(How) can social policy and fiscal policy recognise unpaid family work?

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Until recently, unpaid work was effectively ignored by social scientists and policy-makers. Invisibility entailed under-valuation of the social and economic contribution of unpaid work done in households. The development of time use surveys across the European Union provides the basis for new statistics on all productive work hours, whether paid or unpaid. This new information base is complemented by the new theoretical framework of preference theory. With a broad perspective that encompasses all types of work done in households or the market economy, preference theory predicts varying patterns of work, and identifies the associated policy issues. It helps us identify policies that recognise and reward unpaid family work, and those that openly ignore it.

The new view from time budget studies

Time budget studies are changing the way we see the world, and destroying some well-entrenched myths in the process. By providing hard information on what we do with every hour and minute of the day, time budget surveys can tell us just how much time we spend eating, sleeping, shopping, travelling to work, at work, doing our hair, socialising and playing around with sporting and leisure activities. They also provide information on unpaid household work, care work, and voluntary work – the three types of productive work that have so far remained invisible, uncounted, and unremunerated. A new programme of time budget studies across the European Union, and in many other countries, is providing entirely new kinds of statistics to answer questions that could not previously be addressed – and hence became the subject of wild speculation and anecdotal evidence. As factual data replaces received wisdom, several well-entrenched feminist myths have been overturned.

The first round of the EU Harmonised European Time Use Surveys was carried out in 2000 in over twenty countries. Results from the British 2000 survey are accessible on the National Statistics website (www.statistics.gov.uk/timeuse) and a few reports have already been published. However Jonathan Gershuny at Oxford University has spent decades collecting the largest archive of time use data for all countries of the world, and his reports remain the principal source of information on trends and patterns of time use across the globe.

Who works hardest? Feminists have long complained about women's 'double shift' – a term invented in the United States, and automatically assumed to apply equally in western Europe, despite our shorter work hours and widespread availability of part-time jobs. Indeed, the European Commission actively promotes the idea that women carry an unfair burden, working disproportionately long hours in jobs and at home as well, juggling family and work (1). However time budget studies show that women's double shift is a myth.

On average, women and men across Europe do the same total number of productive work hours, once paid jobs and unpaid household work are added together – roughly eight hours a day. Men do substantially more hours of paid work. Women's time is divided more evenly between paid and unpaid work. Men and women do roughly equal amounts of voluntary work – contrary to the popular myth that women do vastly more than men. Results for Britain are repeated in the USA and other countries, despite differences in the length of working weeks and lifestyles. It is only in the poorer nations that women work longer hours overall. Indeed, in Sweden, Norway and the Netherlands, men actually do more productive work than women.

The pattern of equality in total productive work hours is found among couples aged 20-40 and those aged 40-60, so is reasonably constant across the lifecycle. In fact, an analysis by Susan Harkness shows that British men work longer hours in total than do women when there are children in the home, largely because men often work more overtime to boost family income at this stage, while wives switch to part-time jobs, or even drop out of employment (Harkness, 2008). Couples with no children at home and both in full-time jobs emerge as the only group where women work more hours in total than men, once paid and unpaid work hours are added together. Feminists constantly complain that men are not doing their fair share of domestic work. The reality is that most men already do more than their fair share, and this is most pronounced in the 'gender egalitarian' cultures of Scandinavia. These conclusions have long been established by Gershuny's research, and are re-confirmed by the new time budget studies across Europe and North America. The only exceptions are Eastern European countries: under socialist governments, women did more hours in total, as they were forced into full-time jobs, and they continue to work longer hours in a few ex-socialist countries today. Time use surveys resolve one of the difficulties in giving recognition to unpaid family work: they allow us to count it, and thereby bring it into full public view. They tell us who does it, in what types of family, and for how long. Women's unpaid domestic work and care work emerges out of the shadows, and turns out to be more limited than the case study reports claimed it was.

Two studies that have attained almost iconic status are usually quoted to demonstrate women's 'double burden'. In Britain, Anne Oakley's *Housewife* catalogues the unremitting eighteen-hour workdays of mothers with no jobs but with young children aged under five at home (Oakley, 1976). In the United States, Arlie Hochschild's *The Second Shift* details the domestic work and childcare done by women after they return home from their full-time day jobs (Hochschild, 1990). The trouble is, these case studies invariably focus on women with babies or very young children at home, a relatively temporary phase within the lifecycle. Such studies cannot be representative of women generally, especially as they exclude all women who have no children at home and no job.

