

Origins of Task Division by Gender

WHY DO MEN DECIDE AND WOMEN DELIVER PERSONAL SERVICES IN FINNISH SOCIAL WELFARE

Mirja Satka

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The answers to questions concerning gender division in Finnish public administration can be traced back to the nineteenth century to issues concerning the organization of local administration at a time when the major economic outlays of the municipalities were for social welfare.

Different strategies for helping the poor and the disabled were emphasized by women and men, there being a conflict of interest over whether priority should be given to issues concerning the quality of human care or the effect on municipal finances. While those directly involved in helping work placed a primary value on the care and concern for human wellbeing, the social welfare administration run by men placed a primary value on economics. The result is today's welfare bureaucracy in which control is exerted by men through a demand for economy and efficiency.

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Mirja Satka, Junior Researcher, The Academy of Finland, University of Jyväskylä, Seminaarinkatu 15, SF-40100 Jyväskylä, Finland.

Part of common knowledge in Finland is social worker's low wages as well as their relatively low status in general. Although it is widely known that most social workers are female, the connections between gender and status and other rewards of work are hardly analysed consciously at all taking gender into account. Discussions about social work have almost excluded this crucial issue. One reason for this state of affairs might be the way social work literature has presented the political meaning of gender throughout its existence: such an idea does not exist!

In the light of reasons mentioned above, my interest is to examine the formation of gender-specific division of tasks in the field of social welfare, especially in the case of social work. Instead of attempting a detailed answer as to why the gender division has become what it is in Finland I am rather pointing out how it happened in light of existing historical documents. Foreign influence has always been an important source of ideas in developing our social welfare and social work. On the other hand, it was never taken as such but the influence was modified by our national characteristics and culture. In the case of gender division, the rule common in the Western countries is firm in Finland: women take care of reproductive practices while men keep control.

The underlying connections between the origin of gender division in welfare professions and the ideologies of patriarchy¹, capitalism, bureaucratization, and professionalisation have been pointed out by various scholars (see Hearn 1985, Wilson 1980, 1977, Pascall 1986, Stacey 1982). By no means are these developments independent of each other: it has been suggested that patriarchy is the corresponding form of dominance over domestic labour and reproduction while the form of dominance over socialised labour and production of goods is capitalistic (Stacey 1982, 18).

The most radical change which influenced the formation of gender division in general was the division that came about when production

moved out of the home and its consequence, the split of life between work based on wages and done in public, and work done in the privacy of one's home. This was, all in all, one of the most important sequels to the breakthrough of capitalist mode of production in our social life. When it created the separate spheres of »personal» and »production» it simultaneously separated the expertise of the two sexes from each other. Women were tied to the family and dedicated their lives for the production of future generations. The family became the centre of our private lives. When this state of affairs was combined with the existing ideology of patriarchy it became a rule to exclude women totally from increased public duties by appealing to their duties at home. This meant a drastic increase in male supremacy. (Zaretsky 1976, 29—35). As a consequence an example could be mentioned in the field of health, where the professionals, i.e. male doctors, took over the skill of healing from women and began to control their previous expertise (see Ehrenreich & English 1978).

But how and when did gender division emerge in Finnish social work and what were the so called national »specialities»?

1. THE DAWN: PHILANTHROPY AND THE POOR LAW

The beginning of Finnish social work lies in the nineteenth century and is firmly connected with the fall of a society based on different estates like peasants and priests and the consequences of the capitalist mode of production. As a sign of a new social order, a slowly increasing group of workers who earned their living by wage labour appeared and a widened gap of wealth between the landowners and their dependants in the countryside became evident. However, even more important from our point of view was the change that occurred in the family. Family economy was replaced by the household, which meant drastic structural and functional changes in the institution as a whole. The patriarchal gender relations of the family economy, previously based on common work, were transformed into a relationship of emotions ruled by proper family morals. Woman's duty was no longer that of a companion at work but was gradually confined to housework and taking care of her children as well as her husband. Women became the soul of their home,

which enhanced their relative status and importance in the family. (E.g. Saarinen 1985, 45—48.) However, it should be noted that in the beginning this change affected only few upper and middle-class families in Finland.

