

PAID AND UNPAID WORK IN THE NORWEGIAN WELFARE STATE – THE CASE OF THE LONE MOTHER ALLOWANCE

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Abstract: In much of the literature, the Nordic states are presented as models for woman-friendly and gender equality policy. Differences between the gendered dimensions among the Nordic countries are less frequently explored. From a historical perspective, Norway was a latecomer in supporting women working outside the home, yet the Norwegian welfare state pioneered support for motherhood and lone mothers. Norway is one of the few countries in the world with a specific allowance for lone mothers. Today, the need for special welfare benefits for lone mothers is in question. This article follows the rise and reduction of the Norwegian allowance for lone mothers throughout the 20th century and into the early 21st century. While a core reason for developing welfare benefits for lone mothers at the start of the 1900s was to support women in their traditional, unpaid motherhood roles, this article shows how today's dual-earner and dual-career model and workforce policies exclude lone motherhood as a social category in need of particular support.

Keywords: Norway; lone mothers' allowance; paid work; unpaid work; care.

The Nordic welfare states are often seen as forerunners of gender equality. Key indicators of this are women's high rates of participation in the labour market and politics, generous parental leave policies and state-sponsored childcare and unemployment benefits. Many have pointed to Scandinavia as an example of best practices, best-case scenarios and as a "Nordic Nirvana" (see Lister 2009 for a review of this literature). What has often been left out of such accounts is the historical differences between the Nordic countries with regard to motherhood and paid versus unpaid work. While from a Nordic historical perspective the Norwegian welfare state has been regarded as a latecomer in supporting women workers, Norway was actually early in its support for motherhood and lone mothers.¹ The Norwegian case can be characterized as collaboration between traditional family values and gender equality ideas (Ellingsæter & Leira 2006).

¹ Hageman (2007) suggests economic as well as political and cultural traditions as reasons for the Norwegian case. She underlines the existence of a progressive maternalism in Norway in the early 20th century, with connections to liberal feminism and an organized feminist movement.

In this article, the rise and reduction of the Norwegian allowance for lone mothers² is followed throughout the 20th century and into the early 21st century. Norway is one of the few countries in the world with a specific allowance for lone mothers (Kammerman & Kahn 1988; Kilkey 2000; Skevik 2005). Why did Norway develop a benefit that included support for women who care for their children at home as well as for education and childcare benefits for women who worked outside the home? Further, why has the legitimacy of supporting women who provide care for their children gradually disappeared in the 21st century? The valuing of unpaid care has always been a Gordian knot in discussions about the welfare state and gender equality (Lister 2003, 2009; Pateman 1989). To support women in a traditional mothering role has been considered a way of keeping women in this role. On the other hand, to only support women as workers outside the home may be seen as supporting women only if they embrace a male norm. These have often been presented as choices. Acknowledging gender differences traps women in the private sphere, while a gender-neutral model has difficulty winning recognition for the value of family care (Lister 2003, 95). To move beyond this dichotomy, Lister (2003, 9) suggested the concept of gender-inclusive citizenship. The history of the Norwegian allowance for lone mothers is interesting because it presents a particular mixing of these perspectives. Exploring the history of this benefit in greater detail provides an in-depth understanding of the woman-friendliness of the Norwegian welfare state (Hernes 1987).

This article discusses the development of the allowance for lone mothers in Norway from 1919 through 2014. This discussion is based on my own and others' research on the public policy for lone mothers during this period (Grødem 2010; Haavet 1994; Hatland 1987; Seip 1984, 1994; Skevik 2001, 2005; Syltevik 1996, 1999; Terum 1993). This article's contribution is that it places previous contributions into a wider timeframe and follows the development of the allowance through current times. The primary material for my analysis is parliamentary debates about the allowance from 1963 to 1998³ (Syltevik 1996, 1999). The focus is on the way in which the lone mother's role as carer versus provider/ worker was discussed by politicians. How did they picture the situation of lone mothers in paid and unpaid work? What were their thoughts about fathers' and society's responsibilities? From a theoretical perspective, the point

² I chose to use the term 'lone mothers' because it covers all groups (divorced, unmarried and widowed) who have children and who live without men. I use 'mothers' since this has been and is now a group of predominantly women.

