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University of Turku



**VIEWS OF FINNISH  
MOTHERS ON CHILDCARE AND  
LABOUR MARKET PARTICIPATION:  
A CROSS-EUROPEAN COMPARISON**

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## ABSTRACT

Family time is highly valued in Finland, and is important for the wellbeing of all family members. At the same time, work participation provides an essential means to fulfil financial and psychosocial needs that are also important for wellbeing. How parents of small children are able to allocate their time between family and work is affected by childcare policies. What differentiates Finland from other countries in Europe is that parents can choose between municipal day care and subsidised parental home care (a child home care allowance) after the period of parental leave and until the child is three years old. Since prolonged home care periods are taken mainly by mothers and rarely by fathers, the Finnish system has been linked to neofamilialism. It has been criticised for operating against mothers' interest by weakening their position at work and at home. On the other hand, reconciliation of motherhood with paid work might not be trouble-free either. In addition to the fact that increased demands from work may challenge successful reconciliation, a proportion of mothers are prevented from benefitting from this reconciliation due to unemployment.

This thesis examines childcare at home, work participation and unemployment from the viewpoint of mothers. In addition to the quality of life of the mothers, indications of neofamilialism are also examined. The aspects investigated are divided into four articles. Included in the first article are attitudes and behaviour related to the choice of home instead of work participation; in the second article, the perceived negative consequences of childcare at home on an occupational career; and in the third article, the perceived negative consequences of work participation on family domain roles. Also included in the third article is life satisfaction among working mothers and those staying at home. The self-assessed consequences of unemployment on wellbeing and on family life are investigated in the fourth article. With the exception of unemployment, the focus is on a European comparison. Of special interest are the differences and similarities between Finland and the other two Nordic countries included (Denmark and Sweden), which belong to the same welfare regime type but provide weaker access to very long family leave for mothers. The data used in the first three articles is based on the second round of the European Social Survey (ESS), conducted during 2004 and 2005, and the data regarding unemployment comes from a survey conducted by the University of Turku in 2000.

The Finnish mothers included in the investigation had stayed at home with their children for a relatively long time. In a cross-national comparison, their attitudes did not, however, appear familialistic. Mothers in only two – Sweden and Denmark – of the other 11 countries included here less commonly considered that a woman should be prepared to cut down on paid work for the sake of family. The results regarding unemployment further contradict the idea of (generalised) neofamilialism in Finnish society. Although changes in wellbeing are shown to be in general more negative among men than women, the family situation was not decisive for the experienced effect of unemployment on the wellbeing of an unemployed person. Changes associated with unemployment were not purely negative. In particular for the mother–child relationship, the effect was often assessed as positive.

Finnish mothers did not report much detrimental effects related to childcare at home. Any negative consequences for an occupational career were perceived less

commonly than in the other countries, and those mothers who took care of their children at home were satisfied with their life. Working mothers in Finland were also satisfied with their life, although out of these, the least satisfied were those whose work interfered with family roles. Negative perceptions regarding work in relation to family members were reported more often by Finnish mothers than by mothers in the other countries. Almost three quarters of Finnish mothers felt that their work prevented them from spending the time they would like with their family members, and more than half considered that their family members were fed up with the pressures of their work. Based on the results obtained, both these problems could be decreased by reducing time pressure at work. Almost half of the Finnish mothers reported frequent time pressure. Time pressure was not, however, more common among Finnish mothers than among all the mothers on average. Working hours were among the longest, and long working hours increased interference from work on family life.

As well as mothers, fathers in Finland also reported a lack of family time. Increasing parents' involvement in paid work, either through longer working times or shorter childcare leave for mothers, cannot generally be recommended. Rather than restricting the choice of the mothers, the fathers' choice could be widened by means such as making a more equal share of family leave days more readily available to them. Another means by which childcare policies could reduce the imbalance between the two life domains could be through further facilitating shorter working hours. The idea of increased choice should also be more widely adopted in working life. Even in times of increased job insecurity, employees should be encouraged to openly talk about the burdensome aspects of their work. Employers could possibly be somehow rewarded for adopting family-friendly practices.

The findings further suggest that among the unemployed, single mothers in particular would benefit from financial support. Yet, in addition to financial strain, high non-financial work motivation, which did not depend on family situation, also explained changes in wellbeing. To reduce the detrimental effects of unemployment and to increase the genuine choice for the mothers (or both parents), it would be of primary importance to take adequate action to secure the supply of jobs.

Lastly, despite the different routes regarding longer-term childcare leave, more similarities were revealed between Finland and the other two Nordic countries compared with Finland and the other European countries. Therefore, the idea that longer-term childcare leave differentiates Finland from the other two Nordic countries is not overall supported by the findings of this thesis.

**Keywords:** career consequences, childcare policy, child home care allowance, mothers, subjective wellbeing, unemployment, work–family reconciliation

## TIIVISTELMÄ

### Suomalaisten äitien näkemyksiä lapsen hoitamisesta kotona ja ansiotyöhön osallistumisesta Eurooppalaisessa vertailussa

Suomalaiset arvostavat perheen parissa vietettävää aikaa. Siinä missä perheaika on tärkeää kaikkein perheenjäsenten hyvinvoinnille, on työhön käytetty aika tärkeää vanhemman psykososiaaliselle ja perheen taloudelliselle hyvinvoinnille. Mahdollisuus päättää ajankäytöstä työn ja perheen välillä riippuu osin lastenhoitopolitiikasta. Vapaus valita kunnallisen päivähoidon ja tuetun kotihoidon välillä erottaa Suomen muista Euroopan maista. Vanhempainvapaan jälkeen lasten kotihoiton tukeen ovat Suomessa oikeutettuja kaikki kotona lapsiaan hoitavat alle kolmivuotiaiden lasten vanhemmat. Koska pitkät kotihoitajakset painottuvat äiteihin, ja vain harvat isät hoitavat lapsiaan pitkään kotona, on Suomen järjestelmä yhdistetty uusfamilismiin. Sen on katsottu heikentävän äitien asemaa niin työelämässä kuin kotona. Toisaalta, myöskään äitiyden ja työn yhteensovittaminen ei ole ongelmatonta. Työn lisääntyneet vaatimukset voivat hankaloittaa äitiyden ja työn yhteensovittamista, ja osalla äideistä yhteensovittaminen estyy työttömyyden takia.

Väitöskirjatutkimukseni tarkastelee lasten kotihoitoa, äitiyden ja palkkatyön yhdistämistä ja työttömyyttä äitien subjektiivisesta näkökulmasta. Tutkimuksessani kartoitan sekä äitien elämänlaatua että viitteitä uusfamilismista. Tutkimukseni perustuu neljään artikkeliin, joista ensimmäinen tarkastelee äitien asennetta palkkatyön vähentämistä kohtaan sekä aikaa, jonka äidit ovat olleet kotona koko- ja osa-aikaisesti lapsiaan hoitamassa. Toinen artikkeli tarkastelee lasten kotihoiton koettua vaikutusta ammatilliseen uraan ja kolmas työstä perheeseen suuntautuvaa ristiriitaa, työn piirteitä sekä yleistä elämään tyytyväisyyttä. Neljäs artikkeli keskittyy työttömyyden perhe- ja hyvinvointivaikutuksiin. Artikkelit 1–3 perustuvat kansainväliseen vertailuun ja niissä on mukana 12 Länsi-Euroopan maata. Erityisen kiinnostuksen kohteena ovat erot ja yhtäläisyydet Suomen ja kahden muun sosiaalidemokraattiseen hyvinvointivaltioregiimiin kuuluvan Pohjoismaan – Ruotsin ja Tanskan – välillä. Kiinnostavaksi vertailun tekee suomalaisäitien ruotsalais- ja tanskalaisäitejä laajemmat mahdollisuudet pidentää lasten kotihoitajaksoa. Artikkeleiden 1–3 aineisto perustuu vuosina 2004 ja 2005 toteutettuun European Social Surveyn (ESS) kierrokseen 2. Neljäs artikkeli perustuu Turun Yliopiston Sosiaalipolitiikan laitoksen v. 2000 suorittamaan kyselyyn.

Suomalaiset äidit olivat hoitaneet lapsiaan verrattain pitkään kotona. Pitkä kotihoito ei kuitenkaan näyttäisi lisäävän familistista asennoitumista äitien keskuudessa. Vain noin neljännes suomalaisäideistä katsoi, että naisen pitäisi olla valmis vähentämään palkkatyötä perheensä takia. Väite sai vähemmän kannatusta vain Ruotsissa ja Tanskassa. Myöskään työttömyyteen liittyvät tulokset eivät tukeneet käsitystä yleistyneestä uusfamilismista. Vaikka miehet raportoivat naisia enemmän negatiivisia hyvinvointivaikutuksia, ei perheellisyys suojannut naisia työttömyyden haitoilta. Yksinhuoltajat kokivat työttömyyden hyvinvointivaikutukset hieman muita äitejä negatiivisemmin. Ero selittyi osin taloudellisilla ongelmilla, jotka olivat yleisempiä yksinhuoltajilla kuin muilla äideillä. Taloudellisten ongelmien lisäksi vahva työmotivaatio, mikä ei ollut yhteydessä sukupuoleen tai perhetilanteeseen, selitti

koettua hyvinvoinnin laskua. Työttömyyteen liitettiin myös positiivisia seurauksia. Etenkin äiti–lapsisuhteen katsottiin usein muuttuneen parempaan suuntaan.

Suomalaisäitien arviot lasten kotihoidon vaikutuksista ammatilliseen uraan eivät vastanneet lasten kotihoidon tukeen yleisesti liitettyjä käsityksiä. Myös ne suomalaisäidit, jotka olivat olleet pitkään kotona lastensa kanssa raportoivat verrattain vähän negatiivisia uravaikutuksia. Sekä kotona lapsiaan hoitavat että työssäkäyvät suomalaisäidit olivat tyytyväisiä elämäänsä. Työstä perheeseen suuntautuva ristiriita kuitenkin heikensi työssäkäyvien äitien tyytyväisyyttä. Suomalaisäidit raportoivat työstä perheeseen suuntautuvaa ristiriitaa useammin kuin äidit muissa maissa. Kolme neljästä suomalaisäidistä koki ainakin joskus, ettei perheelle jää riittävästi aikaa työn takia. Usein tai aina aikapulaa raportoitiin joka kolmas äiti. Yli puolet suomalaisäideistä arveli työpaineidensa häiritsevän perheenjäseniään ainakin joskus. Joka kymmenes raportoitiin toistuvaa häirintää. Pitkät työpäivät sekä kiire töissä selittivät työn negatiivista siirräntää perhe-elämään. Suomalaisäitien työajat olivat pisimpien joukossa ja työkiirettä raportoitiin lähes puolet heistä. Kiire ei kuitenkaan ollut yleisempää kuin keskimäärin äideillä. Työn negatiivinen siirräntä perhe-elämään oli verrattain yleistä myös suomalaisten isien keskuudessa.

Tutkimuksen tulokset eivät tue yleistä työaikojen pidentämistä, eikä niiden perusteella voida suositella äitien kotihoidon tuen lyhentämistä. Etenkin niissä perheissä, joissa työhön paluu merkitsisi merkittävää työn ja perheen välistä ristiriitaa, voi pidempi kotihoito olla perusteltua. Äitien valinnanvapauden rajoittamisen sijasta isien valinnanvapautta voitaisiin laajentaa ja molempien vanhempien mahdollisuutta osa-aikatyöhön parantaa. Valinnanvapautta ei kuitenkaan tulisi nähdä vain lastenhoitopolitiittisena kysymyksenä, vaan sitä tulisi tarkastella myös työelämän näkökulmasta. Työn saatavuutta sekä osa-aikatyön mahdollisuuksia parantamalla voitaisiin paitsi lisätä äitien (vanhempien) valinnanvapautta, myös ehkäistä työttömyyteen liittyviä haittoja. Työllistymiseen tähtäävien toimenpiteiden lisäksi etenkin yksinhuoltajien taloudelliseen asemaan tulisi kiinnittää huomiota.

Mahdollinen työstä perheeseen suuntautuva ristiriita tulisi huomioida työpaikoilla. Työajoista, työkiireestä sekä muista kuormitusta aiheuttavista työn piirteistä tulisi voida keskustella myös taloudellisesti epävakaina aikoina ja myös silloin, kun työn jatkuvuus on epävarmaa. Työnantajia voitaisiin kenties palkita perheystävällisistä käytännöistä.

Tutkimuksessa ilmeni enemmän yhtäläisyyksiä Suomen sekä Ruotsin ja Tanskan kuin Suomen ja muiden tutkimuksessa mukana olleiden maiden välillä. Näkemys, jonka mukaan lasten kotihoidon tuki erottaa Suomen muista sosiaalidemokraattiseen hyvinvointivaltioregimiin kuuluvista maista ei siten saanut tukea.

**Avainsanat:** lastenhoitopolitiikka, lasten kotihoidon tuki, subjektiivinen hyvinvointi, työttömyys, työn ja perheen yhteensovittaminen, uravaikutukset, äidit

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It has been said that completing a doctoral thesis bears a strong resemblance to running a marathon. In my mind, it also is a team sport. On your own, you have very limited possibilities and few chances of succeeding at this particular game.