This new state of affairs especially served the expanding capitalism in need of new qualifications unknown in the traditional society, which are e.g. of great importance for the proper behaviour of paid labour. These qualifications had a great deal to do with the new way of life and its moral codes. Proper reproductive behavior, i.e. the centrality of the family as the realm controlled by women, was essential. That is why women's position became strategically important for the newly formed society and for the interests of factory owners.

Women had a socially important task and, simultaneously, the change in their position in relation to the other sex excluding them from the expanding public sphere made them conscious of their oppressed status in relation to men. As in many other countries, this offered a basis for the birth and expansion of the women's movement towards equality in terms of education and law (see Jallinoja 1983, 32—42). The new social situation offered a twofold challenge to upper-class women: to educate themselves in the skills of »housekeeping» and to instruct women of the lower classes. The second task meant gaining a foothold in the public sphere and for that reason it was regarded as an important goal by women activists.

Many ideas for new activities among women were uncritically adopted from the more industrialised countries and applied to the Finnish rural poor by educated upper-class ladies and by some male journalists. In this connection it is worth remembering that Finland was very late in its industrial breakthrough — still in 1940, 64 percent of the economically active population earned their living from agriculture, the corresponding figure being e.g. in England about 6 percent (Alestalo 1986, 26). Although the object of philanthropy in Finland was very different from that in English or German urban slums where the original idea of charity was from (see Stedman Jones 1971) the fear of the lower classes was projected on the Finnish poor. Education of the ignorant masses, in practice lower-class women and their children, became the ideological goal of local groups of women activists throughout the country from the middle of the nineteenth century. (Åström 1961, Saarinen 1985, 60—64.) It was presented

as an extension of women's duties at home by men advocates as well as by Finnish women activists and their foreign counterparts (Saarinen 1985, 45, Forsten 1898, 90—2, Davis & Brook 1985, 8).

The following two examples are typical of the activities of contemporary nineteenth-century Finnish women's clubs. In Helsinki, »Fruktimärsföreningen i Helsingfors» association defined its duty to be visiting poor people's homes and advising them to be God-fearing, industrious and well-behaved. One principal point of the visits was to advocate Christianity in the child rearing given in poor homes (Åström 1961, 19). In Tampere, a philanthropic women's association first founded a school for poor girls and later on a workshop for children (Andelin 1979, 8—9).

A boom of philanthropy broke out in the 1880's because of the Poor Law of 1879, which was a result of the liberalisation of the economy and private life, excluding able-bodied poor from the »help» given by local administration.² However, it was soon recognised that the field of the Poor Law and charity was out of control: it was in a state which was interpreted as dangerous, taking into consideration the new moral rule of supporting oneself.³ The national organisation of social welfare was carried out with a heavy hand by the inspector of the Poor Law since 1888. His controlling and instructive duties included the local activities in the execution of the Poor Law as well as private philanthropy (Keisarillisen majesteetin . . . 1888).

From the point of view of gender division this was the first step taken by the state in bringing under official male control the activities women had practised for decades. Philanthropic associations were to serve as complementary executors of the state policy but in no circumstances were they allowed to work against the principles of the Poor Law. This was a consequence of the new policy whose main idea was to socialise citizens to the new social order with the threat of the poor house.⁴ However, this was only a simple version of what was to come: on one hand it strengthened the efforts of selfsupport in the families, but in some cases the family was unable to subsist on its own. The policy was to disperse it to the poor house and to other people's homes.

The work done on a voluntary basis in philanthropic activities gave certain expertise to women and they became informed about poor people's circumstances from the upper class's

point of view. In the late 1880's a proposal was made in the parliament: women should be given the right to be elected as a member of local Poor Law Committees with equal rights regardless of marital status. This was historical because previously women were only allowed to act as a member of a school board since 1866 in case they had practiced educational activities on a voluntary basis. Only unmarried and widowed women had had limited civil rights since 1873 but were, however, still legally under a male guardian (see Koskinen 1983, 31—46).

This proposal was exceptional as it gave this right to married women also whose only duty was understood to be her home and family and who was totally under the patriarchal control of her husband. Advocates of the proposal argued that it would benefit the whole society. The expertise women had acquired in philanthropic associations and their skills in household economy were greatly valued by the advocates. (Talousvaliokunnan mietintö 1888.) However, the final Act (1889) only allowed unmarried women who were over 24 or divorced or widowed women to be elected as members of a Poor Law committee.