³ The debates were about the allowance law for widows and unmarried mothers (12th and 19th of June 1963), changes to the law for widows and unmarried mothers (9th and 14th of June 1972), social insurance law (18th and 27th March 1980), debate about the official welfare report (14th of May 1996) and changes to the law of social insurance (13th and 20th of February 1997). All of these are available at the website of the Norwegian parliament; [http://sok.stortinget.no/?aid=185&querytext=stortingsforhandlinger 1814 2001&l=no](http://sok.stortinget.no/?aid=185&querytext=stortingsforhandlinger+1814+2001&l=no).

of departure is from the literature on gender, welfare states and citizenship (Hobson 1994; Lister 2003; Skevik 2005). The concept of citizenship allows for broad discussion of aspects of the relationship between women and the welfare state and is here understood in its broadest sense to comprise rights, obligations, belonging, participation, inclusion and equality. A test of the gendered dimension of a welfare regime is the degree to which individual adults can uphold a socially acceptable standard of living, independent of family relationships either inside or outside a coupled relationship. This may be realized through either work or social security (Lister 2003, 172).

The extended historical timeframe taken here necessitates some limitations. Although there are other welfare benefits highly relevant to lone mothers (e.g., older child care by the state) and wider services that benefit all families with children (e.g., kindergartens and parental leave) that are highly relevant to lone mothers, the discussion here is generally restricted to transitional allowance for lone mothers. I do, however, briefly present some of the most important changes for parents when it is relevant for understanding shifts in the historic discussions. I also focus on the discussions of the allowance and the tensions between securing childcare and vulnerable groups' needs (care and redistributive concerns) versus concerns about the conduct of lone mothers with regard to marriage or paid work norms (moral and provision considerations).

In the 100 years covered here, both lone mothers and those who have been considered lone mothers in the allowance policy have changed. At the start of the 1900s, widows made up the dominant category (Hatland 1987) while the largest group today is separated or divorced women and unmarried mothers (Grødem 2010). In addition, today immigrant women make up a considerable proportion of lone mothers with benefits in Norway (Grebstad & Tønseth 2012). To be a lone mother today is considered an ordinary phase of life. Most Norwegian children are born outside marriage, divorce is common and there is no particular stigma associated with being a lone mother. This is very different from the start of the 20th century, when debate about the Norwegian allowance for lone mothers began.

A Pioneering Reform – The Oslo Social Insurance (1919)

The conditions for lone mothers and their children in Norway at the start of the 20th century were harsh. This became a public problem due, in part, to demographic factors (e.g., alarming rates of child mortality) and in part to their impoverished situation (Haavet 1994). Lone mothers⁴ faced great economic difficulties: very few unmarried mothers received child support or alimony from

⁴ The lone mother category at that time in Oslo consisted of widows (63%), separated and divorced mothers (14%), abandoned wives (12%) and unmarried mothers (11%). Abandoned wives are not a category used today (Hatland 1987, 34).

the father; childcare alternatives were bad⁵ or non-existent for working mothers; and the mortality rate among children born out of wedlock was alarming. There was a considerable stigma associated with giving birth outside of marriage (Seip 1994). A central actor who put lone mothers' problems on the public agenda was Katti Anker Møller.⁶ From 1901 to 1909, she made 70 public speeches about the conditions faced by illegitimate children (Seip 1984, 194). She also argued that motherhood ought to be recognized as work and campaigned for a motherhood wage.