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In Kaarina on the 19th of March, 2018

Sirpa Weckström

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## ORIGINAL ARTICLES

- I Weckström, Sirpa (2014). Defamilialisation policies and attitudes and behaviour among mothers in twelve European countries. Do results for Denmark, Finland and Sweden differ from the others? *Finnish Yearbook of Population Research* XLIX: 5–29.
- II Weckström, Sirpa (2015). Finnish mothers' assessments of the harmfulness of childcare at home on occupational careers: a comparison of twelve European countries. *Social Sciences* 4(4): 1140–161.
- III Weckström, Sirpa (2011). Working mothers in Finland: a cross-country comparison of work to family interference, work characteristics and satisfaction with life. *Finnish Yearbook of Population Research* XLVI: 71–94.
- IV Weckström, Sirpa (2012). Self-assessed consequences of unemployment on individual wellbeing and family relationships. A study of unemployed women and men in Finland. *International Journal of Social Welfare*: 21(4): 372–383.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Hardly any other aspect of women's life raise the same strongly positive and negative reactions as where a mother should stay when her child is small. The reconciliation of family and paid work has been, even in general, a topic attracting wide interest in Finland during the last few decades. In particular it has been debated whether a mother should take care of a child at home or participate in paid work. Opinions about this issue have been divided, not only among policymakers and various specialists, but also among ordinary people, especially the mothers concerned. Arguments for and against the two options have typically been justified by the best interests of the child or the best interests of the mother. With regard to mothers, the best interests have been understood as the freedom of choice, or a better position and options with regard to paid work. In addition to validating people's own opinions, the debates have included criticism of the opposing opinion. At its worst, freedom of choice has been seen as a trap for 'latte mothers', who allegedly spend their family leave days in cafes<sup>1</sup>, whilst early return to work has been connected with selfishness and lack of care about the child's needs.

In the present thesis, this topic is approached from a mother's viewpoint. However, instead of asking a precise question about a mother's ideal behaviour when her child is young, selected aspects related to the reconciliation of motherhood with paid work are investigated. Included in this are attitudes and behaviour related to the choice of being at home instead of participating in paid work, the perceived consequences of (non-)participation in one domain on the other, and the subjective quality of life in the work and care situations included.

Despite the actuality of the topic, the reconciliation of motherhood and paid work is not a new phenomenon. In general, women in Finland have a long tradition of work participation. The nature of women's work, as well as the importance of the family situation on the likelihood of a woman to work away from home has, however, varied over time. Before industrialisation, women worked mainly in agriculture and performed various activities in their own or somebody else's home. At the beginning of industrialisation and several decades afterwards, employed women were mostly unmarried (Kauppinen-Toropainen et al., 1983; Ranta, 2012). In the 1950s, many women in Finland were already participating in paid work, but a marked change in women's employment took place in the 1960s and 1970s. In addition to e.g., rapid structural changes and an increased level of education, the rapid expansion of women's employment was connected with the development of the Finnish welfare state. The Finnish welfare state represents the traditions of the Nordic welfare state model,

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<sup>1</sup> It is presumed that a mother who takes care of the child at home for a long period has a lot of leisure time that she spends in cafes (drinking latte coffee) with other mothers at the same time as her career views exacerbate.

characterised by ambitions such as a high degree of equality and a high level of employment for women (Greve, 2007). While the public sector provided more working opportunities for women, their possibilities to work were facilitated, although gradually, by family leave and day care policies (Anttonen and Sipilä, 2000).

In the 1970s and 1980s, mothers who had small children were commonly engaged in paid work (Hiilamo, 2002; Kauppinen-Toropainen et al., 1983). In 1990, the employment rate for mothers of children under six years old was among the highest in Europe. By the year 2002, however, it was among the lowest (OECD, 2005a: 41). This reduced ranking was caused by a behavioural change of mothers with a child under three years old, whereas mothers with older children still commonly participated in paid work (see also OECD, 2007). Thus, Finland experienced a rapid fall in the labour market participation of mothers with small children at the same time as countries with less-developed childcare policies experienced a rapid growth. The opposite development in Finland is connected with a child home care allowance: a benefit that can be paid as an alternative to municipal day care from the end of the parental leave until the child is three years old.<sup>2</sup>

The child home care allowance has markedly improved the option for parents to choose parental care at home, however, this increased choice has raised concerns regarding the position of women at home and at work. It has been connected with neofamilialism: a turn towards traditional gender roles instead of equality between the sexes (Mahon, 2002: 351–352). In particular, there is a concern that prolonged periods of home care may have negative consequences on mothers' occupational careers (e.g., Anttonen and Sointu, 2006: 76; Ellingsæter, 2012; Nelander, 2007; Rösen and Sundström, 2002; Sipilä et al., 2010). Overall, the child home care allowance has been criticised for operating against the traditional goals of the Nordic welfare state model, and against mothers' and women's best interests.

The present thesis comprises three separate themes, which all involve the judgements of mothers regarding different work–care situations. The first theme is *maternal care at home instead of work participation*. Mothers' attitudes and behaviour are investigated, together with the self-assessed consequences of maternal care at home for the occupational career. Of special interest are aspects associated with the child home care allowance. The second theme is *the work-related experiences of working mothers*. Since the late 1980s, there have been many changes in working life, steered for example by economic downturns, a renewal of management philosophy in public sector organisations and globalisation-related competition (e.g., Cooper, 2007; Hood,

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<sup>2</sup>A Finnish mother who has a work contract is not counted as employed when she is on a childcare leave (OECD, 2007). In this respect, Finland differs from some countries with long parental leave policies. Therefore, when compared with some other countries, the lower employment rate for Finnish mothers with a child not yet three years of age is in part related to varying definitions of employment.

1995; Koivumäki, 2005). Some of these changes might challenge the successful reconciliation of motherhood with paid work. A common justification for a mother to stay at home with a child for a prolonged period is its importance for the child (e.g., Repo, 2010; Salmi et al. 2009). In addition, there are some indications that negative perceptions of working life may affect a mother's choice (Repo, 2007; Salmi et al., 2009). Therefore, included in the investigation are the negative influences of work participation on family and home life, as well as some selected characteristics of work.

The third theme in this thesis is *the experience of unemployment*. Increased job insecurity was a marked work-related change in the 1990s (e.g., Nätti et al., 2001; Lehto and Sutela, 2008). In addition to the threat of unemployment, actual unemployment also became more common. In 1994, when the peak of unemployment was reached in Finland, almost 17 per cent of the labour force was registered as unemployed. Despite the subsequent recovery of the economy, unemployment rates remained higher than before the financial crisis, and the earlier low rates (around 3 per cent) have not yet been reached again (OECD, 2000; Statistics Finland, 2010; Statistics Finland, 2017a). As well as the fact that unemployment affects the quality of life of unemployed people and their families, it may also affect the choice of some mothers to prolong providing childcare at home (Lammi-Taskula et al., 2009). How unemployment is experienced is investigated with regard to wellbeing and the family relationships of the unemployed.

This thesis aims to increase the understanding of the ways in which Finnish mothers experience various work and care situations. With regard to childcare at home and work participation, the main aim is to increase the understanding of Finnish mothers' experiences, based on comparisons between European countries. What is known to date about maternal care at home is mainly based on studies that only include Finnish mothers (e.g., Lehto and Sutela, 2008; Kupiainen et al., 2007; Repo, 2007; Salmi et al., 2009). With regard to working conditions and work-to-family interference, cross-country comparisons have also been made (e.g., Boye, 2011; Paoli and Merllié, 2001; Parent-Thirion et al., 2007). However, wider comparisons regarding mothers with young children are scarce. With regard to the reconciliation of motherhood and paid work, there are a few things – in addition to the child home care allowance – that differentiates Finland from many other countries. First, a considerable proportion of women in Finland work in the public sector (Ministry of Finance, 2006; Anghel et al., 2011: 3) where the most intense changes have taken place. Second, Finnish mothers typically work full time, irrespective of the age of their child or children, whereas in many other countries mothers of small children commonly facilitate the reconciliation of the two life domains by working part time. The reference countries were selected so that they represent different types of welfare states, childcare policies and the working patterns of mothers. All the countries included in the investigations are long-standing EU member states. In addition to the Nordic countries of Denmark and Sweden,



Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom are also included.

Cross-national comparison is necessary to determine what is common for different societies and what is specific to a certain society (Pöntinen, 2004). It is an important means by which to evaluate the functionality of a country's social political system and the need for changes (Anttonen, 2005; Anttonen and Sipilä, 2000: 237–267). In a sense, it facilitates the evaluation of the 'relative severity' of the condition in question. Other comparisons made here (in the second and the third themes) are between mothers and fathers, and other selected reference groups (for example, childless women). These comparisons facilitate the evaluation of the importance of gender and family-specific issues, rather than the overall importance of Finnish society or Finnish working life on mothers' experiences. In addition to the life quality aspect, the comparisons made in the present thesis are intended to reveal indications of alleged neofamilialism.

The aspects investigated are divided into four articles. The first article includes the attitudes of mothers towards cutting down on paid work for the sake of the family, and the durations mothers have stayed at home because of childcare. The main aim is to determine whether attitudes in the three Nordic countries are alike and whether they vary from those in the other EU countries included in the research. A marked difference between Finland and the other two Nordic countries could indicate that the child home care allowance is important to mothers' attitudes. Incentives and disincentives in national childcare policies for mothers' employment, and connections between policies, attitudes and behaviour, are included in the theoretical discussion. In the second article, the perceived negative consequences of child home care on the occupational careers of the mothers are investigated. It is clarified whether the perceptions of Finnish mothers vary negatively from those in the other two Nordic countries included here. Of special interest are mothers who have stayed at home for a relatively long time. The theoretical framework comprises national childcare policies in addition to the theory of human capital. The third article concentrates on the work-related experiences of working mothers. The main aim is to examine whether there is anything in the work domain that could possibly increase the appeal of a prolonged home care period in Finland. Interference from work to family roles and aspects of work that could influence this interference are central in the theoretical discussion. The subjective quality of life (overall life satisfaction) is included in this third article, and also measured for stay-at-home mothers. The fourth article aims to answer the question of whether family can substitute for paid work in the life of unemployed women in Finland. From a theoretical perspective, relevant are financial and psychosocial needs important for wellbeing and, in particular, the possibilities for unemployed mothers to fulfil psychosocial needs within the family domain. The data used in the first three articles is based on the second round of the European Social Survey (ESS), conducted

during 2004 and 2005. The fourth article is based on Finnish data, collected by the University of Turku in 2000.

This thesis continues with a more in-depth consideration of the theoretical framework. First, in Chapter 2, the focus is on ‘general’ theories (for example, work–family balance) and then, in the subsequent chapters, more specifically on childcare policies. The way childcare policies are organised depends on the nature of the welfare state. Chapter 3 presents the foundations of the Finnish welfare state, and with the focus on mothers and the contexts of work and care, discusses major changes and challenges related to these foundations. Many of the challenges welfare states face involve national or global economics. In policy decisions, ideological standpoints also play a marked role. The background to the child home care allowance system is presented in Chapter 3. Then, in Chapter 4, a wider look is taken at Finnish childcare policies, including alternatives for maternal care of a long duration. In addition to institutional care, the caring role of fathers and the options for mothers to combine childcare with shorter working hours are considered. Thereafter, differences and similarities between Finland and the included reference countries are discussed. Lastly, to facilitate the understanding of the importance of, in particular, childcare policies on the aspects investigated, the targets for and influences of childcare policies are discussed. In Chapter 5, the aims of the study and the data, measurements and methods are presented. In Chapter 6, the results are discussed separately for each article, and Chapter 7 comprises a summary of the results and a concluding discussion.

## 2. RECONCILIATION AND NON-RECONCILIATION OF MOTHERHOOD WITH PAID WORK

In this chapter, the reconciliation and non-reconciliation of motherhood with paid work is discussed, with a focus on related literature. With regard to reconciliation, a central point is work–family balance. How successfully a mother can reconcile the two life domains depends on the circumstances in both of them. In this thesis, the interest is on conditions at work. Of special interest are any conditions and in particular changes to the work environment that might weaken the balance. To begin with, this chapter looks deeper into these issues (Section 2.1). The subsequent focus is on non-reconciliation. Here non-reconciliation refers to a state where due to child home care or unemployment, a mother is occupied only doing family roles. As to childcare at home, human capital and career consequences are discussed (Section 2.2). During periods of child home care, mothers typically do not accumulate work experience and thereby the human capital that is valued in working life. With regard to unemployment, the consequences for wellbeing and family life are examined (Section 2.3). It is typical of theories involving wellbeing and the consequences of unemployment that unemployment is compared with paid work participation. From this outlook, negative changes in wellbeing are mainly attributable to a lack of the financial and psychosocial advantages related to paid work. Unemployment may, however, also bring with it positive changes that can help to cope with the situation, such as increased time with other family members and in general within the family domain.

How a mother experiences work–family life reconciliation (or non-reconciliation) is likely to be influenced by the reasons that influenced her choice. In particular, labour market constraints (a lack of jobs) may inhibit a mother from choosing her preferred work–care situation. However, there are other structural and institutional factors that also set constraints and facilitation for various work and care situations. Why a mother reconciles or does not reconcile motherhood with paid work is discussed in Section 2.4.

### 2.1. *Conditions at work and work–family balance*

From a theoretical perspective, two types of effects can be discerned regarding the possible consequences of the reconciliation of various life domains for the everyday life of individuals. According to the *scarcity approach*, the time and energy an individual has is constant, and therefore an increase in domain roles is expected to result in an increased likelihood of role conflict, overload and stress (Goode, 1960; Marks, 1977). In the contexts of work and family, a commonly-employed concept to describe harmful effects is *work–family interference* (or work–family conflict). This occurs when the time devoted to one role makes it difficult to participate in the other role, strain experienced in one role interferes with effective performance in the other

role, or behavioural requirements in one role are incompatible with behavioural requirements in the other role (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). On the other hand, there may also be positive effects between different life domain roles (e.g., Grzywacz and Marks, 2000; Greenhaus and Powell, 2006; Marks, 1977). This occurs when performance in one role is improved by resources gained in the other role, or by positive emotions related to that role. *Work–family enrichment* refers to the extent to which experiences in one role improve the quality of life in the other role (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006). The idea of positive influences has also been referred to as *positive spillover* and *work–family facilitation* (e.g., Frone, 2003; Grzywacz and Marks, 2000). Overall, various life domain roles may affect each other directly (time) or indirectly through affecting, for example, the emotions of an individual.

