Family policies and parenthood gap in wellbeing in Nordic context: the case of early childhood education and care

Johanna Lammi-Taskula, Merita Mesiäislehto, Johanna Närvi and Sanni Välimäki

Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (THL)

Gesis microdata conference Mannheim, 16.-17.3.2023
Aim of the study

• We study the parenthood gap in different dimensions of wellbeing and the role of family policies in explaining the gap in Nordic context

  • Is there a parenthood gap in the different dimensions of subjective wellbeing and do we find variation between countries?

  • Does the use of early childhood education and care (ECEC) services contribute to any changes in the parenthood gap?

  • Do we find differences in the parenthood gap (and the role of ECEC) between women and men?
Costs of parenthood on parental wellbeing

Parents (of small children) are said to experience lower levels of wellbeing/happiness in comparison to persons without children. The costs of parenthood are related to

1) Time costs / household chores and childcare vs leisure and spousal time

2) Financial costs / increased expenses (food, housing, childcare, health care, education), opportunity costs costs in the labour market

3) Psychosocial costs / work-family conflict, strained relationships, worry

(Fawcett 1988; Nelson et al 2013; Collins & Glass 2018)
Family policies support parental wellbeing

According to previous research (see Collins and Glass 2018), public family policies may support parents’ wellbeing and reduce the costs of parenthood:

• Parental leave policies decrease time use costs

• High-quality and low-cost early childhood education and care services support work-family reconciliation and reduce financial costs as well as psychosocial stress.

• More generous family policies are associated with smaller disparities in happiness between parents and non-parents

• We could assume that in Nordic countries where ECEC is widely available and affordable, the parenthood gap in subjective wellbeing is small

• Among parents, use of ECEC services may relieve particularly the financial stress as it allows both parents to work

• In Finland, differences in subjective wellbeing between the two groups of parents could be assumed to be smaller as home care allowance (for 1-3 year old children) widely used

# Early childhood education and care in the Nordic countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Denmark</th>
<th>Finland</th>
<th>Iceland</th>
<th>Norway</th>
<th>Sweden</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Entitlement to ECEC</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>starting from the age of (months)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>- No entitlement (varies between local authorities)</td>
<td>13 (for children turning one before the end of August)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Duration (months) of well-paid / low or unpaid post-natal leave</strong></td>
<td>11 / 18</td>
<td>14 / 36</td>
<td>12 / 20</td>
<td>13 / 37</td>
<td>13 / 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Children 0-2 years in day-care/ECEC in 2020, % of the age group</strong></td>
<td>53</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Koslowski et al., 2021, cross-country comparisons; Nordic Statistics Database
Data, variables and methods

• European Living Conditions Survey (EU-SILC) 2013 & 2018
• Countries: Finland, Norway and Sweden (N=6 649)
• Age 25-45, youngest child 1-2 years old
• Wellbeing variables
  • Overall life satisfaction, satisfaction with financial situation, time-use and personal relationships (0-10)
  • Mental wellbeing (mhi5) (1-5)
• Independent variable: Having children & participation of youngest child in ECEC (0=No children; 1=Child not in ECEC, 2= Child in ECEC)
  • Control variables: age, gender, education, disposable household income, employment status, consensual relationship status, migrant background

• Regression analysis with pooled data, separately for women and men
  Interaction effects by country to compare differences in the possible parenthood gap in wellbeing between countries
## Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No children</th>
<th>Child not in ECEC</th>
<th>Child in ECEC</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>2271</td>
<td>436</td>
<td>361</td>
<td>3068</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>1399</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>1926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>1175</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>349</td>
<td>1653</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>4845</strong></td>
<td><strong>708</strong></td>
<td><strong>1094</strong></td>
<td><strong>6647</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results: is there a parenthood gap in wellbeing?
### Women’s wellbeing by parenthood and country, mean (scale 0-10)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Non-parents</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Non-parents</th>
<th>Parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Overall satisfaction**
- **Financial situation**
- **Personal relationships**
- **Time-use**
- **Mental wellbeing**
Men’s wellbeing by parenthood and country, mean (scale 0-10)
Overall satisfaction

Women's overall life satisfaction

Men's overall life satisfaction

- Childless
- Child, Not in ECEC
- Child, In ECEC

Country: Finland, Norway, Sweden
Finances & mental wellbeing

Women's financial satisfaction

Women's mental wellbeing

- Childless
- Child, Not in ECEC
- Child, In ECEC

Predicted financial satisfaction

Finland  Norway  Sweden

Predicted mental wellbeing

Finland  Norway  Sweden
Conclusions

• We did not find any parenthood gap in wellbeing, except in time use
• On the contrary: having a child was associated with mother’s better mental wellbeing

• Comparing the two groups with children (those in ECEC and those at home), we only found few significant differences
  • ECEC has negative association for Finnish mothers’ financial situation and mental wellbeing & for Swedish fathers’ overall life satisfaction

• Differences in wellbeing between parents and non-parents and the two groups of parents vary between women and men
  • Barely any significant associations for men (except in time use)

To conclude, small differences in wellbeing between parents and non-parents (and between those who use ECEC services and those who don’t) confirm results of earlier studies arguing that in Nordic countries the availability of ECEC services seems to support well the reconciliation of work and family and parental wellbeing more widely
Thank you!

johanna.lammi-taskula@thl.fi
merita.mesiäislehto@thl.fi
johanna.närvi@thl.fi
sanni.valimaki@thl.fi