. Parents have to pay a maximum of 30 per cent of the costs, but there is a great difference between municipalities regarding the fees charged. Although Denmark has the highest day care coverage of all European countries, demands from parents have been growing. The results have been long waiting lists for childcare places during the 1990s. In 1992, between 20,000 and 30,000 0-6-year olds were in acute need of a place, the majority of them aged between 0 and 2 (ibid., p.106). One reason for the growing need to create extra day care places is the rise in the birth rate since the 1980s.

The political consensus on childcare has been promoted by the growing organisation of parents as a cross-party pressure group on local governments. Since 1992, the official national policy has been to abolish all waiting lists and in 1994 the government announced a "child care guarantee" for children aged between one and five years by 1996. It has, however, been difficult for the municipalities to live up to these promises because of the rise in the birth rate. Bringing down waiting lists is today high on the political agenda, but abolishing them will involve major expenditures for the municipalities and will increase the problem of balancing their budgets. There is a growing difference between municipalities on the child care policies and several have announced that they cannot live up to the childcare guarantee. However, some municipalities guarantee childcare provisions for all families in order to attract young families to the municipality. Parliament has tried to solve the problem of waiting lists in different ways: by giving the unemployed work as social care leaders and child care assistants; and by introducing parental leave, whereby parents of children under 9 have the opportunity of taking 13-36 weeks leave at 80 per cent (reduced to 70 per cent in 1995) of the maximum unemployment benefits¹⁵ (ibid.; 108). In general,

¹⁵ One possible way to reduce waiting lists would be to extend maternity and paternity leave. It has been calculated that for each month the leave is extended, waiting-lists are reduced by 2,600 places, meaning that 75 per cent of all mothers or fathers extend their leave.

more flexible measures have been advocated to accommodate more children within the existing schemes.

In Denmark, parents have become an important group of participating citizens. They have organised locally and nationally to tackle waiting lists, and as users of social services they have shown an active involvement in their children's day care. Since 1993, all municipalities have had to establish parental boards with majority parental representation. The board has the power to influence the principles and budgets of the day care centres and are able to appoint new employees. The institutionalisation of parents' participation in this way is important for gender relations as well as from a more general perspective of citizenship. Will mothers become more involved than fathers, or will the institutionalisation of participation strengthen the participation of fathers? Will the power of parents as citizens to influence child care policies be strengthened?

The Strategies and Values of Lone Mothers

Part-time work is traditionally a strategy used by women to reconcile the problem of balancing work and care for children. In families with two working parents, mothers often choose to work part time, and their husbands work over-time to compensate for lost wages. A day care survey (from 1989) shows that in fact a large group of both mothers and fathers with small children would actually prefer to work part time (Juul Jensen, 1994; 112-114). Part-time work is generally not a strategy open to lone mothers (80 per cent work full time). These women may be forced to choose between full time work and unemployment when the children are young. In addition, lone mothers can only share caring responsibilities with the other parent to a limited extent, for example, through mutual agreements between divorced couples about dividing child care (Stoltz, 1995). The question, then, is what strategies are open to single mothers in order to balance wage work and caring for children. Studies of lone mothers using interviews, or case studies of local communities, have given a more detailed picture of single mothers'

strategies, values and priorities in relation to wage work and caring for children than have surveys. Thaulow and Gamst's 1985 study was based on intensive interviews with 19 lone mothers, all of whom received public assistance, and Bak's 1990 study was based on intensive interviews with 25 lone mothers. Half of the group of 25 were working and the other were unemployed, in low paid, part time work, or in irregular jobs, but only 4 were on social assistance (Bak, 1996). Both investigations show that lone mothers actually prefer to have wage work and do not express any wish to become full-time carers, which is in accordance with public policies that expect lone parents to earn (Thaulow & Gamst, 1987; Bak, 1996).

The focus of Bak's study was on the situation of ordinary lone mother families (*enemorfamilier*). On the basis of her interviews, she differentiated between two types according to their overall goals: a) traditional, where the aim of the women is to recreate a nuclear family with two parents, and b) late modern, where the aim of the women is to support themselves and their children as lone mothers. According to Bak, the majority of the 25 lone mother families belonged to the second group. The women used three different strategies to gain autonomy in their own lives: a) the adoption of strict economic discipline, b) the careful construction of a daily life with their children, and c) the development of resources through the creation of social networks.

The investigation illustrates two general points: first, there is an important difference in economic resources between lone mothers. However, the majority of mothers were dependent on public transfers, not only those on social assistance but also those on low and medium incomes. This indicates that *secondary* economic transfers provided by state benefits make up an important part of the budgets of lone mothers and that without them half the mothers would be in a situation that could be described as near poverty. There is a poverty-trap in the sense that there is not much difference between living on social assistance or on unemployment benefits, and living on low wages. In spite of the differences in their economic situation, Bak found that none of the women interviewed wanted to give up their jobs and live on

unemployment benefit or social assistance. The four women on social assistance all wanted to enter education and get a job.

Second, *time* becomes one of the crucial resources for lone mothers, who are generally more time-poor and exhausted than mothers in two-parent families. In Bak's study more than half of the women (14 of 25) worked 37 hours or more, 8 women managed to work three quarters time, i.e. 30 hours a week. Other studies have confirmed that single women do not in general spend less time with their children than other parents, their strategy is to cut down on housework. Bak suggests that for single mothers time is an important consideration that can be seen both as freedom to determine the time they spend with their children, and as a restraint because of their tendency to work full time (Bak, 1996; 25).