*Work–family balance* refers to a situation wherein work and family roles are compatible with each other. The first and the most commonly used indicator of work–family balance is a lack of interference between work and family roles (Frone, 2003; Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985: 77). In the conceptualisation by Frone (2003), another component in work–family balance is inter-role facilitation. Several researchers, including Grzywacz and Carlson (2007) and Greenhaus and Allen (2011), maintain that work–family balance is more complex than simply the lack of interference and existing enrichment. Yet, these two components are typically the ones recognised. According to Greenhaus and Allen (2011), the two components can diminish (in the case of interference) or enhance (in the case of facilitation) domain-related effectiveness and satisfaction and thereby diminish or enhance work–family balance. In their definition, work–family balance is “an overall appraisal of the extent to which individuals’ effectiveness and satisfaction in work and family roles are consistent with their life values at a given point in time” (Greenhaus and Allen 2011: 174). To justify the use of this term in the present thesis, more important than the specific mechanisms through which work–family interference and facilitation influence work–family balance, is the view that the two components are antecedents of work–family balance. Yet, the idea that life values or priorities are involved in the process is an interesting one. Even if Finnish women and men do value work, the value of the family has increased, and it seems that many people value family more than they do work (e.g., Pekkola and Lehtonen, 2015; Pyöriä and Ojala, 2016a).

In terms of work–family balance, it is largely a question of the precise ways work participation affects an individual and thereby his or her family life. A crucial question to ask, therefore, is how work affects the individual. In many theories involving ‘good working life’, human needs have a pivotal role. For example, Abraham Maslow’s (1943; 1954) famous theory of *the hierarchy of needs* has been applied to working life (e.g., Ojala and Ahonen, 2003). The basic assumption then is that the extent to which physiological needs (e.g., rest and recovery from work), safety needs (e.g., physical and mental safety in the workplace; trust in the continuity of a job), belonging needs

(e.g., a sense of community), esteem needs (e.g., a sense of ability; respect from others) and higher-level needs (e.g., self-actualisation), become fulfilled within the work domain influence work and overall wellbeing. The *vitamin model* presented by Warr (1987; 2007) asserts that certain work environmental features (e.g., opportunity for control, opportunity for skill use, externally generated goals, opportunity for interpersonal contact, variety and payment) are important for wellbeing. Yet, some of the job characteristics that boost wellbeing – such as externally generated goals (workload), variety and autonomy – can become harmful if the necessary level (the subjective optimum for a person) is exceeded. The *job strain model* developed by Karasek (1979) maintains that mental strain derives from a work situation where high demands of work are combined with low job decision latitude: low control over one's work, such as having few opportunities to make decisions about the way work tasks are carried out. Social support from supervisors and colleagues was added in the later version of the model, as it was associated with a buffering effect on the influence of work-related stressors on mental strain (Karasek et al., 1982).

Based on the theoretical viewpoints presented above, reconciliation of motherhood with paid work may produce both plusses and minuses with regard to a mother's wellbeing and her family life. In the present thesis, negative effects from work to family domain roles are investigated. Accordingly, in this section the focus is on conditions at work that may cause negative effects. When the focus is on mothers, in particular on those with young children, one factor that commonly arises is working hours. In this respect Finland differs from many other countries in Europe. In Finland, mothers who work, typically work full time, whereas in many other countries a substantial proportion of mothers work part time (e.g., Salin, 2014). Long working hours have been associated with work-to-family interference (e.g., Grzywacz and Marks, 2000; Kinnunen et al., 2006; Smith Major et al., 2002). By contrast, part-time work has been associated with better compatibility of working hours with family responsibilities and a lower level of work-to-family interference (e.g., Fagan and Burchell, 2002; Grzywacz and Marks, 2000; van Rijswijk et al., 2004).

However, it is not only a question of working hours, but also of work tempo, scheduling, predictability and autonomy (Tammelin, 2009). Around the time the data of the present study was collected, almost one third of Finnish women reported substantial hurriedness at work (Tammelin, 2009). It was further found that boundaries between work and private life were often blurred, so that work was stretching over to home. Hurriedness at work and thinking about work at home were associated with each other, and between the years 1990 and 2003, a clear increase was seen in both (Tammelin, 2009). Work stretching over to home can be understood in the light of widening and more demanding work tasks, as well as tight deadlines (e.g., Järnefelt and Lehto, 2002). The increased prevalence of knowledge work means that work can be carried over into an employee's private spheres (e.g., Ojala, 2014). Because

working is to a lesser extent tied to traditional working times and places, it is less straightforward for employees to separate leisure time and work time from each other.

One change in Finnish working life for which there is some evidence is increased job insecurity. In addition to perceived insecurity (the threat of becoming unemployed, dismissed or laid off) contractual insecurity also increased in the 1990s (Lehto and Sutela, 2008; Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2000; Nätti et al., 2001; Statistics Finland, 2011). Although perceived job insecurity has shown a marked long-term increase, the increase in labour market insecurity has been linked to economic cycles (Pyöriä and Ojala, 2016b). However, there is also an indication of increased labour market instability (assessed as the proportion of short-term work contracts out of all new work contracts) beyond the recessions and a dualisation of labour market stability, so that women – in addition to students and young people – steadily face fragmentation (Soininen, 2015). In general, it has been stated that by the end of the 2000s, Finnish labour markets had become similar to liberal labour markets elsewhere with regard to short-term employment (Soininen, 2015).

It can be asked to what extent the needs that are important for wellbeing (cf. the above-mentioned theories) become fulfilled within the work domain nowadays. Instead of safety and freedom from fear, many employees are insecure about the continuity of their job and fear job loss. Also, a fast pace and the requirement to adapt to continuous changes may inhibit employees from making the most of their abilities and also weaken their opportunities to fulfil higher needs through helping others (see also Hoffman, 1996; Koltko-Rivera, 2006). Obviously, time pressure and overtime work affect the opportunities for employees to rest and recover from a work day or week. When time pressures, tight deadlines and heavy workloads lead to regular overtime work, psychological symptoms, family problems (including quarrels) and in general a work–life imbalance easily occur (Ojala, 2014). Prolonged work overload may finally lead to work exhaustion (e.g., Kalimo and Toppinen, 1997; Leppänen, 2002; Rikala, 2013).

It is important to note, however, that there have also been changes in Finnish working life that can be experienced positively. For example, work tasks have become more varied and independent, and the opportunities for employees to influence different aspects of their work have improved (Lehto and Sutela, 2008). Undoubtedly, for many employees these changes mean greater opportunities to fulfil higher needs that are important for wellbeing. On the other hand, the increased tendency of organisations to evaluate the achievements of individual employees may cause emotional pressures for workers (e.g., Jallinoja, 2000; Lehto et al., 2015). Further, as workplaces emphasise individual work performance and with an increase in competition, social relationships and collaboration may suffer (Official statistics of Finland, 2008). Despite increased independence, social relationships still play a marked role; social support may help people to stay well even during organisational restructuring (Pahkin, 2015).

Similarly, as positive changes in working life may not be purely positive, some changes and characteristics of work that are regarded as mainly negative can produce positive feelings. For example, a fixed-term work contract typically brings about feelings of financial and general insecurity, emotional strain related to insecurity and difficulties in planning for the future. However, it might also produce a positive feeling of freedom and suit the life situation of some individuals (Lehto and Sutela, 2008; Miettinen and Manninen, 2006). Likewise, mothers' non-standard working schedules (work in evenings, nights and/or weekends) can produce either negative or positive outcomes in terms of family time (Murtorinne-Lahtinen et al. 2016). One more change that entails both positives and negatives is the growing prevalence of remote working. This has brought with it increased flexibility, but has also been connected with an increased risk of hurriedness and stress (e.g., Ojala and Pyöriä, 2013). In general, the possibility to choose, within certain limits, the time to start and finish work has improved (Tammelin, 2009). At the same time, as a result of frequent contacts outside office hours, the predictability of working hours is often weak and, as found in a study regarding female knowledge workers in Finland (Tammelin et al., 2017), using working-time autonomy may be restricted by work-related matters such as time pressures and unpredictability of work.

Even with the diversity of the changes, it seems that the risk has grown for the existence of conditions at work that may burden an employee and endanger the balance between family and work (see also e.g., Cooper, 2009; Julkunen et al. 2004; Leppänen, 2002; Siltala, 2004; and however, also Alasoini, 2010).

Because a considerable number of women in Finland work in public sector organisations, a short look is still taken at public sector changes. One of the factors that may have steered changes in public sector organisations is 'New Public Management', a management philosophy utilised in the 1990s. In New Public Management, the basic assumption is that efficiency and effectiveness can be improved by exposing public sector activities to market pressures and by using markets to serve public purposes (Larbi, 1999; Metcalfe and Richards, 1990: 155). This philosophy, however, may not be consistent with the nature of the work being done in all types of occupations (e.g., care work and helping other people; see Julkunen 2007: 98–103). In particular, if efficiency-seeking activities are not properly coordinated and not functioning correctly, they may create harmful outcomes. In healthcare, for example, if a person is not able to meet the expectations of patients in accordance with her/his professional aims and values, dissatisfaction may arise (Kuoppakangas, 2015). In the 1990s, mental strain increased both in public and private sectors, and the increase was still larger in the public sector (Koivumäki, 2005; see also Työ- ja elinkeinoministeriö, 2017).

It has been stated that employees recognise more clearly than before that they do not spend enough time with their family members and do not have enough energy for family life because of the increased demands of work (Moisio and Huuhtanen, 2007).

On the other hand, when comparing year 1990 with 2013, a feeling of neglecting home because of work had not become more common among in general working people in Finland (Sutela and Lehto, 2014). Most common the feeling was among parents whose children were under school aged. Neglecting family because of work may be a painful situation for an individual. As reported in the First European Quality of Life Survey (Böhnke, 2005), the more obstacles people encounter in trying to spend enough time with their family and in carrying out housework duties, the less content they are with their life. Similar conclusions can be made based on data regarding Finland; the highest levels of life satisfaction are seen among women who are satisfied with their working conditions and who have a job that does not require them to compromise their loyalty towards their family (Martikainen, 2006).

Positive work-to-family spillover has been found to be more common than negative spillover, and has been found to be positively connected with an employee's wellbeing (Kinnunen et al., 2006). This finding suggests that the needs that are important for wellbeing can still be fulfilled within the work domain to such an extent that work participation benefits more than harms an individual and his or her family life. On the other hand, negative work-to-family spillover turned out to be more relevant than positive spillover in terms of overall wellbeing (Kinnunen et al., 2006). Negative work-to-family spillover is also a risk for a person's health, work capability and, among men, for divorce (Ojanen, 2017).

## *2.2. Human capital and the career penalties of stay-at-home mothers*

A decision not to reconcile motherhood with paid work resolves immediate problems related to reconciliation. It does not, however, mean that a mother is released from any negative effects between the home and work domain roles. One way in which maternal care at home could affect work domain roles is by influencing the mothers' career prospects. Based on human capital theory, work experience and education have a marked influence on a person's career progression (e.g., Becker and Chiswick, 1966; Mincer and Polachek, 1974). During a period of childcare at home, a mother typically does not accumulate work experience or participate in education, and when the period is long, skills acquired at school and at work may depreciate. In addition, it has been stated that prolonged absence from paid work may send an unfavourable signal to employers regarding a mother's continued orientation towards work (Evertsson and Duvander, 2011), which might negatively affect career prospects.

Most studies regarding the career-related consequences of motherhood have presented objectively measured outcomes such as the differences between wages for women with and without children (e.g., Misra et al., 2007; Sigle-Rushton and Waldfogel, 2007). An upward move in an occupational career typically leads to increased wages, whereas decreased wages may signify a downward move; therefore



changes in wages can be regarded as a relatively reliable indication of career development. Studies of various European countries indicate that the wages of mothers are on average lower than those of childless women, and that it can take many years after a period of leave for mothers to close the wage gap (see Valkonen, 2006).

In addition to child-related work interruptions there may, however, be other reasons that could contribute to mothers receiving lower wages than non-mothers. Some basic examples are that mothers may move from jobs with better earnings to jobs that are more family friendly, employers can discriminate against them, or the energy and effort expended at home can make a mother less productive at work (Budig and England, 2001). To varying extents, these other reasons can be controlled for. Nevertheless, the mothers' own interpretation differentiates in particular between child caring responsibilities and other reasons that might hinder career progression. Especially when the interest concerns the subjective quality of life, it is justified to rely on mothers' perceptions.

How mothers in Finland assess career consequences has rarely been explored. Based on a study including mothers with a two-year-old child, it is known, however, that motherhood-related work interruption is not always regarded as harmless. More than one in four of the mothers investigated assessed that time spent with a child at home had negatively affected their career prospects or position at work (Salmi et al., 2009; see also Kupiainen et al., 2007). Based on objectively measured outcomes (i.e., earnings), negative effects nevertheless seem to be of a short-term nature, at least for those mothers who have not stayed at home for very long (e.g., Kellokumpu, 2015; Napari, 2010). From a lifetime perspective, the effects of motherhood on earnings have been found to be positive (Kellokumpu, 2015), which further suggests that the negative effects level out over time.

The main interest in this thesis is on negative career consequences. However, the influences of child-related work interruptions on human capital may also be positive. Especially those mothers whose work involves care or education often see that child homecare has improved the skills and expertise required at work. Even in general, mothers seem to think that during periods of caring at home, they learn skills beneficial in working life, such as organising abilities, efficiency and social skills (Kupiainen et al., 2007; Salmi et al., 2009).

Regardless of what a mother's choice between child homecare and work participation is, this choice may harm the other life domain. Whereas interference from work to family refers to immediate harm, occupational career consequences may also be experienced in the somewhat longer term. With regard to the subjective quality of life among mothers, both viewpoints are important. Although both of these viewpoints have been included in earlier studies, what is largely absent is a comparison of Finnish mothers' assessments with those of mothers in other European countries.

### 2.3. *Influences of unemployment on wellbeing and family life*

It has been shown through longitudinal studies that unemployment is in general a negative experience for unemployed individuals. Moving both into and out of employment have been associated with changes in psychological wellbeing (e.g., Iversen and Sabroe, 1988; Lahelma, 1992; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Strandh, 2000; Waddell and Burton, 2006; Young, 2012; see, however, also Böckerman and Ilmakunnas, 2009).

