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The cultural contexts in which parents of young children make decisions related to participation in working life and their children's care and education

This article examines the cultural contexts in which parents of young children make decisions related to participation in working life and their children's care and education. Particular attention is paid to the cultural expectations of the ideal worker and the conditions they place on childcare and working life solutions. Norms are examined through the concept of a frame (Goffman 1974). The cultural frames are relevant to what options are seen as possible and what solutions parents of young children end up with. The research material consists of 64 interviews in which either one or two parents of a 1–2-year-old child have been interviewed. Our analysis shows that childcare and working life solutions are constructed primarily through the intertwined and gendered ideal worker and livelihood frames. On the other hand, these solutions are also framed by norms related to meaningful work and good parenting. Norms related to good parenting in particular are in conflict with the prevailing norms related to the ideal worker and livelihood when good parenting, especially motherhood, is built on the strongly emphasised ideal of home care for children in Finnish society. The results shed light on the complexity and mutual dynamics of norms framing childcare and working life solutions.