However, feminist views have become so entrenched in this area that even Harkness rails against the injustice of men's limited contribution to domestic work and childcare. She overlooks the fact that when paid and unpaid work hours are aggregated, men almost invariably put in more hours of productive work, as she herself has shown. The reason men are reluctant to offer more help with domestic work is that they are already doing more than their wives, on average – at least in Britain.

Valuing care work and domestic work

Time use surveys are also helping us to assess the economic value of all these hours of household work and care work. Satellite accounts for private households are now a regular addition to National Accounts across the EU. Findings here are more slippery, as they depend so heavily on how unpaid work is valued. When a highly-paid lawyer stays at home to care full-time for a new baby, should their time be valued at the commercial rate for a babysitter, or a qualified nanny, or at the commercial rate for their normal full-time legal job? So far, for developed countries, the total value of household work has been estimated as adding up to fifty per cent of GDP, although most estimates cluster in the twenty per cent to forty per cent range. On this basis, men still work hardest, measured in economic value.

Social policy analysts are now arguing that care work should be more highly valued. At the same time, they also demand that it should be provided free (or heavily subsidised) to users, and be paid for by the state out of general taxation. These two positions are in practice somewhat incompatible and contradictory. People rarely accord high value to something that is available free of charge. As several economists point out, it is precisely because care work is done 'with love' that it has been accorded low value, due to the Puritan idea that love and money are incompatible (England and Folbre, 1999; Zelizer, 2005). The alternative argument is that any one-to-one personal service will have lower market value than services that can use technology to extend their consumer market to millions. Hairdressers are low paid because you can only cut one head of hair at a time, no matter how skilful you are, whereas a singer can make CDs that are bought by millions, thus extending the earnings of every song.

There is no equivalent campaign to raise the status and earnings of other household work. With care work, especially childcare, there is the argument that well educated and properly socialised children are to some extent 'public goods' – we all benefit from a younger generation that does not commit crimes, is polite and well behaved, and able to earn a living. With other types of household work, the consumers are clearly the immediate family and no-one else. Indeed, there appears to be some advantage in keeping status and salaries as low as possible, thus giving working women access to 'affordable' domestic servants. Immigrant women and men with limited employment options have become the main suppliers of low-cost labour in this and most other personal service occupations.

The story presented by the European Commission, and by feminists, is that all women aspire to being in a dual-career couple with both spouses working full-time in equally demanding careers, who subcontract most housework, and rely on nurseries and schools to look after any children they might have. To achieve their dream lifestyle, women demand more and better childcare, more and better maternity leave, and employers who understand working mothers' needs. In reality, all the evidence shows a more diverse picture, with dual-career partnerships the aim of only a minority of women compared to a majority of men. Preference theory predicts that a sizeable minority of women will continue to prioritise home and family life, while a majority will choose an even balance between family and paid work.

Preference theory

The latest research results on women's position in the labour market are making conventional perspectives, especially those focusing on patriarchy and sex discrimination, out of date, based on research conducted before the equal opportunities revolution of the 1970s. Preference theory is solidly grounded in the research evidence for developments since 1980 in liberal modern societies. Preference theory explains and predicts women's choices between market work and family work in the twenty first century. It is historically-informed, empirically-based, multidisciplinary, prospective rather than retrospective in orientation, and applicable in all rich modern societies (Hakim, 2000). Lifestyle preferences are the key drivers of family choices in modern societies.

Preference theory predicts a polarisation of work-lifestyles, as a result of the diversity in women's sex-role preferences and the three related models of family roles. It argues that in prosperous modern societies, women's preferences become a central determinant of life choices – in particular the choice between an emphasis on activities related to children and family life, or an emphasis on employment and competitive activities in the public sphere. The social-structural and economic environment still constrains choices to some extent, but social-structural factors are of declining importance – most notably social class (2). Preference theory forms part of the new stream of thinking that emphasises ideational change as a major cause of social behaviour. Individualisation frees people from the influence of social class, nation, and family. Personal life goals become more important. Men and women do not only gain the freedom to choose their own biography, values and lifestyle, they are *forced* to make their own decisions because there are no universal certainties or collectively agreed conventions, no fixed models of the good life. Preference theory reveals the choices women and men actually make in the twenty-first century. It contrasts with economic theories of the family (Becker, 1991) that assume that women and men form two homogeneous groups, with contrasting goals and preferences, which make some family division of labour optimal and efficient for all couples, and produces sex differences in investments in careers. In sum, preference theory predicts diversity in lifestyle choices, and even a polarisation of lifestyles among *both* men and women.