Unemployment does not, however, have the same meaning for or the same influence on everyone. Instead, both the reaction and adaptation to unemployment vary markedly between individuals (e.g., Lucas et al., 2004; Nordenmark and Strandh, 1999). Whereas some people seem to adapt to unemployment, at least to some extent, the wellbeing of others stays substantially lower, even after many years, when compared with their wellbeing prior to unemployment (Lucas et al., 2004). The major explanations for decreased wellbeing deal with the financial and psychosocial needs for employment. The *latent deprivation model* of Jahoda (1982), links paid work with five latent or psychosocial functions – time structure, social contacts, participation in collective purpose, regular activity and social status or identity – in addition to the financial function (wages). Although financial deprivation is recognised in this model, deprivation in psychosocial functions is decisive for wellbeing change. The importance of psychosocial deprivation has been verified by various studies (e.g., Nordenmark, 1999a; 1999b. See also Young, 2012).

It has, however, also been questioned whether the five psychosocial functions are more important for wellbeing compared with financial strain (Ervasti and Venetoklis, 2010. For a combination model, see Nordenmark and Strandh, 1999). According to the *agency restriction model* (Fryer, 1986), an unemployed individual can also enjoy, if she/he has financial resources, meaningful activities outside the work domain and therefore unemployment does not necessarily lead to a reduction in wellbeing. Correspondingly, when income loss restricts the exercise of personal agency and makes it difficult or impossible for an individual to look forward to and to plan for the future, a personally satisfying lifestyle that is required for wellbeing is difficult to establish and maintain (Fryer, 1995: 170–171).

One more theoretical approach, the *status passage theory* (Ezzy, 1993), stresses the importance of identity: one of the five psychosocial functions in the latent deprivation model (Jahoda, 1982). According to this approach, if the employment-related identity plays only a minor role in enabling an individual to maintain a sense of having a meaningful life, unemployment might not markedly weaken her or his wellbeing (Ezzy, 1993: 50). Conversely, if a person is unable to find a satisfying alternative identity to that of a worker, the consequences of unemployment are likely to be much more negative.

When the interest is on unemployed mothers, all three theoretical approaches are worth considering. A family brings with it monetary responsibilities for the other family members, but in the case of two-parent families, also a second breadwinner (cf. the theory of Fryer). In addition, a family provides for example regular activity, as well as alternative identities (spouse and parent) to a worker's identity: central aspects in the other two theories. Jahoda (1982) postulates that even if it is hard to replace the psychosocial functions in other life domains they can be replaced, at least to some extent, within the family domain. She further claims that owing to the different family responsibilities of women and men, women have a better possibility of coping with unemployment.

The importance of family for wellbeing during unemployment has rarely been considered. However, there is some indication that the effect may be different for women than for men. In a study concerning the unemployed in Spain (Artazcoz et al., 2004), a protective effect of marriage and children was found for women but not for men. In Finland, despite the long tradition of work participation among women, a buffering effect of children has also been observed for young women (Malmberg-Heimonen and Julkunen, 2002). Even if negative experiences, such as weakened health and lowered self-esteem, did not markedly differ for mothers and fathers, they were reported less often by mothers than by childless women. Furthermore, whereas children decreased job search activity and work involvement among young women, for young men the effect of children was in the reverse direction. Thus, motherhood seemed to substitute, at least to some extent, for paid work. It is worth noting, however, that the young age (under 25 years old) of the respondents might restrict the generalisability of these results to all Finns.

So far, a distinction has been made here between mothers and non-mothers. The way a mother experiences unemployment may, however, depend on whether she is single or living in the same household as a spouse. In addition to the fact that single mothers struggle with financial pressures alone, their opportunities to apply for work may be limited. In particular, jobs that involve atypical working hours may be more problematic for single mothers than for those with a partner (Kröger, 2005). Not only do single mothers face unemployment markedly more often than partnered mothers (Hakovirta, 2006; Statistics Finland, 2016), but they are also more likely to receive compensation that is not based on earlier earnings (Forssén et al., 2005).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Earnings-related unemployment allowance is associated with a markedly higher gross replacement rate than the other two benefit types (OECD, 2006a). It is available only to members of an unemployment fund, whereas the basic unemployment allowance is available to the unemployed who meet the conditions regarding previous employment but do not belong to an unemployment fund. Labour market subsidy is paid to the unemployed who have no recent work experience or have exhausted their eligibility (500 days, until the end of 2016) for the basic or earnings-related unemployment allowance (Kela, 2016a).

In unemployment theories, various psychosocial and financial advantages have been associated with participation in paid work. On the other hand, as already mentioned (Section 2.1), all the advantages do not necessarily actualise in working life. Losing a job may be an extremely painful experience for an individual. All the same, it means that a person is released from negative experiences at work and that hours previously spent at work can be spent within the family domain.

In addition to the unemployed person, those who live in the same household also face pressures (e.g., financial) as well as the possible positive changes unemployment brings about. This all is likely to affect how an unemployed person experiences his or her life within the family domain. An interesting question is how unemployment affects relationships between family members. In this respect, the outcomes of earlier studies vary. A correlation has been found between unemployment and conflicts with the spouse and even divorce (e.g., Broman et al., 1990; Lambard, 1994; Patton and Donohue, 2001). Positive changes have been found especially for the relationships between unemployed individuals and their children (Goul Andersen, 2002: 185; Kinnunen, 1996), although adverse effects have also been seen (e.g., Patton and Donohue, 2001). Among Swedish families, many of the parents who reported a positive change justified this by increased time with children (Jönsson, 2001). In general, negative changes in family relationships have been connected with financial difficulties (e.g., Vinokur et al., 1996. See also Mannerheim League for Child Welfare, 2010). Among Swedish families, in addition to financial difficulties, other issues frequently reported by parents who reported negative changes in family relationships were feelings of shame and insecurity about the future (Jönsson, 2001), which could both be, at least in part, connected with financial difficulties (Jönsson, 2001: 235). In a society where employment is a social norm, these feelings might also be related to a psychosocial deficit (e.g., social status) caused by unemployment.

Subjective interpretations of unemployed individuals with regard to their life before and during unemployment have rarely been examined. In particular, studies that include experienced changes on both individual and family levels, and both the psychosocial and the financial explanations behind the changes, are scarce. In the present thesis, changes that are experienced are investigated with regard to the wellbeing of an unemployed person and her/his family life. In the latter aspect, the main interest is in the relationships of unemployed persons with their family members.

#### *2.4. Preferences and structural factors behind a mother's choice*

The way mothers experience the reconciliation (or non-reconciliation) of work and family roles is influenced not only by the conditions related to the work and home domain roles, but also by the extent to which mothers view themselves as captives or

committed to their work and family roles (Moen, 1992). This is partially dependent on the reasons that influenced the mother's choice.

Why then does (or does not) a mother reconcile motherhood with paid work? There are different explanations for variations in working patterns among mothers. From a theoretical viewpoint, a rough division can be made between *individualistic* and *structural* explanations. According to the seminal theoretical approach underlining individual agency, *the preference theory*, lifestyle preferences (home centred, work centred or adaptive) are major determinants of the employment patterns and job choices of individuals (Hakim, 2002). In this outlook, mothers can genuinely and freely choose between various work and care situations. Alternatively, it has been stated that decisions regarding employment and care giving are made in a larger context, where structural, institutional and cultural settings create constraints and facilitations for different arrangements related to childcare and work (Pfau-Effinger, 1998; 2004; see also e.g., Kangas and Rostgaard, 2007; Nieuwenhuis et al., 2012; Salin, 2014). In this outlook, social values and norms – as well as institutions such as family policy and the labour market – influence the division of time between child caring responsibilities and paid work among mothers. Not all preferences are realistic in all institutional settings.

In the current thesis, policies (the state) are considered as a creator of opportunities and constraints, or incentives and disincentives, for various work and care situations, at the same time as the final choice is left to families. The chosen approach is compatible with studies indicating that institutional support for mothers' employment (e.g., the public provision of day care) explains a substantial part of observed cross-country variation in the employment patterns of mothers (e.g., Geyer and Steiner, 2007; Stier and Lewin-Epstein, 2001; Uunk et al., 2005).

It is worth noting that mothers' behaviour may also be affected indirectly by policies, as a result of policies influencing attitudes towards various work and care situations (e.g., Fortin, 2005; Nordenmark, 2004; Sundström, 1999; Sjöberg, 2004). Policies are expected to affect attitudes by indicating the normatively appropriate behaviour of women, and by influencing the ability of women to reconcile paid work with family responsibilities (Sjöberg, 2004). At the same time, given that the government is encouraged to continue, enhance and expand policies that people support and replace ones that are unpopular (Jo, 2010: 3), attitudes may have a bearing on policy formation. However, since policymaking is also affected by other factors, such as economics, interests and power relations (Jo, 2010), there is a possibility of a gap between policies and the attitudes of individuals towards the pursued policies. A disagreement between policies and attitudes could then lead to a situation where some citizens (here, mothers) act contrary to what they believe to be right.

A mother's experiences and perceptions relating to paid work are additional factors that may – even if closely intertwined with other ideological and practical factors (see

above) – affect choices between work participation and childcare at home. The increased choice related to the child home care allowance makes this topic especially relevant in Finland. Ultimately, this point can be wrapped up by asking to what extent the actions of those women who choose long family leave are actually a consequence of a familialistic or a defamilialistic way of thinking, and how much of a role is played by the current demands of the labour market and the often absent support for work–family balance in the workplace (Salmi, 2007: 164).

Non-participation in paid work may not be a voluntary choice, but an unavoidable consequence of the unavailability of jobs. In particular, when the level of unemployment is high, the choice between unemployment and employment may be far beyond the influence of an individual. Principally, unemployment differs from the other work–care situations included in the present thesis due to the weaker access to choices. For mothers whose children are under three years old, maternal care at home provides, however, an alternative to unemployment. Obviously, this also means that a prolonged period of home care might be, instead of a real first choice, a consequence of inadequate choices. This applies in particular to mothers with the least labour market resources (e.g., Duvander and Ellingsæter, 2016), but also to other mothers (Närvi, 2014a).

The choice of child home care instead of unemployment means that a mother is outside the labour market.<sup>4</sup> In studies regarding the importance of unemployment on wellbeing, unemployment is typically compared with the (preceding or subsequent) employment situation, and comparisons between unemployment and child home care are quite rare. There are, however, some indications that progressing from unemployment into family leave may increase a person’s wellbeing (e.g., Strandh, 2000). Part of the increase is possibly associated with different statuses or identities related to the two work–care situations. In terms of the subjective quality of life, one interesting aspect is the career prospects following the alternative work or care situations. Child home care has been associated with negative career consequences when compared with paid work participation (Section 2.2), however, the same might not be true when the comparison is made between child home care and unemployment. There are two explanations for why firms might find it optimal to avoid hiring unemployed workers (Eriksson and Lagerström, 2006). The first assumes that the least productive workers of firms are generally laid off first in bad times. If these workers cannot be distinguished from other fully productive unemployed workers by the firms, then unemployment becomes a possible indicator of low productivity. The second explanation is based on duration effects and assumes that unemployment will lower the human capital of the individuals concerned. Even with the same duration of work

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<sup>4</sup> Receiving the child home care allowance does not alone prove this condition, since the allowance can be paid even when a person is unemployed. The child home care allowance is then deducted from unemployment benefits (Kela, 2016a).

interruption (the same amount of human capital loss), stay-at-home mothers should be better sheltered from employer discrimination caused by doubts about productivity.

In addition to unemployment, even the threat of unemployment may restrict a mother's choices. In a study done by Närvi (2014a), even if mothers weighed the child's best interest and the available care possibilities when deciding on how long to stay at home, the decision to return to work was often conditioned by the (un)availability of work. Some of the mothers who did not have a job to return to stayed at home longer than they would have stayed if they had had a job. Yet, the influence of an insecure labour market position could also work in the reverse direction. For example, certain mothers with a temporary work contract reasoned that the timing of their work return could influence the continuity of their jobs (Närvi, 2014a). Thus, a somewhat earlier return to work could sometimes be only an attempt to avoid unemployment.

As argued earlier in this section, policies (the state's) are considered here as creators of opportunities and constraints for various work and care situations at the same time as the final choice is always left to families. That the final choice is left to families means that the choices mothers make are not just of choices of mothers only, but also the result of negotiations taking place inside their families. The factors included in the negotiations, as well as the weights given to these factors, may vary markedly between families. For example, the cost of non-familial childcare probably is less decisive in a wealthy family than it is in a poor family. Also, how crucial a mother's earned incomes are for the subsistence of that family varies between families. One more family specific circumstance that shapes a mother's options is the father's preparedness to take a career break. As found by Närvi (2014a), practical and ideological rationalities intertwine when parents decide childcare arrangements and the division of labour. In that study, the labour market position of a mother was often weaker than that of the father. Parents then had two choices in their negotiations; either invest on the insecure career of one parent or prioritise the more stable career in the family and be sure of income. Obviously, how realistic the work participation is for a mother depends on her family type. For example, as discussed earlier (Section 2.3), the possibilities of mothers taking (or continuing) a job with atypical working hours are generally more restricted in single parent family than in families with two parents. While certain family specific factors might be highly family specific, some of them can be influenced, at least to some extent, by certain welfare state policies.

Overall, the reasons behind a mother's choice may affect the way she experiences her life. At the same time, the way a mother experiences her life may affect her choice, as already brought up in this section in connection with negative perceptions of working life. In the following two chapters, a closer look is taken on the importance of the welfare state, and in particular childcare policies, on mothers' choices and on the ways they experience their life.

