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Effects of cognitive labor inequality on gendered working-time behavior in Norway: Evidence from a factorial survey experiment

Bakgrund/Frågeställning

Generous family policy packages, prevalent in social democratic welfare states, have been linked to certain counterproductive gendered effects such as horizontal labor market inequality and feminized part-time work. This policy conundrum remains a welfare state paradox yet to be solved. Norway is a clear victim: it has long been a pioneer of extensive family support and gender egalitarianism broadly, yet experiences significant labor market gender segregation in types of work, sector, and not least, working time, with more than one third of the female workforce working part-time. Most women cite family-related reasons for their reduced hours, at the same time as domestic work tasks are more equally divided than ever within couples. This article argues for looking beyond the division of physical labor and towards *cognitive inequality* in household work as a driver of persistent gender inequality in otherwise egalitarian contexts – or in other words, as a possible explanation of the welfare state paradox. Comprising the organizational dimension of combining paid work and care, the hypothesized mechanism is that larger cognitive labor burdens imply higher work-family spillover for women, equating to lower capacity for paid work. The mechanism is investigated through a factorial survey experiment of a representative sample in Norway (N=3000), where the responsibility level for cognitive labor is varied among the vignettes before asking respondents about working time preferences. Based on the findings, the article discusses the explanatory power of mental labor inequality on the welfare state paradox, and how the frontline of family policy development can be pushed beyond it by taking the final pillar of domestic labor inequality into account in policy design.

Metod och Resultat

Konklusion