The Oslo Social Insurance followed a series of radical family reforms in Norway. Consistent with the other Nordic countries, Norway passed a marriage act in 1909 ending the husband's legal power over his wife and enhancing women's individual rights. The law also allowed no-fault divorce (Melby et al. 2006). Norway passed 'The Castbergian Children's Laws' that were adopted by Parliament in 1915 and provided significant changes for lone mothers and their children. Regardless of their parents' marital status, children were given the right to inherit their father's name and inheritance. This was a radical step even in a Nordic context⁷ (Hageman 2007). One of the 'Children's Relief Laws' also provided mothers with cash benefits through six months after birth if the father was unknown or too poor to provide for the child. Under these laws, mothers also received help with claiming child support and alimony.

When the Labour Party gained control over the Local Government in 1916, they began developing a Social Insurance System intended to serve as a model for an eventual national program. As part of this plan they introduced an allowance for lone mothers. The Oslo pension was provided to widows and unmarried, separated or divorced mothers. To qualify for the pension, lone mothers had to have lived in Oslo for the preceding 15 years. If the mother remarried she lost the pension. This was also the case if she cohabited with a man who was the father of the children, or if she neglected her children. In addition to the pension, mothers and children were given free medications and medical and hospital care (Hatland 1987).

Providing support for all lone mothers in a single program outside the poverty relief system was exceptional in Europe at that time. Hatland (1987) argues that the idea must have come from the committee members, as there are no references to other models or suggestions in the committee's written records. The committee included members of different parties, but the majority were from the Labour Party because the chairman had a double vote (Hatland 1987).

⁵ At the start of the century the so-called 'makers of angels' were charged for murdering children for whom they were supposed to provide care (Haavet 1994).

⁶ Katti Anker Møller was from a bourgeois family, a mother of three children and the sister-in-law of Johan Castberg, the first Minister of Social Affairs (Haavet 1994). She and Castberg are referred to as the mother and father of the 1915 Children's Acts.

⁷ Similar legislation was not passed in Sweden until 1969.

The committee minority (conservative party members) wanted to reserve this entitlement for widows (Seip 1984, 198). The committee majority (representatives of the Labour Party) argued that other lone mother groups had similar economic needs. In the debates both within the committee and later in the City Council, the arguments against a common program were that not all groups should be considered worthy recipients and that public responsibility had to be limited. The minority questioned the ability of unmarried mothers to form their own family and become ‘a real mother for her children’. They also argued that the social security system would reduce the responsibilities of living fathers and that a benefit for divorced and separated women would weaken family ties and make divorce an easy solution (Seip 1994, 177; Hatland 1987, 35). Another concern was the relation to the child’s father. This was important when deciding whether a lone mother could claim support or not. It was stressed that the responsibility of living fathers should not be lessened and the benefit should therefore be reduced by the amount the fathers did pay.

From the start, there were many contradictions in the allowance for lone mothers. On the one hand, the aim of the pension was to give lone mothers the opportunity to provide greater care for their children and in recognition of their unpaid work: “*For all these categories the issue is the same: to free the mother from work outside the home as much as possible, to give her time and opportunity to make a home for her children so that she personally can take care of their nutrition and upbringing*” (The majority of committee; Hatland 1987, 33).

On the other hand, the allowance was not meant to supplant paid work (Skevik 2001, 210) and for this reason, the pension was too low to completely support lone mothers and their children. Lone mothers were supposed to be engaged in paid work, unless they were considered unfit. This was also assumed to be the wish of lone mothers themselves: “*A mother with only one or two children would not have enough to do at home and would not be happy going home without providing for herself and her children*” (From the discussion in the City Council; Seip 1994, 177).

This was contrary to the housewife ideology applied to middle-class women by groups such as the Norwegian Housewife Association (Seip 1994, 177). However, the Norwegian Association for Women’s Rights (Norsk Kvinnesaksforening, NKF) warned against disallowing paid work in the allowance policy and campaigned for paid work opportunities for all women.

Many Norwegian municipalities established benefits for lone mothers in the following years and by 1955 half the municipalities had such benefits. However, the benefits were most often limited to widows (Seip 1994, 178). Norwegian lone mothers had to wait until the 1960s for a national system.