### 3. THE FINNISH WELFARE STATE AND MOTHERS' WORK AND CARE

The choice between work participation and non-participation is based on different reasons, and, as discussed above, some of the reasons may inhibit a mother from making 'a real first choice'. However, the important preconditions for mothers' entering into employment are the availability, affordability and quality of non-maternal childcare, as well as the opportunity to withdraw temporarily from paid work to take care of a newborn child at home. Childcare policies therefore play a significant role in the institutional interventions that affect mothers' working and care giving. The way childcare policies – as well as other policy fields that affect mothers' work and care – are organised depends on the nature of the welfare state. This chapter presents the foundations of the Finnish welfare state (Section 3.1) and, with the viewpoint on mothers and the contexts of work and care, discusses major changes and challenges related to these foundations (Section 3.2). The classification by Esping-Andersen (1990) into three welfare state types and the related differences regarding (de)familialization (Esping-Andersen, 1999) provide conceptual tools to describe the foundations and the changes.

#### 3.1. *Defamilialization and neofamilialization*

In Esping-Andersen's (1990) classification, the three types of welfare state vary from each other with regard to the relative roles of the state, work (market) and family in welfare provision. In the social democratic welfare regime type, to which Finland, Sweden and Denmark belong, the role of the state is emphasised. The characteristics of this regime type are universal and comparatively generous benefits, high equality (which is facilitated by a redistributive taxation system) and a high level of social rights. The level of decommodification (the protection of citizens and families from market dependency) is also high. This means that a reasonable standard of living is also achievable during periods of non-participation in paid work. The liberal regime type (Anglo-Saxon countries, e.g., the UK) is in many respects the opposite of the social democratic one. Principally, citizens are expected to participate in the market in order to obtain services and income. The role of the state in welfare provision is marginal. Public benefits are mainly means tested, relatively low and often involve social stigma for those who receive them. Within the conservative regime type (e.g., continental European countries), families are in principle responsible for their members' welfare. Most social benefits are delivered through social insurance schemes. For those people who do not have any work history, a limited range of benefits is available. In real life these people often depend on the income and social security of the breadwinner (traditionally male) in the family.



Esping-Andersen (1999) connected *defamilialization*, a concept originally developed by Ruth Lister (1994), with the social democratic welfare regime type. With this concept he complemented his earlier analyses (1990) with the purpose of better noting women's viewpoint. The earlier analyses had been criticised for ignoring gender related issues such as women's access to paid work and their role as a breadwinner (e.g., Lewis, 1992; Lister, 1994; Orloff, 1993; Ostner and Lewis, 1995). With the term *defamilialization*, Esping-Andersen refers to the extent to which the caring responsibilities of families have been relaxed via the public or private provision of care. As indicators of state-based *defamilialization*, he used public expenditure on services for families, the coverage of public childcare (for children less than three years old) and home help for the elderly. In practice, *defamilialization* through the state means that the state takes responsibility for care work that has traditionally fallen primarily on women, and by freeing women to take a job outside the home, *defamilialization* facilitates the reconciliation of paid work with family responsibilities. *Defamilialization* through the state was characteristic for the Nordic countries, whereas in for example the UK, *defamilialization* occurred through the market. As well as most continental European countries, Mediterranean countries were also *familialistic*, however, with less state intervention.

In the welfare state typology, instead of pure country cases, it is a question of leading principles; therefore countries belonging to the same regime type can in certain respects visibly differ from each other. For example, based on better access to day care services France and Belgium could be separated from the other conservative regime countries (e.g., Anttonen and Sipilä, 1996; Leitner, 2003). Correspondingly, countries belonging to different regime types have certain similarities. With the interest on Finnish mothers, one crucial question is Finland's position on the *defamilialization/familialization* scale. In order to describe the situation in Finland, and also in France, a third related concept – *neofamilialism* – has been proposed (Jenson and Sineau, 2001; Mahon, 2002). This concept refers to the tendency of longer-term childcare leave to decrease the priority of publicly provided childcare services as a form of care arrangement. The tendency of mothers rather than fathers to take longer-term leave has been seen as a hindrance for gender equality, and it has even been questioned whether Finland can be placed in the same category as the other two Nordic countries included here (Rianne Mahon herself made a clear distinction).

Besides referring to childcare policies, the term *neofamilialism* (or *neofamilism*) may refer to the ideology related to viewing a family. In Finland, it has been linked in particular to a *familistic* turn that was seen at the turn of the 2000s (Jallinoja, 2006). This ideological 'new familism' manifested as, for example, an increased importance of, and increased attention paid to, family time. Among the aspects debated were e.g., increased demands of work and challenges related to the reconciliation of family with paid work. The caregiving role of a mother is also regarded in this 'new familism'. Yet,

in ‘good parenthood’ circumstance, both mothers and fathers follow the ideal of a nurturing parent, and non-familial care arrangements are discouraged. In this current thesis, neofamilialism is associated with *neofamiliazation* policies (see above), instead of the increased importance of family time or the increased value of family for both women and men in Finland (e.g., Pekkola and Lehtonen, 2015; Pyöriä and Ojala, 2016a; see also Jallinoja 2009). Generalised neofamilialism here is used in connection with the understanding of traditional gender roles taken outside of the early child caring years.

### 3.2. *Changes and challenges*

During the last three or four decades, the frameworks in which nation-states operate have markedly changed. Some of the changes are demographic, such as the ageing of the population and related changes in nations’ dependency ratios<sup>5</sup>. However, many of the challenges the welfare states face involve national and global economics. In particular, opening economies, internationalisation of production, increased connections between states and the process labelled as globalisation have changed the frameworks (e.g., Vartiainen, 2011).

With the viewpoint on Finnish mothers, and the contexts of work and care, two main dualities or confrontations can be seen in Finnish welfare state policies. Both these dualities have to do, at least in part, with economics. The first one is between defamilialistic and neofamilialistic childcare policies, and involves mothers (or families) who are entitled to choose a child home care allowance in place of a municipal day care place for their small child(ren). Understanding this duality is facilitated by taking a brief look at the background of the day care and child home care allowance systems in Finland (Section 3.2.1). The other duality is between traditional social democratic and neoliberal values and policies, and involves a wider range of policy fields. According to the liberal standpoint, the welfare state hinders economic growth, encourages unemployment by undermining work incentives, sets poverty traps, is unaffordable and a burden on the economy, and diminishes international competitiveness (Leibfried and Obinger, 2001: 2).

Economic downturns in particular challenge the sustainability of the welfare state and provide reasons for reforms (e.g., Julkunen, 2001). The two recessions Finland has faced during the last few decades are discussed in this chapter. These recessions have affected mothers’ work and care through influencing both of the above-mentioned dualities. In recent times, along with a prolongation of the most recent downturn, the subsidiarity of social policies on economic policies has been emphasised. Following a

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<sup>5</sup> An age-population ratio of those typically not in the labor force and those typically in the labor force

sociohistorical standpoint (Section 3.2.1), in order to position this thesis (i.e., the aspects investigated) on policymaking in our time, the present-day challenges are discussed (Section 3.2.2).

### 3.2.1. *Childcare duality and increased liberalism*

A brief look at the background of the childcare duality reveals a close linkage between its two components. In particular, the development of the child home care allowance has followed the development of day care policies. The gradual change from strongly selective to universal services is characteristic of the earlier stages of day care policies. Beginning in 1936, day care provision was included in the Child Protection Act, in which the target groups were defined very narrowly (Forssén, 1998). In the 1950s, day care with long opening hours was still only available to poor mothers who had to work for economic reasons (Anttonen and Sipilä, 2000). In the following decades, when mothers started increasingly to work outside the home, a more widespread day care system was needed. The first day care law came into effect in 1973. It did not, however, guarantee a care place for all children (Anttonen and Sipilä, 2000). The lack of day care places was among the factors affecting the later introduction of the child home care allowance system in Finland. The allowance had actually already been introduced through various municipal and regional experiments in the late 1960s, when there was a serious shortage of day care places in many municipalities. Around every fourth municipality was already paying a municipality-related allowance prior to the establishment of the national child home care allowance system, as they were attempting to avoid expensive investments in day care facilities as well as the high labour costs for day care personnel (Hiilamo and Kangas, 2006).

In addition to economics, ideological standpoints also affected the foundation of the child home care allowance system. In the 1970s, when the question of public childcare for working mothers was raised, the Centre Party pointed out that mothers who are farmer mothers should also be supported by the state and suggested a ‘mothers wage’. The benefit was meant to compensate mothers and wives for the work and childcare they do in their homes. The opportunity for parents to choose the form of care they think is best for their children was another justification presented by centre and right-wing political parties for the child home care allowance. A day care compromise was adopted in 1985. Two new laws passed by the Finnish government gave all parents of children under three years old the right to either place their child in day care provided by the municipality (organised in day care centres or as family-based day care in which one adult takes care of up to four children) or to receive a child home care allowance. The laws were phased in by 1990 (Hiilamo and Kangas, 2006) and the child home care allowance was widely accepted by Finnish families. While in 1985 there were 25,000

families that received the allowance, in 1993 the number had risen to 95,000 (Sipilä and Korpinen, 1998).

In the early 1990s, Finland went through a deep recession. Between 1990 and 1992, in order to save public resources in day care, the child home care allowance was made more attractive by an increase in its real value of 30 per cent (Haataja, 2005; Hiilamo and Kangas, 2006). Along with the deepening of the recession, the idea of the child home care allowance as an alternative to unemployment was also brought up (Budget initiative no 288/1995; Hiilamo and Kangas, 2006). Although the economy had already improved in 1996, the unemployment rate was still high. The new government then cut the child home care allowance together with other flat-rate benefits. In addition, entitlement rights to earnings-related benefits were tightened and means testing alleviated in some respects. The justification for these reforms was a work incentive policy and the aim of decreasing income traps (Haataja, 2005).

Finland's relatively rapid recovery from the deep recession has been seen as proof that the Nordic welfare model can also be sustained during economic downturns (Kangas and Palme, 2009). The recession nevertheless left the unemployment rates higher than beforehand, with a proportion of citizens in long-term unemployment (Mikkonen, 2013). Since the mid-1990s, the redistributive effect of taxes and transfers has decreased, income inequality has increased and relative poverty among families has grown. The risk of poverty in particular concerns single-parent families, families with many children and the (long-term) unemployed who are without earnings-related benefits (see also e.g., Moisio et al., 2011; Sauli et al., 2011).

The increased income differences following the recession can be interpreted as a sign of the Finnish welfare state sliding towards the liberal model. At an ideological level, the change of the basic idea behind the policy prescriptions for alleviating poverty from universalism to selectivism – and in general the relative growth of means tested benefits – can be interpreted as a transition towards liberalism (Kuivalainen and Niemelä, 2010; Lehtonen et al., 2001). Wage labour becoming more important for the access to benefits refers to the conservative regime type, and overall, it seems that the Finnish social security system 'Europeanised' along with the changes following the recession (Lehtonen et al., 2001). Nevertheless, one reform pointed to the social democratic welfare state model and universalism. In 1996, the entitlement to municipal day care was broadened to all children under school age (e.g., Anttonen and Sipilä, 2000). From the beginning of 1997, families have also had the option of receiving a private care allowance for arranging private day care for their children. On the whole, however, when compared with pre-recession times, the relative roles of family and work in welfare provision have increased, and the relative role of the state has decreased. From the viewpoint of mothers and families, the welfare state has become less generous.

The established childcare systems, including the subjective right to day care and the child home care allowance, principally ‘survived’ the recession in the 1990s, although both systems have subsequently been under threat. The subjective right to day care was threatened in 2013, when the Finnish government proposed a restriction to the daily hours available to children with a younger sibling being taken care of at home (Valtioneuvosto, 2013). Also in 2013, a bill was prepared by the government that outlined a reduction of mothers’ entitlement to leave by one year that was to be reserved for fathers. The reform was justified by the view that it promotes mothers’ employment, career and gender equality. The reform would have been expensive for the state (Salmi and Närvi, 2014; Valtioneuvosto, 2014) and finally, in February 2015, the government decided not to present the bill to parliament (Valtioneuvosto, 2015). In addition to increased unemployment, the greater need for day care services would have resulted in costs for the state.<sup>6</sup>

### 3.2.2. *Present-day challenges*

Since the beginning of the global financial crisis in late 2008 and the euro crisis that followed it, the national economy of Finland has again been in an unsatisfactory condition. The deep problems in Finland can be found in the export markets. In 2015, the Finnish government presented various, partially alternative, means to intervene in the unfavourable situation, such as the extension of working time (without raising wages accordingly) and shortening the duration of the earnings-related unemployment allowance (Finnish Government, 2015; Valtioneuvoston kanslia, 2015a). The prime aim of the government was to improve international competitiveness in the hope of boosting exports, investments and job creation. The government programmes also aimed to deal with the sustainability gap and the adjustment of public finances in order to secure the funding of public services and social security in the longer term (Ministry of Finances, 2015). The subjective right to day care was, again, in the list of possible cuts and this time it was actually cut. The final decision was, however, left to the municipalities (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2016). In municipalities where the option has been taken up, children with one parent who is unemployed or takes care of a younger sibling at home are entitled only to half-time day care programmes. In addition, the number of children in day care groups for children over the age of three can be increased. In principle, these revisions touch defamilialization through a less favourable staff-to-child ratio (quality of care) and possibly also through complicating occasional work among unemployed mothers. The future of the child home care

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<sup>6</sup> Mothers who stay at home with their children for a very long period typically have a weaker position in the labour market and a lower education level than Finnish mothers in general. Many of these mothers would probably have been unemployed or employed in a low salary job after their period of child home care (Salmi and Närvi, 2014).

allowance is also not clear. Despite the decision of the government not to split the leave equally between mothers and fathers (Valtioneuvosto, 2015), the need to reform the system has been under debate again.

Economic crises erode the financial basis of the welfare state and necessitate changes in some respects; however, the patterns of restructuring are a political choice (Timonen, 2001). When weighing up the consequences of alternative policy decisions, some information can be obtained from the outcomes of past decisions (e.g., Kiander, 2001). Looking at human beings (rather than national economics), objectively-measured outcomes such as poverty rates and the distribution of poverty between citizens are revealing. However, revealing are also the subjective experiences, feelings and thoughts of people who have undergone similar conditions (here, work and care situations) to those whom the decisions concern.