In spite of these limitations women activists considered this an important opportunity to strengthen women's position in the public sphere, but in their arguments they stressed more the fact that only women having the skills to socialise the future generation as well as to instruct mothers and control the functioning of the poor house. Both sides regarded the role of women in a Poor Law Committee as that of helping men in decision making because women had a special sense of charity, as argued by women. Again, men were credited with the ability to organise and make decisions also by contemporary women. (Gripenberg 1889)

Poor house policy, which was the beginning of a controlled state intervention in poor people's lives, offered another opportunity for women in the public sphere. According to an inspector of the Poor Law it was soon discovered that women were more skilful as managers of poor houses. His explanation for this was the qualifications that this duty required (housekeeping, caring). He started a campaign of involving more women as poor house managers in order to save the policy which he had shortly before forcefully advocated as a means of solving the question of Finnish pov-

erty. (Helsingius 1891.)

The National Association of Women as well as Zacharis Topelius were also advocates of the issue. Topelius wrote in 1892 an appeal to women about their duties in poor relief according to the suggestion of the Poor Law inspector, who later on described this as a decisive turn in women's participation (Helsingius 1918, 194). Topelius' challenge already reflected the changing of the poor relief policy from strict external control to internalised control achieved by pedagogic means, i.e. the field of poor relief could no longer survive without female qualifications. The poor house was seen as an extended family which needed a mother. According to Topelius, among poor house residents the working woman found helplessness which fulfilled all her needs of love and affection, the most important of her rewards. That is why she should not look down on the slight salary for this socially important duty. (Topelius 1892.)

2. THE FEMINISATION OF POOR RELIEF

At the turn of the twentieth century a new idea for relief policy was brought from Germany, namely the Elberfeld system.⁵ The original system was the following: the town was divided into districts in which voluntary visitors took care of three or four poor families. The system was based on the principles of individualisation⁶ of relief, decentralisation of decision making in delivering help and intensive personal (i.e. class) relationships. (See Sachsse & Tennstedt 1980, 214—222.) The inspector of the Poor Law wrote of a visitor's duty as applied to the Finnish conditions: »A visitor must help the poor as an educator does, and look for the reasons of the economic shortcomings like a doctor in order to heal, and then he will recognize the concern and the good advice as being more effective than money in cash.» (Helsingius 1894.)

Several male advocates of the new system considered it necessary that women take care of voluntary visiting because its object was the home, the traditional sphere of women. It seems as if they had to some degree adopted the same arguments that women's movement had had when they began their philanthropical activities several decades earlier. Now both of them were arguing how only women had the suitable character and experience for visiting and instructing lower class mothers. (Hannula

1911, 10, Lindberg 1912, 33, Forsten 1898.) This policy also produced results: e.g. in Tampere 80—90 % of the visitors were women (Valkama 1953, 493).

It is worth asking why the change towards feminisation and familisation of poor relief practices took place? In this paper we do not have a change to look carefully into the change that took place in poor people's everyday life but it could be described in a few words as the crumbling of the patriarchal order in the organisation of family life. Upper-class contemporaries defined it as the problem of a diminishing fear of God in lower-class homes (Helsingius 1929, 77). Children were no longer working in factories and the idle children on the streets were considered a »social problem». Another concern were the former dependants of peasants, who did not have the means to support themselves. Both states of affairs »incapacitated from working, caused poverty and misery» (Helsingius 1929, 76).

When these concerns combined with the ideals of the Enlightenment, which were the ideas underlying the pedagogically and individually oriented early forms of social work, in the atmosphere of growing Finnish nationalism the result was a policy whose greatest aim was to civilise the general morals of the lower classes. The civilising of lower-class family life became the state policy. It found its expression in an emphasis on preventive poor relief⁷ and public schools, and in the appearance of the first day care institutions as well as in the earliest forms of preventive health care. Day care centres for children were the model for the new policy as the inspector of the Poor Law saw it. (Helsingius 1929, 76—82.)