A National Allowance for Lone Mothers

The national allowance for widows and unmarried mothers began in 1964.⁸ Separated and divorced mothers were not, unlike the Oslo Social Insurance, included in this law. The policy included an extra maternity grant at a child's birth, transitional allowance for a period after birth and economic support for education and childcare expenses. The principle of vocational rehabilitation that dominated the social policy debate in the 1960s was central to this law. The stated aim was to enable widows and unmarried mothers to support themselves after a period on the allowance. The opportunity to remain at home to look after children was considered to be a right until the children were old enough for it to be considered proper for the mother to take paid work outside the home (Skevik 2001, 215). However, there was no time limit and each case was to be considered individually, taking into account the local labour market.

The debate at that time was concentrated on the issue of paid and unpaid childcare. Before the debate in Parliament, the law was discussed at a meeting arranged by NKF. The main speaker claimed that the law would reward the least efficient, lazy and most passive women (Seip 1984). The argument was that matrimony was a lifetime provision and that women's roles as housewives were taken for granted. This was met by reactions in the Parliament stressing the value of unpaid work. A typical response follows: *"Allowance will be a reward for the lazy and make them give up! That's how widows are pictured. They have for certain done their best for society, and even if this has been as wife and mother, I think most of us are negative towards this downgrading of housewives' work."* (Gunvor Eker, the Labour Party, Parliamentary debate 12th of June 1963).

Working in the home was considered of equal importance to society as paid work outside the home. The importance of mothers caring for their children was also mentioned by members of Parliament as important for supporting the law. After the first years, however, paid work was considered possible: *"In my view we ought to go as far as possible to give mothers allowance. I know this is a question under debate today, but in my view nothing can substitute the relation between mother and child in the first years of a child's life. What ought to be the solution for women with older children, is a type of part-time work."* (Karen Grønn Hagen, the Centre Party, Parliamentary debate 12th of June 1963).

⁸ The law also included so-called 'family widows': women who had taken care of their elderly parents or other relatives and who, after the death of those for whom they had cared, were unable to provide for themselves. When the law was later included in the 1967 National Insurance Act, the rules concerning widows (and family widows) and unmarried mothers were written into different chapters.

This speaker continued on to state that if reliable childcare were available, three to four hours of daily paid work could be good for both the mother and the child. However, she considered full-time work a danger to the mother-child relationship. There was ambiguity in the 1960s with regard to lone mothers' roles as potential workers and there was a double standard for different categories of lone mothers. Discussions of the child's age at which it would be relevant for the mother to take paid work made distinction between widows and unmarried mothers. While for widows it was deemed unreasonable to demand that they take paid work outside the home while the children were in school, the primary time limit for unmarried mothers to remain at home was the first three years after a child's birth (Terum 1993, 37).

The debate at the time concentrated on which categories of lone mothers should be included in the allowance scheme (Skevik 2001, 56). In the parliamentary debate, widows' difficulties were the main argument for the law and the numbers of unmarried mothers was historically low (Syltevik 1999). Widows and unmarried mothers had comparable situations with regard to the fathers of their children because unmarried fathers had a legal commitment to pay for child support but not alimony for the mother. Another important consideration was that benefits for unmarried mothers had been previously established in many municipalities and politicians wanted to fill the 'last holes' in the National Insurance Scheme. At that time, the needs of separated and divorced mothers were considered so diverse that an allowance would not be adequate. Instead a means-tested benefit, the new Law of Social Assistance (following the poverty law) was established. The main argument for this was the economic responsibilities of ex-husbands. Unlike widows and unmarried mothers, the divorced father was obliged to provide for his former wife. The state did not want to take over this responsibility from male providers.