The mothers investigated in the present thesis had children and made decisions regarding family and home during the 1990s and the first half of the following decade. Similar to mothers today, those examined here were entitled to the child home care allowance and thereby had increased opportunities to decide whether to stay at home with children for a prolonged period or participate in paid work. The mothers investigated, those of today, and those in the future, will be obstructed from free choice because of an inadequate supply of jobs. However, due to the shorter duration of the well-compensated allowance period, as well as other renewals on unemployment benefits (Finnish Government, 2017a), the pressure to seek employment may become even greater than before.

## 4. CHILDCARE POLICIES

This chapter focuses on the effects of childcare policies on the reconciliation and non-reconciliation of motherhood with paid work. As discussed in Chapter 2, various aspects of working life may challenge a successful reconciliation. In a situation of successful reconciliation, work–family interference is non-existent or rare. From a legislative point of view, realisation of this ideal is largely a matter of regulations that are the same for all employees, irrespective of their family situation. For example, laws govern weekly maximum working hours and weekly rest periods, as well as the required actions of employers when work overload endangers the health of an employee (Työsuojeluhallinto, 2017a; 2017b). Yet, as pointed out in Chapter 2, how a mother experiences this reconciliation depends in part on the reasons behind her choice. This means that the quality of reconciliation is also related to childcare policies. From a mother’s viewpoint, an important question is therefore what is targeted by childcare policies and through what specific means.

Since 1995 when Finland joined the EU, although the EU does not have direct power to guide national social policies, social policies have been directed by the European Commission through for example shared guidelines for member states for achieving policy goals (Kangas and Saari 2007; Mikkonen, 2013). Both at the EU level and in national policies, increasing attention has been paid to equality and equal opportunities for women and men (Eurofound, 2006; COFACE, 2015).

This chapter begins with a description of Finnish childcare policies, with the main focus on mothers. However, because paternal care at home provides an alternative for maternal care, the fathers’ role is also examined (Section 4.1). One alternative to full-time familialization for a mother is part-time work (Section 4.2). Because the interest in this thesis is on the relative situation of Finnish mothers in a European comparison, the Finnish system is evaluated in the light of a cross-country comparison (Section 4.3). As a last point, the targets and influences of childcare policies are discussed (Section 4.4). In this regard, the interest is on individual and family-level outcomes. Because, however, successful policies produce acceptable outcomes at the micro and the macro (societal) level, both are included in the discussion.

### 4.1. *Maternal vs. paternal care*

The foremost means in Finnish childcare policies to facilitate the reconciliation of motherhood with paid work is through public or publicly supported day care services. The fee for day care depends on the income and the size of the family, but has remained quite reasonable (e.g., Kela, 2004) and should not have inhibited mothers

who wish to work from doing so.<sup>7</sup> The right to day care begins when the parental leave ends: when the child is around nine months old. Until then, parents are expected to take care of their children at home. Maternity (the first 105 days) and parental (the remaining 158 working days) allowances are earnings related, covering a major proportion of the wage loss, and for those mothers or parents who are not eligible to receive earnings-related compensation, there is a minimum rate (e.g., De Henau et al., 2007a; Haataja, 2008). Parental leave can be taken either by the mother or the father, or can be shared between the parents. In reality, the major proportion of leave is taken by mothers. In 2002, for example, only 2.6 per cent of fathers took some proportion of the parental leave (Lammi-Taskula et al., 2009). Since then, incentives for fathers to take leave days have been augmented. In 2003, fathers were entitled to a full month's leave if they took the last 12 days of the parental leave. Despite the increase in the proportion of fathers who take some of the parental leave, the share of fathers' total leave days remained low (Lammi-Taskula et al., 2009; Lammi-Taskula and Takala, 2009). Following the doubling of the 'bonus leave' in 2009, the duration of leave periods taken by fathers increased somewhat. Since the beginning of 2013, fathers have been entitled to 54 day's paternity leave (in addition to an equal entitlement with the mother to parental leave), which can be taken quite flexibly until the child is two years old.<sup>8</sup> The revision did not, however, markedly increase long periods of leave (exceeding six months) among fathers (Sutela and Lehto, 2014).

Because the child home care allowance is based on a flat-rate principle, it is generally less generous for working mothers than are the preceding benefits. The compensation, however, depends on the number of children whose care is arranged in the same way, the accessibility of a care supplement – which depends on the income of the family – and the availability of a special municipal supplement, which is only provided by some municipalities.<sup>9</sup> Similar to parental leave, home care leave is available for both parents, but normally taken by mothers; for example in 2001, 80 per cent of mothers extended the home care period through receiving child home care allowance. Of these, about half ceased receiving the benefit by the time the child was 18 months old, whereas one-third remained on leave until the child was three or almost three years old (OECD, 2005b: 191). The percentage of fathers out of all recipients of the child home care allowance has been low; for example in 2009 it was only 5.1 per

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<sup>7</sup> Before the day care fee reform of 1997, the interactive effects of day care fees, progressive taxation and income-related support caused disincentives to participate in paid work, in particular for single mothers (Forssén, 1998).

<sup>8</sup> Finnish fathers have been entitled to a short paternity leave since 1991.

<sup>9</sup> In 2004, the allowance for one child under the age of three was €252.28 per month, the payment for each additional child under age three was €84.09 per month and for each additional child under school age, €50.46 per month. The care supplement was a maximum of €168.19 per month (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2006). In year 2007, the special municipal supplement was on average €136 per month. The amount of (and the conditions for) the supplement varies between municipalities (Miettunen, 2008).



cent and had increased by less than 1 per cent over the previous ten years (Haataja and Juutilainen, 2014). More-recent statistics indicate a slight increase in the proportion of fathers, as well as a slight decrease in the commonness of the benefit (Kela, 2010; 2016b).

In the bill prepared by the Finnish government in 2013, the child home care allowance was targeted equally towards mothers and fathers, meaning that the share one parent did not take would no longer be available to the other parent (Valtioneuvosto, 2013). In practice, in case the bill would have been introduced and enacted into law, it would have meant that the maximum leave period available for a mother would have been shortened by more than a year, and that year would have been reserved for fathers. The government's plan was rarely agreed with. It was criticised for operating against the best interests of children and families, and also for causing pressures on day care centres (e.g., Adressit.com, 2013; Mannerheim League for Child Welfare, 2014; MTV3uutiset, 2013; Uusi Suomi, 2013). Of the Finnish mothers and fathers with a two-year-old child, a relatively small proportion agreed with the proposed law reform (11 and 14 per cent respectively; see THL, 2014). In general, only a minority of mothers and fathers in Finland think that any proportion of the leave days available to either of the parents should be reserved exclusively for fathers (Lainiala, 2014).

Most probably, a traditional understanding of men's and women's gender roles partly explains the unequal sharing of leave days between parents (see also Lammi-Taskula, 2007). On the other hand, the cultural expectations of fathers and the understanding of men as parents have become more oriented towards care and nurture (Eerola, 2015: 51), and many parents think that it would be good for fathers to use a larger part of the parental leave days (Salmi, 2007). That the ideals and practices do not meet in the everyday life of families is in part related to financial matters. Since fathers typically earn more than mothers, a long work interruption by a father might destabilise the financial wellbeing of the family more extensively than that of a mother, and therefore not all families have a genuine choice. This applies to parental leave, but even more to home care leave, during which financial compensation is not based on earlier earnings.

#### 4.2. *Part-time work*

A compromise between full-time care at home and full-time work (i.e., part-time work) has been relatively uncommon in Finland (as mentioned in Section 2.1). Some facilitation of part-time work is, however, included in Finnish family leave legislation. First, since 2003, parents have been entitled to take parental leave on a part-time basis. This option has, however, only been available to those parents who share the leave, and only some have chosen this (Lehto and Sutela, 2008). Second, after the parental leave

period and until the end of the child's second year at school, partial childcare leave can be taken by either of the parents. Financial compensation has, however, only been available when the child is under three years old, and from 2004, again during the first and the second school years of the child. Financial compensation has been fairly low and not a strong incentive for mothers to reduce working hours.<sup>10</sup> In 2003, 8 per cent and in 2008, 10 per cent of the mothers eligible took partial childcare leave. Since then, the popularity of part-time work has increased somewhat, and in 2013 the corresponding rate was 13 per cent (Lehto and Sutela, 2008; Sutela and Lehto, 2014).

Many mothers in Finland, as well as in many other countries, work longer hours than they would prefer to work (Salin, 2014). In 2008, and again in 2013, mothers who were entitled to a partial childcare leave but who did not take it were asked why this was the case (Lehto and Sutela, 2008; Sutela and Lehto, 2014). Some of them explained that the decision was due to financial constraints (see also Salmi, 2007). Since 2014, parents with a child under three years old have been entitled to a flexible care allowance and thereby higher compensation for reduced working hours. Thus, financial constraints have been lessened for mothers who typically choose between full-time work and non-participation in paid work. Yet, in addition to monetary issues, work-related obstacles also inhibit mothers from reducing working hours. Some of them saw that the nature of their work was incompatible with work-time reduction, some of them were concerned that their work load would remain the same despite reduced working hours, and there were also some who were afraid that a reduction in working time could endanger their position in the workplace (Lehto and Sutela, 2008; Sutela and Lehto, 2014).

#### 4.3. *Finnish childcare policies in a European comparison*

Of the countries included in this thesis, only Finland gives all mothers (or families) with a child in a certain age range the opportunity to choose between longer-term childcare leave and reasonable cost day care services. Otherwise, Finnish childcare policies have many similarities with policies in the other countries studied, in particular with the other two Nordic ones. In general, during the first few months after the birth of a child, cross-country differences are relatively small. Work interruption of the mother is facilitated in all these countries and the income deficit is typically compensated quite generously. The duration of the well-compensated period, however, varies markedly between the countries. Around the year 2000, it was longest in Sweden (approximately a year), followed by the other two Nordic countries (Bradshaw and Finch, 2002; De Henau et al., 2007a; Gornick and Meyers, 2003). In many other

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<sup>10</sup> In the year 2004, for example, it was only €70 per month for a working time up to 30 hours a week (Kela, 2004).

countries mothers were, after the well-compensated maternity leave period, only entitled to parental leave with flat-rate compensation (see Table 1). Parental leave with job protection but low or no financial compensation allows people to continue child home care without the risk of job loss, but might not be an affordable solution for all mothers (Eurofound, 2006:63).

**Table 1.** Family leave and day care policies in the studied European countries around the year 2000.

	Enabled to stay a year at home	Payment during the parental leave period	Availability of day care	Access to longer-term leave	Payment during the longer-term leave
Denmark	X	ER	Unrestricted	( x )	
Finland	X	ER	Unrestricted	X	FR
Sweden	X	ER	Unrestricted		
Belgium	X*	FR	Moderate		
France	X	FR**	Moderate	X	FR**
Austria	X	FR	Inadequate	X	FR
Germany	X	FR	Inadequate	X	FR
Netherlands			Inadequate		
United Kingdom			Inadequate		
Greece			Inadequate		
Portugal	X		Inadequate	X	
Spain	X		Inadequate	X	

ER = earnings related; FR = flat rate.

( x ) = Restricted. In Denmark, a form of longer-term leave (for a period of 26–52 weeks) was available in the 1990s. In early 2000, local municipalities were empowered to pay a subsidy for those who took care of a child at home, but only a very small number of mothers took up the benefit (Rantalaiho, 2009; Rostgaard, 2002).

\* Maternity leave, parental leave + a career break.

\*\* Payment is available to some mothers (depending on the number of children).

Sources: Bradshaw and Finch, 2002; Gornick and Meyers, 2003; De Henau et al., 2007a; 2007b.

In Finland, Denmark and Sweden, all children were entitled to public day care at a reasonable cost after the parental leave period (Table 1). In Belgium and France, access to public care was reasonable, whereas in the rest of the investigated countries it was quite rare. A lack of day care, as well as short opening hours in early education and care, limited the possibility for mothers to participate in paid work, particularly full-time work. For some of the mothers, the only possible option to participate in paid work may therefore have been part-time work. This has been especially popular in the Netherlands; in Austria, Germany and the UK many mothers have worked part time (Eurostat, 2005).

With regard to part-time work, Sweden is an especially interesting country to compare with Finland. While mothers in Finland typically continue child home care after the parental leave period, mothers in Sweden reduce their working hours. In Sweden, part-time work has been common especially among those mothers whose children are 0 to 2 years old (OECD, 2006b). Certain differences in the family leave legislation between the two countries facilitate the understanding of the reasons for dissimilar working patterns of the mothers. First, the child home care allowance was only available to all mothers in Sweden for a short period in 1994. Since 2008, parents have again been entitled to this benefit, but only in some municipalities (Eydal and Rostgaard, 2011). Second, parental leave is somewhat longer in Sweden than in Finland, and parental leave legislation is more flexible. In Sweden, parental leave can be taken until the child is eight years old and, unlike in Finland, a mother can take partial leave regardless of whether or not the father takes it. The parental leave can be taken with a 25, 50, 75 or 100 per cent compensation rate (depending on working time), and the leave periods are converted as full-day equivalents (Båvner, 2001; Pylkkänen and Smith, 2004). Since the late 1970s, parents who have used all of the paid leave still have had the right to work 75 per cent full time until the child is eight years old. In Finland, the possibility to reduce working hours was adopted about ten years later than in Sweden, and it originally only included parents with a child under three years old. In 1990 the entitlement was broadened until the beginning of the first school year, and in 1998, until the child is around eight years old (Haataja, 2006).