Preference theory specifies the historical context in which personal values become important predictors of behaviour. It notes that five historical changes collectively produce a qualitatively new scenario for women in affluent modern societies in the twenty-first century, giving them options that were not previously available (Table 1). Reviews of the research evidence for the last three decades, particularly for the USA and Britain (Hakim, 2000; 2004), show that once genuine choices are open to them, women choose between three different lifestyles: home-centred, work-centred or adaptive (Table 2). These divergent preferences are found at all levels of education, and in all social classes. Social class becomes less important than motivation, personal life goals, attitudes and values.

The three preference groups are described in Table 2, with estimates of the relative sizes of the three groups in societies, such as Britain and the USA, where public policy does not bias the distribution. In this case, the distribution of women across the three groups corresponds to a 'normal' statistical distribution of responses to the family-work conflict (3). In practice, in most societies, public policy is biased towards

one group or another, by accident or by design, so that the exact percentages vary between modern societies, with inflated numbers of work-centred women or home-centred women, as shown in Table 3.

Table 1: The four central tenets of Preference Theory

1	Five separate historical changes in society and in the labour market which started in the late twentieth century are producing a qualitatively different and new scenario of options and opportunities for women. The five changes do not necessarily occur in all modern societies, and do not always occur together. Their effects are cumulative. The five causes of a new scenario are: i) the contraceptive revolution which, from about 1965 onwards, gave sexually active women reliable control over their own fertility for the first time in history; ii) the equal opportunities revolution, which ensured that for the first time in history women had equal access to all positions, occupations and careers in the labour market. In some countries, legislation prohibiting sex discrimination went further, to give women equal access to housing, financial services, public services, and public posts; iii) the expansion of white-collar occupations, which are far more attractive to women that most blue-collar occupations; iv) the creation of jobs for secondary earners, people who do not want to give priority to paid work at the expense of other life interests; and v) the increasing importance of attitudes, values and personal preferences in the lifestyle choices of affluent modern societies.
2	Women are heterogeneous in their preferences and priorities on the conflict between family and employment. In the new scenario they are therefore heterogeneous also in their employment patterns and work histories. These preferences are set out, as ideal types, in Table 2. The size of the three groups varies in rich modern societies because public policies usually favour one or another group (Table 3).
3	The heterogeneity of women's preferences and priorities creates conflicting interests between groups of women: sometimes between home-centred women and work-centred women, sometimes between the middle group of adaptive women and women who have one firm priority (whether for family work or employment). The conflicting interests of women have given a great advantage to men, whose interests are comparatively homogeneous; this is one cause of patriarchy and its disproportionate success.
4	Women's heterogeneity is the main cause of women's variable responses to social engineering policies in the new scenario of modern societies. This variability of response has been less evident in the past, but it has still impeded attempts to predict women's fertility and employment patterns. Policy research and future predictions of women's choices will be more successful in future if they adopt the Preference Theory perspective and first establish the distribution of preferences between family work and employment in each society.

(Source: Hakim, 2000)

Table 2: Classification of women's work-lifestyle preferences in the twenty-first century

Home-centred	**Adaptive**	**Work-centred**
20 per cent of women varies 10 to 39 per cent	60 per cent of women varies 40 to 80 per cent	20 per cent of women varies 10 to 30 per cent
Family life and children are the main priorities throughout life	This group is most diverse and includes women who want to combine work and family, plus drifters and unplanned careers	Childless women are concentrated here. Main priority in life is employment or equivalent activities in the public arena: politics, sport, art, etc.
Prefer *not* to work	Want to work, but *not* totally committed to work career	Committed to work or equivalent activities
Qualifications obtained as cultural capital	Qualifications obtained with the intention of working	Large investment in qualifications / training for employment / other activities
Number of children is affected by government social policy, family wealth, etc. Not responsive to employment policy	This group is *very responsive* to government social policy, employment policy, equal opportunities policy and propaganda, economic cycle / recession / growth, etc. Including: income tax and social welfare benefits; educational policies; school timetables; child care services; public attitude towards working women; legislation promoting female employment; trade union attitudes to working women; availability of part-time work and similar work flexibility; economic growth and prosperity; and institutional factors generally.	Responsive to economic opportunity, political opportunity, artistic opportunity. Not responsive to social/family policy.