All Categories of Lone Mothers Included in the Law of National Insurance

In 1980, the Norwegian Parliament included separated and divorced mothers in the Law of National Insurance, which resulted in changes to the allowance for unmarried mothers. Until then the allowance for unmarried mothers had not been reduced if they received child support payments from the father. This was now changed so that unmarried, separated and divorced mothers were treated alike. In addition, the law became gender-neutral so that fathers too had a right to the allowance. The benefits included the transitional allowance, as well as support for education and childcare arrangements if the lone mother had paid work or attended an education program (Skevik 2001).

Children's care needs were a central theme in the debate and the role of mothers in relation to childcare was discussed as important and demanding work. Lone mothers' situations were compared to those of married women who worked part-time. Paid work was seen as good for lone mothers and to be encouraged when their children were old enough. The 10-year child age limit now covered all groups of lone mothers (Terum 1993, 39). However there was also an understanding of lone motherhood as being particularly demanding and thus there was a need for flexibility with regard to children's needs: *"This leads me to the question about ending the allowance for those who are at home, that today is mostly done when the youngest child turns 10 years of age. I am happy that the committee agrees that the conditions for lone parents and their children are so different that we have to be cautious with absolute age limits. A child who is 10 years of age is still a child who demands a lot of care and attention."* (Gunn Vigdis Hagen, The Labour Party, Parliamentary debate 18th of March 1980).

Care for children is understood as a hindrance to lone mothers' participation in the labour market and the presupposition of the parliament speakers was that lone mothers needed support from society to be able to combine care for their children and paid work. This was in a context of a shortage of available childcare and after-school activities and a resulting sense that many lone mothers really had no choices.

In the parliamentary debate of this time a main issue was still the relationship with male providers. Compared to the debate in the 1960s there was a new group of male providers who received attention. Members of the parliament suggested that lone mothers should lose their support if they married, cohabited with the child's fathers (as had been the case previously⁹) or cohabited with a new partner under 'matrimony-like' circumstances. The main argument was that it should not pay to not marry. The majority argued that cohabiting fathers did not have any legal obligation to either support their partner's children or their partner and that there were difficulties determining what the actual living arrangements were, so the discussion at the time ended there.

The Lone Mother Allowance and the Activation Policy

The discussion about male providers continued through the next decade. In 1993, the family allowance rules changed so that a lone mother lost her extra family allowance if she cohabited with a man even if he was not the father of her children. If the cohabitation lasted at least 12 months, this was called a stable 'matrimony-like' relationship. It was the relationship between the couple

⁹ According to the law in 1964, matrimonial status was the criteria for claiming support. This was altered in 1972 so that unmarried mothers cohabiting with their children's father lost their right to the allowance.

that was considered important and excluded, for example, adults sharing a flat. From 1998 this was also the case for the transitional allowance. The argument was that it should not be possible to gain financially by not marrying. Legally, a cohabitant had (and still has) no commitment to provide for either his or her partner or the partner's children, unlike married partners.

The next change concerning lone mothers came in 1998, when the period for staying at home with a child was limited. The new time limit was lowered to a maximum of three years and the oldest child age was lowered to eight years. In addition, mothers of children three to eight years of age had to have paid work or be in an education program at least 50% of the time to receive support. Nearly half of those who had previously received support lost their benefits.¹⁰

In the discussions in Parliament at that time, the transitional allowance was seen by the majority as a hindrance to the employment of lone mothers. The allowance was thought to be in need of modernization with regard to mothers' roles. In addition, there was a new understanding of the implications of fatherhood with regard to caring for children. The family with a male provider was no longer the yardstick against which lone mothers were measured. Instead, the two-income family in which both parents were engaged in caring for their children as well as paid work was presented as the norm. Non-resident fathers were thought of as still being involved in caring for their children and the ideology of the involved father blurred the distinctions between lone mothers and mothers living with partners. Compared to the debate in the 1980s, it is striking how caring for children was no longer mentioned as a hindrance to paid work. From one official report prior to the debate: "*Today even the care of infants alone is no hindrance for the parents to have paid work on a part- or full-time basis.*" (Norbomutvalget 1993, 85).