A further circumstance that differentiates Sweden from Finland is the stronger support for fathers' caring role. In Sweden, fathers became entitled to one month's father's quota for parental leave in 1995. In 2002, the quota was extended to two months (Eydal and Rostgaard, 2011) and in 2016 to three months (Duvander et al., 2016). Also in Sweden, the major proportion of leave days have been taken by mothers. The fathers' share has, however, exceeded that in Finland (e.g., Eydal and Rostgaard, 2011; Plantenga and Remery, 2005).

In general, the understanding of the importance of policies on the aspects investigated can be facilitated by classifying countries on the basis of the differences and similarities in their policies. With regard to day care policies, Finland could easily be placed in the same category as Denmark and Sweden (e.g., Kamerman, 2000). With regard to family leave policies, however, the position of Finland is not unambiguous (e.g., Deven and Moss, 2002; Plantenga and Remery 2005). Taking into account both fields of childcare policies, or more widely, family policies, leads to the same conclusion. Finland has been placed in the same group as Denmark and Sweden (Bettio and Plantenga, 2004), or with, for example Austria and Germany (Boje and Ejrnæs, 2012), with France (Mahon, 2002) or with Belgium and France (Wall, 2007). Therefore, due to the exceptional combination of unrestricted access to day care services and longer-term childcare leave, Finland effectively stands alone and cannot

be unambiguously placed in the same or a different group (model) as the other two included Nordic countries, or in the same group as any other included country.

#### 4.4. *Targets and consequences of childcare policies*

The values and goals that are characteristic of the social democratic welfare state model – in particular a high degree of equality and high levels of employment (Esping-Andersen, 1990; 2009) – are reflected in the foremost targets of childcare policies (Eydal and Rostgaard, 2011). The first leading target, *women's employment*, has been relatively well achieved in Finland, and in Denmark and Sweden. In these three countries, female employment rates were high already in the 1970s and have not changed much since the early 1980s, whereas in most other Western European countries, women's employment has continued to grow during the last few decades (OECD, 2011; Plunkett, 2011: 7). In addition to the fact that the work participation of women influences the financial wellbeing of families, it may help to reduce a country's poverty rate (Fritzell and Ritakallio, 2010).

Another ambition of childcare policies, in particular in the Nordic countries, has been *equality between women and men* (Eydal and Rostgaard, 2011). If equality is understood as equal employment rates, Finland performs quite well in an international comparison (e.g., Ferreira, 2009; OECD, 2011). However, if one looks at wages, many countries surpass Finland (OECD, 2011). Higher wages for men than women in Finland can be, to a high degree, attributed to labour market segregation (Korkeamäki and Kyyrä, 2005), although part of the difference is probably related to an unequal division of family leave days between women and men. Mothers typically do not accumulate occupation-related human capital, at least not officially, during family leave days and this may negatively affect their career progression (see Section 2.2). In addition, since young women are expected to take the leave, employers may regard them as less reliable employees and hesitate to nominate them for positions with higher prestige (Kupiainen et al., 2007: 92–93; Salmi, 2007).

In addition to gender equality, child-related work interruption might affect the *equality between women with and without children*, as already discussed in Section 2.2. In terms of wages, mothers in Finland seem to be, however, relatively well protected from negative consequences compared with mothers in many other countries (Gash, 2009). In all likelihood, the employment supportive aspects in Finnish childcare policies have facilitated the high ranking of the country. First, family leave that has a relatively long maximum duration and a job guarantee<sup>11</sup> makes it possible for a mother

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<sup>11</sup> A job guarantee concerns mothers who have a work contract with a permanent duration as well as those whose work contract is non-permanent, but would be renewed if they were not on leave (Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden ministeriö, 2009).

to take care of a child at home without the risk of being laid off. Second, access to reasonable cost day care with long opening hours enables a mother to return to her earlier job or enter into a new one with full hours after the family leave period. Part-time work in a regular job is also available for Finnish mothers for quite a long period, reducing (together with day care services) their need to turn to typical part-time jobs that often require lower qualifications and provide fewer opportunities for learning and formal training than full-time jobs (Fagan and Burchell, 2002; Eurofound, 2007). In general, policies that support female employment have been associated with a smaller wage gap between mothers and non-mothers, and greater employment continuity compared with less-supportive policies (see, for example, Gash, 2009; Harkness and Waldfogel, 2003; Misra et al., 2007; Sigle-Rushton and Waldfogel, 2007; Stier and Lewin-Epstein, 2001).

Providing parents with an *increased choice* regarding the form of care for their children is a somewhat newer target of childcare policies (Eydal and Rostgaard, 2011). Concerns have been expressed, though, that increased choice by the means of extended family leave – which is typically taken by mothers and rarely by fathers – runs contra to the traditional objectives of childcare policies (see also Jenson and Sineau, 2001: 259; Mahon, 2002). In this outlook, a disagreement is seen between the expected outcomes of defamilialization and neofamilialization policies concerning mothers' position at work and at home. Payments targeted to families that do not enrol their children in public day care have been associated with adverse effects such as a risk of not getting a job, not being considered for promotion and not developing one's qualifications (e.g., Ellingsæter, 2012; Nelander, 2007). A family wage gap with a somewhat longer duration has been found for mothers in Finland who take advantage of the possibility to take care of the child for a relatively long period (over two years) at home (Napari, 2010).

Among the main targets of childcare policies has traditionally been *children's best interest* (Eydal and Rostgaard, 2011). This target, again, concerns equality. As a general rule, high quality public services reduce inequalities in terms of the investment that highly educated and highly paid parents can make for their children compared with those who have relatively low human capital (Esping-Andersen 2004 and 2009). In addition, investments in early childhood education and care are investments in future workers (e.g., Esping-Andersen, 2002) and therefore, even in this respect, childcare policies have to do with the macro-level target of high employment.

Especially in Sweden, educational aspects have been among the justifications for the priority of public care as compared with family care of a prolonged duration (Hiilamo and Kangas, 2006). Opinions are divided, however, as to what is better for a child; institutionalised care or parental care at home. In Finland, discussions regarding this subject have typically involved children under three years old: children whose mothers may choose whether to stay at home for a prolonged period with a child (e.g.,

Keltikangas-Järvinen, 2012). The advocates of the child home care allowance have pointed out that a mother provides warmth, closeness, care and love, which are of primary importance for a small child. By contrast, public day care has been associated with negative features such as inhuman bureaucracy, rigidity, medical problems (ear infections, flu, etc.) and stress in children caused by long days in day care centres (see also Hiilamo and Kangas, 2006: 30). Mothers who choose the home care solution emphasise that this makes it possible to prolong a carefree and unstructured childhood without a sense of hurriedness (Repo, 2013). The arguments of mothers for home care also include aspects of pleasure for themselves, such as the satisfaction from being in the company of the child and the happiness that comes from following the child or children's development. On the other hand, in mothers' perceptions a workday at home can be more hard work and more tiring than a workday at 'real work' (Vauva, 2012). Further, many parents in Finland consider that when they work outside the home they can cope better with their children (Lehto and Sutela, 2008).

Since children's wellbeing and social and cognitive development are strongly affected by the capacity of their parents to spend time with them, what also matters is how successfully their parents can reconcile the two life domains (e.g., COFACE, 2015). In a study concerning nine to ten-year-old Finnish children and their working parents, negative spillover from parents' work explained anxiousness and irritation among the children (Vasikkaniemi, 2013). Positively experienced spillover, conversely, accounted for children's positive self-esteem, which in turn was negatively connected with emotional and behavioural problems. Positive spillover was more common than negative spillover. Time pressure, work exhaustion and dissatisfaction with work explained negative spillover.

Furthermore, at least indirectly, childcare policies may affect fertility (Eydal and Rostgaard, 2011), thereby affecting a country's economic dependency ratio, an aspect crucial for maintaining bearable social and economic structures and social welfare systems. Under the pressures of work and economy, people tend to postpone having children; the average age of women in childbirth will increase and the final number of children will decrease (Pekkola and Lehtonen, 2015; see also e.g., Lainiala, 2012; 2014; Sutela, 2013). These negative effects of work and economy can be diluted by diverse state interventions, including the provision of high quality day care at affordable cost and monetary subsidies for those mothers who take care of their children at home. In many countries where women's employment has been supported to a lesser extent than in Finland, fertility rates have fallen more (e.g., OECD, 2015; see also Forssén and Ritakallio, 2006). There is some indication, though, that in recent times, along with increased job insecurity and increased insecurity regarding family benefits, the buffering effect of social policies has weakened somewhat (Miettinen, 2015).

On the whole, childcare policies have various targets and influences that concern individual women, their families and whole societies. With regard to women, the targets primarily concern the reconciliation of motherhood with paid work in such a way that the two life domains interfere as little as possible with each other.

Lastly, based on the above discussions, three basic means through which childcare policies may influence the way mothers experience their life can be separated. First, childcare policies affect the opportunities for mothers to choose a preferred work–care situation. Generous day care policies are significant in this regard, as they enable a mother to choose full-time work instead of a prolonged home care period or part-time work. On the other hand, a person who leaves a job conserves time and energy that might otherwise be lost from stress caused in the work role (Grandey and Cropanzano, 1999; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984) and therefore, by enabling a somewhat longer withdrawal from paid work (or reduced working hours), generous family leave schemes should enhance life quality. Very generous schemes are, however, expected to affect the quality of life in the reverse direction through deteriorating career prospects of mothers.

Second, childcare policies provide monetary compensation for expenses related to various work and care situations. Both the inability to choose a preferred work–care situation (Berger, 2009) and financial strain (Diener et al., 2003; Kainulainen, 1998) have been associated with a decrease in a person’s life satisfaction. A third way through which childcare policies may affect the way a mother experiences her life is by affecting the social acceptance and appreciation of various work and care situations. In Finnish childcare policies, social acceptance (normatively appropriate behaviour, see Section 2.4) is directed to working mothers as well as to those mothers who take care of their children under three at home.



## 5. ABOUT THE PRESENT STUDY

### 5.1. *Aims and structure*

The overall aim of this thesis is to increase the understanding of the experiences of Finnish mothers regarding the reconciliation of family and paid work, withdrawal from paid work due to childcare at home, and non-participation due to unemployment. In the first article, the outlook of mothers regarding the choice of family responsibilities in place of paid work is investigated. It is clarified whether the attitudes of mothers in the Nordic countries differ from those in the other included countries. With regard to Finland, a further aim (the main one here) is to see whether there is any indication of the importance of the child home care allowance on mother's attitudes (see Table 2). The allowance enhances the possibility for mothers to choose child home care instead of work participation, and signals that taking care of children at home is normatively appropriate behaviour. On the other hand, facilitation of home care is restricted to very early childhood years, and due to the simultaneous access to public day care, there are two opposite signalling effects during the period under consideration.

On a general level, it is clarified whether the way childcare policies are organised is connected with the attitudes and, further, the behaviour of mothers. From the perspective of childcare policies, it is important to observe how long mothers stay at home, either full time or part time, because of childcare. This is especially important in countries where female employment rates are low. However, it is also important in countries where mothers commonly participate in paid work, since among other things, it facilitates the evaluation of the ways through which childcare policies may affect the occupational careers of mothers.

The second article examines the self-assessed consequences of childcare at home on the occupational careers of mothers. To cope with the increased demands of work and to succeed in a context of increased competition, employees should constantly increase, or at least preserve, their skills and knowledge base. Longer family leave in particular could therefore run counter to the career prospects of mothers (see Section 4.4). In this situation, it is important to clarify how mothers who are enabled to stay at home for a very long time in childcare, and who actually do so, experience the related career consequences.

Self-assessed career consequences have rarely been the subject of interest in cross-country comparisons. It has, however, been found that mothers in Denmark assess the career consequences related to full-time care of children at home less negatively than mothers in some other European countries (Austria, Hungary, Portugal and the UK) with different family policy schemes (Ejrnæs, 2011). Thus, there is some indication of a connection between employment-supportive childcare policies and a lower prevalence of perceived negative career consequences. In the present study, the focus is

on the similarities or differences between Finland, and Denmark and Sweden; countries with employment-supportive childcare policies but with no longer-term childcare leave available for all mothers.

It appears that many of the mothers in Finland who receive the child home care allowance for a very long time are distanced from the labour market after the allowance period (e.g., Rissanen, 2012). On the other hand, many of those mothers were already less attached to the labour market before the birth of the child compared with Finnish mothers on average (see also Salmi, 2007; Sipilä et al., 2010: 41; Haataja and Juutilainen, 2014). Owing to the relatively generous family leave and day care policies, these mothers have relatively good opportunities to take into consideration plans and possibilities related to career progression and their position at work when choosing the length of the home care period. The subjective interpretations of these mothers might, therefore, be less negative than might be expected based on their objective situation.

Of special interest are those mothers who stay at home for a very long time. It is clarified whether the perceptions of these mothers differ negatively from those of other mothers in Finland, as well as from the perceptions of mothers in other countries who stay at home with their children for an equally long time. As mentioned in Section 2.2, quite a number of Finnish mothers with a two-year-old child estimate that time spent with the child at home has a negative effect on their occupational career (Salmi et al., 2009). The present study also includes mothers whose children are of school age. These mothers should have better opportunities to assess actual, rather than expected, career consequences than mothers who have only recently returned to paid work, or in particular those who are still at home. Also, the careers of these mothers have had more time to recover from any negative consequences. Overall, the main aim of the second article is to determine how negatively mothers in Finland perceive the career consequences of childcare at home. A further goal is to evaluate the potential importance of the child home care allowance on the mothers' perceptions regarding childcare at home.

In the third article, work-to-family interference, selected characteristics of work and, as a complementary aspect, overall life satisfaction are all examined. With regard to aspects of work, the focus is on working hours and such characteristics that have become more common during the last few decades and might negatively affect personal and family life, such as time pressure and an insecure job situation (e.g., Lehto and Sutela, 2008; Mauno, 1999; Mauno and Kinnunen, 1999; Wallace et al., 2007). The main aim is to examine whether there is anything in the work domain (in mothers' experiences) that could possibly increase the appeal of a prolonged home care period in Finland. Life satisfaction is used to describe how mothers feel about their life as a whole; in other words, it is used to describe their subjective quality of life. The analysis regarding life satisfaction also includes stay-at-home mothers. In addition to

providing a comparative perspective, the inclusion of these mothers offers a broader view (cf. perceived career consequences in Article 2) on maternal care at home.