Family values: caring, sharing, non-competitive, communal, focus on cohesion	**Compromise between two** conflicting sets of values	**Marketplace values:** competitive rivalry, achievement orientation, individualism, excellence

(Source: Hakim, 2000)

Work-centred women are in a minority, despite the massive influx of women into higher education and into professional and managerial occupations in the last three decades. Work-centred people (men and women) are focused on competitive activities and achievement in the public sphere – in careers, sport, politics, or the arts. Family life is fitted around their work, and many of these women remain childless, even when married. The majority of men are work-centred, compared to only a minority of women, even women in professional occupations, even women in Scandinavia, and even women with exceptional high ability (Hakim, 2003, 183-4, 2006; Ceci, Williams and Barnett, 2009; Henrekson and Stenkula, 2009).

Adaptive or *ambivalent women* prefer to combine employment and family work without giving a fixed priority to either. They want to enjoy the best of both worlds. Adaptive women are generally the largest group among women, and are found in substantial numbers in most occupations. Certain occupations, such as schoolteaching, are attractive to women because they facilitate a more even work-family balance. The great majority of women who transfer to part-time work after they have children are adaptive women, who seek to devote as much time and effort to their family work as to their paid jobs. Where part-time jobs are still rare, women choose other types of job, if they work at all. Seasonal jobs, temporary work, or school-term-time jobs all offer a better work-family balance than the typical full-time job, especially if commuting is also involved. When flexible jobs are not available, adaptive women may take ordinary full-time jobs, or else withdraw from paid employment temporarily. Adaptive people are the group interested in schemes offering work-life balance and family-friendly employment benefits.

The third group, *home-centred* or *family-centred women*, is also a minority, and a relatively invisible one in the Western world, given the current political and media focus on working women and high achievers. Home-centred women prefer to give priority to private life and family life after they marry. They are most inclined to have larger families, and these women avoid paid work after marriage unless the family is experiencing financial problems. They do not necessarily invest less in qualifications, because the educational system functions as a marriage market as well as a training institution. The likelihood of marrying a graduate spouse is hugely increased if the woman herself has obtained a degree (Hakim, 2000, 193-222) (4). This group of workers is most likely to drop out of demanding careers relatively early in adult life.

A person's core values and life goals are different from the multitude of topics on which public opinion data are collected. Personal goals and preferences shape lives; in contrast, social norms may have little impact on behaviour. For example, I may agree that it would be better if everyone stopped smoking, yet choose to smoke myself. Unfortunately, most social attitude surveys collect information on social norms, not on personal life goals. Most people agree women should have the right to pursue careers if they want to, but most women are not sufficiently committed to careers to give them priority over the competing attractions of family life.

In short, it is not the case that the entire female population is gleefully abandoning the full-time homemaker role in favour of the male lifestyle of full-time life-long careers that take precedence over family responsibilities, not even in Sweden. Table 3 shows the three groups are found everywhere, although exact percentages vary between countries, due to the impact of social and economic policies. Men remain

trapped in the rigid role of main breadwinner, but women now have genuine lifestyle choices in the liberal modern societies of Europe. There is evidence that men are beginning to demand the same options and choices as women, with more claims of sex discrimination from men. The full-time homemaker role will not vanish, but will become gender-neutral, as more men demand the work-life balance of the middle ambivalent group.

Table 3: National distributions of lifestyle preferences among women and men

	Family-centred	**Adaptive**	**Work-centred**
Britain			
all women aged 16+	17	69	14
women in full-time work	14	62	24
women in part-time work	8	84	8
all men aged 16+	?	<48	52
men in full-time work	?	<50	50
men in part-time work	?	<66	34
Spain			
all women aged 18+	17	70	13
women in full-time work	4	63	33
women in part-time work	7	79	14
all men aged 18+	?	<60	40
men in full-time work	?	<56	44
Belgium-Flanders			
all women	10	75	15
women with partners	12	75	13
all men	2	23	75
men with partners	1	22	77
Germany			
Women	14	65	21
Men		33	67
Czech Republic			
all women aged 20-40	17	70	13
women in employment	14	69	17
wives aged 20-40	14	75	11
Sweden			
women in 1955 birth cohort: actual lifestyle choices by age 43 (1998)	4	64	32
Japan			
Ideal lifecourse of unmarried women			
1987	37	55	8
2002	21	69	10
2005	20	70	10

(Source: Hakim, 2008)

Policy implications

This diversity of lifestyle choices, among men as well as women, creates problems for policy-makers. Instead of looking for the one 'best option' policy, they must now offer several. If one-size-fits-all policies no longer work, it will require much greater imagination to devise gender-neutral policies that cater for all three main lifestyle choices. The task is made easier by the fact that most European policies today are geared towards full-time career workers. It is unpaid care work that has been ignored and now needs to be addressed.