There was a certain disagreement with regard to part- versus full-time work. While the majority defended the ideal of the full-time working parent after the first year, the minority argued that there may be good reasons for one parent or a lone parent needing to care for their child at home for a longer period (e.g., after a divorce). The minority also wanted to provide greater flexibility for combining education, paid work and the allowance. Compared to the earlier debates, it is apparent that while in 1964 it was difficult to defend mothers working full-time, it was now difficult to defend parents caring for their children at home. A new rhetoric, including the terms 'active' and 'passive' welfare benefit recipients, was also introduced to the Norwegian debate (Syltevik 1996). 'Active' recipients were those in education programs who had paid work and whose allowances were reduced or who only received childcare assistance; 'passive' recipients were those who received a full

¹⁰ While there were 46,340 recipients in 1995, there were just 26,083 in 2001 (Fjær & Syltevik 2002).

allowance. The application of the term ‘passive’ to childcare and the upbringing of children was a symptom of the trend towards an understanding of caring for children as something done outside paid work hours.

The context had also changed. In the 1990s, the workfare and activation policy took hold in both Norway and internationally (Skevik 2005, 2006). It was assumed that in the modern family both parents worked outside the home. Politicians concentrated on the need to build more kindergartens and after school programs and development of a more generous parental leave policy. In 1993 there was a substantial expansion of parental leave (42 weeks with 100% compensation) with a non-transferable quota of one month reserved for fathers. Full coverage for kindergartens was approved in the 2000s and since spring 2011, Norway has guaranteed state-sponsored childcare from the age of one year. Thus, support and services for combining childcare and parental paid work in general improved significantly.

Recent Developments

The transitional allowance benefit has been used by many of those who are eligible.¹¹ A report concluded that the reform was a success in the sense that more lone mothers now provided for themselves. However, it was also reported that many had problems with the transition from benefits. About 50% succeeded in obtaining paid work and many of those were also in part-time employment (Rikstrygdeverket 2006). Following a sample of lone parents over two years after the change in law in 1998 Fjær and Syltevik (2002) identified a group of lone mothers who faced particular difficulties from the change. These were lone mothers who had problems due to their own or their children’s health issues, who had difficulty finding employment or who needed further education. In addition, the sample in this survey also reported having trouble finding satisfactory childcare alternatives and paid employment that allowed them to also care for their children. Other studies have also confirmed that lone mothers still face particular challenges. Lone mothers experience discrimination in the labour market and housing costs are high on a single income. Young lone parents without education and work experience are particularly vulnerable and children of lone parents have higher risk of living below the poverty line (Kjeldstad & Skevik 2004; Epland & Kirkeberg 2008; Skevik 2008; Kaur 2013).

Children with parents without paid work have both a poorer material living standard and are at increased risk for health problems and a weaker

¹¹ Sixty per cent and 70% of lone mothers used the allowance according to calculations in the 1980s. Very few had transitional allowance until children were 10 years of age, and many of those who used it while they got higher education (Terum 1993).

social network (Grødem 2008). Changes to the benefits system have also impacted grades in school among the children of young lone mothers (Reiso 2014). From 2002 to 2012, a greater share of lone mothers with social assistance also relied on this benefit as their primary income (Grebstad and Tønseth 2012). The group who receives social assistance has also changed; in 2012, 52% of lone mothers with social assistance were immigrants. For some lone mothers, the changes during the late 1990s have caused a worsening in their living conditions.