To sum up, the qualitative studies have shown that in Denmark lone mothers perceive themselves to be part of the work force and want to provide for themselves through wage work. They confirm the general hypothesis that single mothers experience more acutely the general problems that mothers have reconciling work and care. Lone mothers in employment are time-poor because they work more hours than other women. And a large group of lone mothers with small children have economic problems because they experience a higher degree of unemployment and marginalisation from the labour market than do other mothers.

The studies further confirm that the difference between in income between lone mothers makes it difficult to generalise about their economic and conditions as a group. In Bak's study secondary state support in the form of family benefits for children and housing benefit for lone mothers with low and middle incomes proved even more important than in Knudsen's analysis of model families. These benefits made up between 20 and 30 per cent of their income and it may therefore be seen as an economic safety net that keeps them out of poverty. The minimum wage is not enough to ensure that single mothers and their children can provide for themselves. It is necessary, even in Denmark, to supplement it with state support, such as the child-family and

housing benefits in order to enable single mothers to live an autonomous life (Bak, 1996; 32).

Bak's study suggests that in Denmark structural vulnerability in the labour market does not necessarily lead to social marginalisation. There is a space for women to exercise agency through social networks and their own strategies designed to cut down on housework and save time. It is remarkable that the majority of 25 lone mothers in the study felt empowered, in the sense of deciding themselves in a way that other women do not always have. This shows that there is an important difference between the socio-economic position of lone mothers and their socio-cultural position, between unemployment and social marginalisation.

Conclusion - the Policy Logic of the Danish Case

Since the 1970s, the universalist Danish welfare system has moved from a male breadwinner to a dual breadwinner model with far reaching implications for women's situation as workers, mothers and citizens. In Denmark lone mothers were originally perceived as low-income families, but with the move toward a dual breadwinner norm, lone mothers have increasingly been perceived in the same way as other mothers. Lone mothers have historically packaged their income from three different sources: the labour market, the state and fathers. In the Danish welfare system, the labour market has historically been perceived as the most important source of income for poor lone mothers rather than the state and fathers. The intervention of the state was limited to supporting those who could not provide for themselves. Since the dual worker model has become the norm, the labour market has, in principle, come to play the primary role for all mothers. However, research shows that, in practice, state benefits and services have played a crucial role in determining the social and economic situation of lone mothers. The comparison of model families as well as qualitative studies show that state support is a crucial contribution to their income and in addition has an equalising effect between lone mother and two earner families.

During the last 15 years mass unemployment has created economic problems for a large group of lone mothers. Unemployment is a problem for all low income families, but it is arguably a particular problem for unskilled lone parents, because they cannot, like couples, compensate for the unemployment of one parent by a second parent undertaking extra work. Therefore social services and transfers in the form of family allowances and child/family benefits are crucial for lone mothers. The latest figures show that about 40 per cent of lone mothers live on either unemployment benefit or social assistance. Social policies in Denmark were based on the presumption of full employment and the growing number of lone mothers dependent on transfers has been the subject of growing political concern, but there has been no attack on family allowances or the extra child/family benefits to lone mothers.

From the perspective of *gender*, the Danish case shows both strengths and weaknesses in relation to mothers in general, and to lone mothers in particular. Women's employment can be perceived both as a positive option and as an obligation that has today become an economic necessity for families with children. In the Danish welfare state women's wage work has been paralleled by an expansion of state provision for that includes both a system of direct cash benefits for families with children, including lone parents, and a high level of social care for children, the elderly, sick handicapped and disabled. The dual breadwinner norm has on the one hand been positive, because it has equalised the situation of all mothers in relation to the labour market. On the other hand, labour market dependency is a problem for mothers with young children, because it is combined with an unequal, gendered obligation to care for children. From the perspective of lone parents, the problems of combining wage work and caring for children is acute, because they normally cannot afford to work part time.

It can be argued that the high degree of universality in welfare services for children and the elderly has been a key factor enabling lone mothers to support themselves and their children. The development of welfare services has been the result of a combination of institutional factors, policies and the activities of human actors: a) the high degree of

decentralisation of the welfare state that has made the demands of citizens for an expansion of social services for the elderly and children extremely effective, b) the principle of universality that has made it easier to form alliances among citizens at the local level around issues of child care, schools, care for the elderly and hospitals, and c) the high level of women's participation that has enabled them to play an important role in the debates and campaigns to expand social programmes and to stop cuts in existing programmes, in their capacity as providers of social services, as users, as policy makers and as concerned citizens.

In terms of public policy, it is crucial that there has been no political attempt in Denmark to make mothers full-time carers and there has been no serious attempt to challenge the publicly funded day care system. Since 1992/1993, the new Social-Democratic-Centre Government has intensified the active labour market programmes targeted towards unskilled women and lone parents. The new leave programmes for education and child care can be interpreted as innovative labour market policies with the aim of creating more jobs as well as of expanding the caring and educational dimensions of the Danish welfare state. Notwithstanding the intentions, women make up the largest group of participants on leave schemes, and unemployed women and lone mothers make up a large group of the participants on childcare leave. This points toward a real dilemma: on the one hand, there is a need for women to have more time to care for young children, on the other, it has been suggested that women's demand to have more time for children is problematic from an equality perspective at a time when competition for jobs is hard. Educational schemes to improve the qualifications of the unemployed and directed explicitly toward unemployed, unskilled groups of women may be an alternative, but they do not solve the dilemma posed by full-time work and caring responsibilities. Since 1994, unemployment figures have gradually been reduced but mostly for men. Even if women's unemployment rates start to fall, full-time employment is neither a realistic nor a preferred solution for unskilled lone mothers with small children.

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