Fiscal policy has given recognition to care work in small ways for decades. For example, the years mothers spent at home caring for children used to be recognised and counted for pension purposes, and still are in Japan. In Britain, this was swept away by the feminist emphasis on ignoring everything except paid employment. The idea is periodically revived, to give recognition to all care work, including eldercare. The carer's allowance for people looking after disabled children and sick relatives also provides a nominal recognition of the work they do. Two more substantive examples illustrate what is feasible, with imagination.

The German income-splitting tax system for couples recognises the work done by full-time homemakers. The earnings of spouses are aggregated and then split into two halves to calculate the tax due from each spouse. This system reflects the idea that the earnings of a single breadwinner belong equally to both spouses, just as the household work and care work of the at-home spouse benefits both spouses equally. The system is popular because it gives couples freedom to choose their own division of labour, without any tax penalties for being a single-earner family instead of a dual-earner couple. It also gives recognition to the unpaid work of a full-time homemaker.

A more direct and concrete benefit is the Finnish homecare allowance paid to any parent who stays at home to care for children without using state nurseries. It is separate from allowances paid to help with the cost of children. It is an allowance paid to the carer for their work. It can be regarded as a wage for childcare at home, as a partial replacement for earnings foregone, or it can be used as a subsidy for childcare services purchased by the parent, from grandparents or neighbours, for example. In Finland, it is roughly equivalent to 40 per cent of average female earnings, so it is not a purely nominal amount. The scheme is hugely popular in Finland, with policy-makers as well as parents. A similar scheme was introduced in Norway, with equal success. French schemes for financial benefits for full-time parental care at home have the same aims and high take-up rates (Hakim, 2000, 223-253). A recent report on childcare from the Policy Exchange think-tank recommended a homecare allowance for British parents (Hakim et al, 2008). The principal aim was to give parents freedom of choice in their childcare arrangements. Such schemes also give concrete recognition to the valuable work done by parental childcare.

The majority of parents prefer to care for their babies and young children themselves, rather than placing them in nurseries. Most mothers prefer to delay their

return to work and have more time at home with small children. All recent government surveys on parental preferences for childcare have shown this (Hakim et al, 2008). Yet press releases for these reports invariably claim they show that people want more and better childcare! Despite Labour government claims to develop evidence-based policies, ideology and vested interests invariably trump the research evidence.

In sum, it is feasible to develop policies that recognise, support and even compensate unpaid family care work and household work. Preference theory provides a solid evidence-based framework for reviewing existing policies and developing new policies that are gender-neutral and neutral between the three main lifestyle choices. As further analyses of time use studies are published, the task of costing and planning such policies will get easier. Whether unpaid family work should be treated as a routine part of the paid labour force is a separate issue for debate, with implications that go well beyond the question of 'How can it be done?'

The contrasting lifestyles identified in Table 2 are linked to contrasting, even incompatible or conflicting value systems. This is the source of political conflict between the three groups. Home-centred women and men embrace altruistic family and community values of caring and sharing, trust, and cohesion. Work-centred men and women adopt the competitive values of the marketplace: individualism, achievement, rivalry and excellence. One-sided policies that support employment and careers, but ignore productive work done in the family are in effect endorsing marketplace values to the exclusion of family values. This has probably contributed to the decline in fertility in recent years in Europe, and the exceptionally low fertility of Southern Europe. As has been argued in this journal, altruistic family values are essential to social democracy (McKnight, 2007). They need to be recognised and valorised.

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Notes

1. The European Commission's research institute in Dublin, the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, is currently the main source of tendentious polemics on women's unfair burden and 'gender inequality' (European

Foundation, 2008). The Foundation's outputs are typically based on 'national' studies that are almost invariably based on selective and unrepresentative samples. These advocacy research studies are subsequently quoted by others who present the results as if they were genuine social science research.

2. The declining importance of social class as a predictor of behaviour and choices in the twenty-first century is most obvious in politics – as illustrated by the fact that personal values, rather than social class, differentiated support for Al Gore and George W. Bush in the closely contested US election of 2000.

3. The distribution set out in Table 2 is based on an extensive review of the empirical evidence for the last two decades presented in Hakim (2000), and has been reconfirmed by subsequent national survey research in European countries (Hakim, 2003) and in the USA (Hattery, 2001, 170).

4. Studies of 'self-service' marriage markets in modern societies show that most women are concerned to marry a man with equal or better education (and thus equal or better earnings potential), whereas most men place far less weight on this criterion in their choice of spouse. The majority of men with education beyond basic secondary education marry women with less education, because men give more weight to physical attractiveness (Hakim, 2000, 193-222).