In particular, children were understood to be a main area of concern. The slogan was: »To save the children of today is to save the society of tomorrow».⁸ However, this policy was put forth to its full extent only after the Civil War when the acute crisis of care of the children of the »reds» and their proper moral instruction as members of organised society was the concern. The boom of founding orphanages since 1918 and the rapid expansion of child care meant in practice feminisation⁹ of the field of poor relief in respect to the total number of paid workers. But this was not the case in administration. The new policy also produced the breakthrough of child counselling clinics supported by the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare. In them ladies whose families belonged to the Finnish

professional elite and who were trained at American professional schools of social work first practiced in the 1920's the skills of a case worker as an assisting member of the social psychiatric team (Linna 1987). The object of this activity was the »problem child».

In order to answer the question why feminisation took place in the 1910's we will have to look carefully into the purpose of poor relief policy and its context. In most documents since the liberalisation of the Finnish society and even before, the economic aspect of poor relief is its ultimate definer. The only continuing interest of the local committees of the Poor Law was the economic advantages of various alternatives to poor relief for municipal economy. However, the inspector of the Poor Law influenced these committees in the end of the twentieth century by requiring that their activities should also be effective as a means of social control of reproduction among the lower classes, which was in my estimation the reason why individualisation and care of families became the focus of state policy.

For these purposes women's work was appropriate. Only women were considered capable of producing the magic relationship of individualisation and only women were able to guide mothers, children and morally questionable women as a visitor or a manageress of an orphanage, i.e. to act in the extended role of a housewife and a mother. Even the ever well-informed inspector of the Poor Law admits in his memoirs that he felt insecure about instructing in issues concerning the sphere of women i.e. child care and care of helpless adults. »I was convinced it belonged only to women» (Helsingius 1918, 194). Simultaneously, with the boom of child care, the new nation got its first female counsellor of poor relief (1918) as an aid in women's issues for other counsellors who were men.

Not the least reason for this common consent was the fact that female labour was available without expense (see e.g. Hannula 1911, 90, Heinonen 1916). The adopted idea of voluntary visiting in poor people's homes offered an excellent opportunity to bring women's voluntary work to a large extent under state i.e. male control and even to increase the volume of the work. The new system formed an easily controllable bridge from private charity to poor relief, which was for many reasons important for the efforts of the state.

3. WHY WAS ADMINISTRATION NOT FOR WOMEN?

So far we have only discussed the formation of gender division from the point of view of women's work and reproductive qualifications in the context of municipal economy. The simultaneous development in the local Poor Relief Committees to which women had recently gained admission, was not feminisation. There were complaints that women did not attend the meetings when they were members of the committee or that they were not even willing to accept these posts. Also, when they were present they only caused additional expenses for poor relief because they were making suggestions for help without properly considering them. Men construed that women had too sensitive hearts, spoke too effectively for the poor in the committees so that reasonable decision making became impossible: women were not qualified for the requirements of organised decision making. (Nilsson 1916, 31.)

From the pedagogical point of view i.e. in order to make the social control of the lower classes function, one of the three male counsellors stressed the importance of women becoming members of the committees. As a means to this end he suggested instruction for women in the principles of Poor Law and other regulations of poor relief as well as defining their duties in the committee properly. »If we want to make poor relief an enlightening institution for the common people we cannot neglect the efforts of women. . . . Proper poor relief requires the judicial mind of men and the heart of women.» (Nilsson 1916, 32—3.)

Since 1880 the most prosperous towns began to engage administrators for the office work of poor relief services, which has been male dominated. The first paid female visitors of the poor appeared in the 1910's. In the 1930's the juridical basis of modern social welfare had been founded and salaried positions were available for the first time all over the country. The gender division as follows: see Table 1.

Throughout these figures it becomes evident that the main features of the still existing gender division were formed in the beginning of Finnish social welfare. The local bureaucratic organisation of social welfare placed men at the top because it was above all the execution of new laws in which masculine qualifications were necessary, as contemporaries argued. It certainly belonged to the public sphere. As an

Table 1. Gender division at municipal social welfare offices, 1938.

Position	Male %	N	Female %	N
Director	98.5	(472)	1.5	(25)
Social worker	25	(110)	75	(326)
Office worker	15	(46)	85	(261)

Source: Komiteamietintö 1940, 25.

example of what it meant for men to have the power to decide what belongs to whom, it should be mentioned that in positions of non-institutional care the formal education of men was lower than that of women in spite of their relatively higher status (Komiteamietintö 1940, 31). The boom of therapeutic social work among families since the 1940's sealed the already formed gender division and besides, I presume, brought about a new type of male dominance exercised by the full professionals of medicine over social work, but that is a theme of another paper (see Hearn 1985, Stacey 1982).