The most recent development in the history of support for lone mothers in Norway is a proposal that the government sent out for a Public Hearing in December 2014. The proposal (prop. 14 L 2014-15) from the contemporary blue–blue Norwegian government would restrict the support period to a maximum of one year or until the child has a right to a place in a kindergarten. If the recent changes are voted through the parliament, there will be nearly no difference between lone and married mothers. In practice, this will make the transitional allowance a benefit for lone mothers who have no right to ordinary maternity leave (because they have not worked long enough). The Norwegian parental leave scheme is generous but is based on former paid work by the parents. For women who have not worked at least six of the last 10 months prior to the birth of their child, the state support will be about one month's salary. On the other hand, there will still be benefits for lone parents whose children have special needs and support for lone parents who are in an education program. The stated aim of the benefits is to make lone parents able to support themselves through paid employment; the aim of securing income during a demanding period is neglected.

Concluding Remarks

The 20th century has been called the century of lone mothers in Norway. The century started with shame and little support from society and the implementation of remarkably radical laws that improved the situation and started the long process towards undermining this shame. The century ended with lone motherhood seen as a common and normal phase of life. There are still specific benefits for lone mothers and there is generous support for making it easier to combine caring for children and paid work for families with children in general. We have generous parental leave schemes for mothers who have been working long enough before the birth of their child, a paternity leave quota, after school programs and, in the last decade, kindergartens for nearly all children beginning at one year of age. Gendered ideology has changed. Fathers are expected to participate in the care of their children, whether they are living with the mother or not, and after a divorce shared responsibility for care is

common. Women are still doing most housework and childcare, but there are clear indications of more involved fathers.¹² Lone mothers have always been a heterogeneous group, perhaps more so today than ever before. While some have sole responsibility for their children, others share responsibility for both financial support and care with the child's father.

The rise and reduction of the Norwegian allowance for lone mothers teaches us several lessons about the Norwegian version of the Nordic model of motherhood as paid versus unpaid work. For a century the allowance has combined supporting lone mothers as both citizens-as-carers and citizens-as-workers. To support paid work participation has always been an integrated part of the benefits. The aim has been to make it easier for women to get an education and work while providing sole care for their children. The allowance has also always supported unpaid care work. This support was at its height in the 1980s with ample opportunities to prioritize care. However, after that time the development has been in the direction of a more minimalist gender-inclusive model, in which lone mothers are supported for more limited periods as carers and mostly as paid workers. Since the 1990s, what has changed are the notions of care and combination of work and care. The Norwegian version of the Nordic model has turned more toward the direction of supporting lone mothers when they act in a traditionally male role with regard to paid work (a gender-neutral model). Care for children is not seen as a hindrance to paid work after the first year of a child's life and care for children is no longer considered demanding of effort beyond what is possible after working hours. It is also no longer considered particularly demanding to be a lone mother compared to taking care of children as a couple.¹³ Perhaps even more than recognition of motherhood as work, state support for lone mothers taking care of their children at home was seen as an alternative to the male provider for women who were missing one. Women's role at home was valued as a part of the male-as-breadwinner and female-as-homemaker family model. Today we have individualistic provider norms that leave little room for viewing lone mothers' situation as different from women in general.

This article has discussed how the value of unpaid work and childcare by lone mothers in Norway has changed over 100 years. For lone mothers, concern has shifted from concern about breaking the norms of sexuality and marriage, to concern about breaking the work-ethic norms. For lone mothers today, to be seen in relation to the two-income families has its challenges, as being seen in

¹² The proportion without weekly child contact falls and 24% have 50-50% shared physical custody (Lyngstad, Kitterød & Nymoen 2014).

¹³ Since there is also a cash-for-care benefit for parents with children from one to two years of age if the children do not attend kindergarten, it may also be argued that it is easier for women in a couple relationship to take care of their one-year-old at home since the benefit is for doing so without having a full-time additional income.

relation to the male breadwinner family. In the era of two-income families it is particularly difficult to manage on one income. Likewise, it is perhaps even more difficult not to have a partner who participates in childcare in an era of involved fatherhood. The changes in the Norwegian benefit system have resulted in more children and mothers with economic difficulties. The situation of lone mothers has, however, disappeared from the public agenda and unpaid work is as difficult to reconcile as it was 100 years ago.

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