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

We have seen how the formation of gender division in Finnish social work was connected with many ongoing social processes: not the least with the policies that the state directed at the nuclear family of wage labour. In the beginning when positive support of the family was non-existent in the policy, i.e. in the period of poor house policies, women were quite free to govern their activities by themselves if they agreed with the official policy. As soon as the state began supportive and educative intervention in the everyday life of a family and could not execute it without female qualifications and labour, it became of current interest to bring the reproductive work of women of various classes under control. This control had two levels, firstly, getting lower-class family life under the control of upper and middle-class women, and secondly, getting the women's work done in a controlled way which fulfilled the hidden purposes of the policy.

The control of women's work proceeded in three stages: at first it concerned only the criteria of almsgiving. The second step was the Elberfeldian visiting which included a visitor's duty to report the conditions of the poor — part-

ly in writing — to the Poor Law Committee responsible for decision making. The third step was the social welfare bureaucracy in which the top level belonged to men but the grass-root work required good-hearted females. It is a nice example of how the social policy of the state had from its beginning the tendency to take every advantage of women's work and also how it reproduced in its functions the existing gender order with its all-encompassing oppression.

As soon as the »paradigm» of social work did arise there was a burning issue: how could the actors fit the principles of economy and emotion together. It found expression for example in the problem of managing the poor house as well as in deciding about the material support to a home in a Poor Law Committee. This issue culminated in grass-root work, which meant that women met it differently in face to face contacts and felt it differently. At the historical moment when women at first stepped into the public domain of local administration of poor relief, they had serious difficulties in seeing human suffering as an economic issue through the glasses of patriarchy and capitalism. For them it was not a problem which could be solved by administration or organisation according to the rules of the existing economic order. This seems to be the specific reason, in addition to all the prejudices of patriarchy, why women were not suitable as policy makers but good for oppressed and controlled case workers.

On the other hand one can argue that the problem of fitting the principles of economy and emotion together in social work was solved differently by the two sexes. Those who had the power of decision withdrew to administration because the problem became much more convenient to handle from there. The solution women had to develop in order to survive with their »well-developed sense of charity» in the duty given to them, was the ideology and literature called social work.

NOTES

1. By patriarchy I mean an historically formed complex set of relations within and by which men tend to dominate women and children. I wish to stress its difference from understanding patriarchy as a form of male-dominated family and kinship system.
2. In most cases this was a governing body of men elected on trust for all local decision making.

3. The social consequences of capitalism in the Finnish society meant above all a radical change in the central values and organisation of everyday life. While the previous social order was based on patriarchal loyalty and duty, the new one required a self-supporting family household in which the central function was reproduction. Charity in the meaning of giving alms was made nearly a crime in the case of able-bodied poor. (Satka 1987.)
 4. The idea of poor house was made a state policy after the inspector of the Poor Law made an excursion to several more industrialised European countries in 1886 and learnt about all the advantages they had achieved via the institution. He considered the poor house system extremely useful because it was the cheapest way for the state to decrease the number of poor relief applicants and had special moral advantages for the working morals of the lower classes.
 5. This system was first put into practice in Oulu (1895) and later on e.g. in Kuopio and Tampere. However, its principles had an effect on the whole organization of poor relief all over the country in the 1910's: personal relationships as well as visiting the homes of the poor became the »method» of poor relief volunteers.
 6. Individualisation meant that the cause of a social problem was mainly seen as individual by nature. Because of this it was greatly believed that individual treatment and control would have been the help that was needed.
 7. This was approximately the period when the term Poor Law (vaivashoito) disappeared and the field was renamed officially poor relief (köyhäinhoito).
 8. Tove Stang Dahl has done a nice analysis of the advent and coming of child care in Norway at the turn of the century, see Stang Dahl T. *Barnvern og samfunnsvern*. Oslo 1978.
 9. Feminisation meant in practice that totally new careers including caring and individual advising were opened for women: positions men had achieved were by no means feminised.
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