The fourth article involves mothers who have not been able to choose between work participation and non-participation because of unemployment. The consequences of unemployment are examined with regard to the wellbeing of the individuals concerned and their relationships with other family members. The focus is on the subjective experiences of individuals regarding the changes caused by unemployment. The prime aim is to find out whether family can substitute for paid work in the lives of unemployed women in Finland. This question is approached by comparing the experiences of mothers with those of women who do not have children living in the same household. To help understand the importance of female gender, women's experiences are also compared with those of men. If Jahoda's (1982) view (Section 2.3) is correct, women with a family should report better wellbeing outcomes compared with women without a family, as well as compared with men in all family situations. Such a finding would suggest that domestic responsibilities and/or identities related to family are important for women in particular. If it is the case that domestic responsibilities and/or identities related to family are also important for men, then those with a family should report better wellbeing than men without a family. These differences should remain even when financial hardship is controlled for.

The results regarding the four articles are described in Chapter 6. In this context, the results that concern Finland – or Finland and the other two Nordic countries of Denmark and Sweden – are mainly included. More detailed information of all the countries can be found in the articles. Prior to the results section, data, measurements and methods are presented (Table 2; Sections 5.2, 5.3 and 5.4). In particular, aspects are discussed that may affect the generalisability of the results obtained.

**Table 2.** Included work and care situations, investigated aspects, the main research questions, data, main measurements and methods.

	Work-care situation(s) included	Aspects included	Main questions regarding Finnish mothers	Data	Main measurements	Methods
Article I	Home/Child home care	Attitudes towards cutting down on paid work Time spent because of childcare at home	Are attitudes (and behaviour) familialistic? Is there any indication of the importance of the child home care allowance on attitudes?	ESS round 2 (2004–2005)	‘A woman should be prepared to cut down on her paid work for the sake of her family.’	Descriptive statistics
Article II		Perceived negative consequences of childcare on occupational career	Do Finnish mothers’ perceptions vary from those in the other (Nordic) countries? Is long home care especially harmful?	ESS round 2 (2004–2005)	‘Has the time you have stayed full time at home/at part-time work because you were taking care of your children at home had negative consequences on your occupational career?’	Descriptive statistics Binary logistic regression analysis
Article III	Work participation  Child home care	Working conditions Work-to-family interference Life satisfaction  Life satisfaction	Are there work-related experiences that differentiate Finnish mothers from other mothers (and possibly contribute to the length of child home care)?  How satisfied are mothers in Finland with their life? Is satisfaction connected with work-related experiences or a work-care situation?	ESS round 2 (2004–2005)	‘How often does your job prevent you from giving the time you want to your partner or family?’ ‘How often does your partner or family get fed up with the pressures of your work?’ ‘All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole nowadays?’	Descriptive statistics Ordinal regression analysis
Article IV	Unemployment	Self-assessed consequences on wellbeing and on relationships with other family members	Is the family situation (and gender) decisive for experienced changes?	University of Turku, Department of Social Policy (1999–2000)	‘Has your general wellbeing improved or worsened as a consequence of unemployment?’ ‘How positively or negatively has unemployment affected the relationships with the spouse/children?’	Descriptive statistics Analysis of (co)variance

## 5.2. *Data*

The data for the first three articles is based on the European Social Survey (ESS) Round 2, conducted during 2004 and 2005 and covering over 20 countries in Europe. The 12 countries included in the investigations were chosen as they represent different childcare policy systems and different working patterns of mothers. In the first two articles, only mothers who had children under 13 years old are included. In the third article, these mothers are still of foremost interest. The mothers had children during the 1990s and early 2000s. With regard to childcare policies, although there were changes in national policies during the period under consideration, and afterwards, basic differences between the countries have not faded away (Eurydice, 2014). Concerning the work-related experiences of Finnish employees, in many respects the toughest years were seen after the earlier recession. When comparing the early 2000s (slightly prior to the data collection) with the early 2010s, changes were generally fairly small (Lehto and Sutela, 2008; Sutela and Lehto, 2014). A working life barometer (Työ- ja elinkeino-ministeriö, 2017) enables a comparison to be drawn between the time of the data collection and the year 2016. It reveals a certain improvement, but also a weakening. For example, a greater number of employees have the possibility to participate in development activities in their workplaces. On the other hand, the proportion of employees who are confident about the continuity of their work decreased (see also Sutela and Lehto, 2014).

The fourth article is based exclusively on data for Finland. In the year 2000, a survey was conducted by the Department of Social Policy at the University of Turku and the data derives from this. The survey was part of a Nordic project by the University of Aalborg (Denmark) and the University of Turku. The sample comprises people who were registered as unemployed job seekers during the last quarter of 1999, and one criterion was that they had been unemployed for at least 92 days (Saurama, 2000). To increase the number of mothers (and fathers), parents whose children were 13 to 17 years old are also included in the present study.<sup>12</sup> During the time of data collection, the unemployment rate in Finland was relatively high. The likelihood of an unemployed person reporting negative consequences might be lower in times of high unemployment than during low unemployment, when there are fewer benefit recipients and a greater risk of social stigma resulting from unemployment (e.g., Lindbeck et al., 1999; Clark, 2003). On the other hand, during high unemployment there are typically fewer job opportunities and more applicants for each job, which might increase emotional stress among the unemployed. During the time of data collection the unemployment rate in Finland was quite close to that of today (Statistics Finland,

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<sup>12</sup> The age ranges used in the questionnaire did not enable defining the age of those children who were 7 to 17 years old.

2017a; 2017b),<sup>13</sup> nevertheless, the effect of unemployment might not be exactly the same. There is some evidence, based on cross-European data, that losing one's job during economic recession has a serious effect on self-assessed health, and that this effect is in part due to financial strain (Huijts et al., 2015). In particular when combined with a reduction in welfare state spending (including unemployment benefits), high unemployment might increase psychological distress among the unemployed. Overall, the results obtained at one point in time (unemployment rate; welfare state spending) might not in all respects be generalisable to a different time period.

Another issue that affects the generalisability of the results obtained involves the number of respondents. In Article I, the number of Finnish mothers is 206 and the number of mothers in the other investigated countries varies from 157 to 293. In Article II, only those mothers are included who had at some time in their life participated in paid work for at least six months continuously, and therefore the numbers of mothers is somewhat lower. However, for Finland, as well as for the other two Nordic countries, there are practically no differences between the numbers of mothers in the two articles. In Article III, a distinction is made between working and non-working mothers. The group of non-working mothers (staying at home) comprises those who had not participated in paid work during the week prior to the survey and who reported housework and/or childcare at home, however, mothers who were unemployed are excluded. For Finland, there were 139 working mothers and 42 mothers who stayed at home.

In Articles I, II and III, the findings in particular that are based on very low numbers of respondents with certain qualities should be regarded as suggestive (i.e., preliminary) rather than conclusive. For example, in Article I, the numbers of mothers with babies is too low to generalise the findings to all mothers of babies in the countries concerned. One more aspect that could affect the generalisability of the results obtained is selection. In Articles I, II and III, design weight was, though, used to correct for slightly different probabilities of selection, thereby making the sample more representative of a 'true' sample of individuals in each country (ESS EduNet, 2012).

In Article IV, the sample size is sufficiently large (881: comprising 494 unemployed women and 387 unemployed men). What could, however, affect the generalisability of the results is the relatively low response rates. There are various reasons for an individual not to respond to a questionnaire, and one possibility is reduced wellbeing: the subject of interest in the investigation. If many unemployed people whose wellbeing had become worse during and due to unemployment refused to respond to the questionnaire, then the negative effects of unemployment would

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<sup>13</sup> Along with the recent economic crises, unemployment rose in many countries. The worst hit countries include Spain and Greece, where unemployment rates for women were markedly over 20% in the mid-2010s (Eurostat, 2016). In Finland, the rate was lower, at almost 9%, which is nevertheless a higher rate than those seen in many other European countries.

appear less common than they actually are. Even in that case, provided that any of the included family situations is not markedly overrepresented in such refusals, the main interest in the article – the importance of the family situation on the experience of unemployment – should not be affected.

### 5.3. *Measurements*

In Article I (and Article II), mothers' behaviour is investigated in terms of the precise length of time they had stayed at home because of childcare. A division was made between full-time care at home and part-time work. By reporting any time spent because of childcare at home (either full time or part time), a previously employed mother expresses that she cut down on paid work for the sake of her family. With regard to mothers who were unemployed prior to the birth of the child, the choice may have been based, at least in part, on the difficulty of finding a job. Nevertheless, by reporting any time spent at home because of childcare, even these mothers expressed that they had chosen to take care of their children at home instead of (an intention to) work. Therefore, except for those mothers for whom an alternative choice would have been studying, time spent because of childcare at home refers to either an actual or a theoretical act of cutting down on paid work.

Attitudes were measured by asking the mothers *whether they think that a woman should be prepared to cut down on her paid work for the sake of her family*. In previous studies, mothers have typically been asked about their opinion regarding precise work-home situations (full-time work, part-time work or non-participation in paid work) or work participation among in particular mothers (e.g., Hakovirta and Salin, 2006; OECD, 2001; Steiber and Haas, 2009). The argument used in the present study does not differentiate between women with and without children, or women with young and older children. Since, however, cutting down on paid work because of family in particular concerns families with young children, it is well founded to assume that the investigated mothers thought about their own or their peer groups' (women with young children) situation when answering the question. In any case, it was specified that the statement referred to family in a sense of 'nuclear' instead of 'extended'.

In the assessment of the consistency of attitudes with policies, the first step was to define the effectiveness of policies. The concepts defamilialization and familialization were adopted from the classifications of Esping-Andersen (1999) and Leitner (2003), and were modified to the specific needs of this study. With regard to childcare, Leitner (2003) based the classification on the following two aspects: the existence or non-existence of paid parental leave and the coverage of formal day care for children under three years old. Although the same two fields of childcare policies are focused on in the present study, there are several reasons why the classification was not used in its

original form. For example, Finland, Denmark, Sweden, Belgium and France were classified by Leitner (2003) in an ideal type of optional familialism. For optional familialism, the defining aspects are paid parental leave and widespread services. Although access to public day care is wider in Belgium and France than in most other European countries, it is not universal, as it is in the three Nordic countries.<sup>14</sup>

The interest was on policies that facilitate women's employment. A relatively long parental leave linked to compensation that is based on earlier earnings should foster high levels of employment, since it encourages attachment to (well) paid work before the birth of the child (Björnberg, 2002; Haas and Hwang, 1999; Sundström and Duvander, 1998). In line with this, short-term familialization is understood as a means to facilitate long-term defamilialization. To facilitate the assessment of the consistency of attitudes with policies, an indicator for defamilialization was created. The final indicator is composed of two sub-indicators: one for family leave defamilialization and the other for day care defamilialization. The statement used to measure attitudes refers to an obligation, rather than to a privilege, to cut down on paid work on behalf of the family. In line with this, the indicators were constructed so that a high final defamilialization value signifies strong facilitation of work participation without the necessity to reduce working hours.

In Article II, mothers were asked whether they think that the time they have stayed full-time at home and at part-time work because they were taking care of their children at home have had negative consequences on their occupational career. The interest is on the occurrence of mothers who reported definitely or probably a negative effect caused by childcare at home. Negative effects were measured separately for full-time care at home and for part-time work because of childcare at home. With regard to full-time care at home, a closer look was taken at the importance of the total duration of child home care and the age of the youngest child at the time of data collection.

In Article III, it is clarified whether there are any work-related experiences that differentiate Finnish mothers from those in the other investigated countries. Fathers are also included in the considerations. The following work characteristics were included in the analyses: weekly working hours, time pressure, contractual job (in)security, subjective job (in)security, atypical working hours, time flexibility (working time autonomy), work autonomy (pace of work; organisation of work) and social support at work. With regard to interference from the work domain to the family domain, a distinction was made between interference that concerns the home domain in general and interference that concerns in particular other family members. The first type of

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<sup>14</sup> Also, a simple distinction between paid and unpaid parental leave does not distinguish countries with regard to the magnitude of familialization (for variations in compensation rates, see De Henau et al., 2007a). Furthermore, in the present study the focus is on public interventions and, therefore, the market based solutions in the UK cannot be a basis for defamilialization.



interference was measured by asking the respondents *how often they worry about problems at work when they are not working and how often they are too tired after work to enjoy things they like to do at home*. With regard to interference that concerns other family members, a distinction was made between time-based and strain-based interference (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). Time-based interference was measured by asking the respondents *how often their job prevents them from giving the time they want to their partner or family*. Strain-based interference was measured by asking *how often their partner or family gets fed up with the pressures of their work*. By itself, work pressure is not a negative phenomenon. A person who works under ‘appropriate’ pressure typically finds her/his work inspiring, makes an effort to achieve the objectives of that effort and accomplish the tasks. However, when a person is unable to meet the demands of work and no longer feels in control (Karasek, 1979), or when the work pressures are recurrent and a person does not have adequate possibilities to recover, those pressures turn into negative stress. On paper, the two types of interference (time-based and strain-based) can be separated; however, in real life they may be coinciding. For example, an inevitable consequence of time spent at work is the inability to be home for family members (time-based interference). At the same time, excess work pressures (the attribute that causes strain) can make a person feel obligated to work extra hours. Theoretically, it is also possible that an emotionally stressed person feels unable to give the time she wants to her family members, even if she technically has the time available to do so.

To complement this study, mothers were directly asked whether they were satisfied with their life. An 11-point scale was used, in which 0 denotes extremely dissatisfied and 10 extremely satisfied. To differentiate motherhood from other reasons that concern a wider range of individuals within society, the following reference groups were included: working women with no children living in the same household, working fathers, all workers and all working age adults.

Self-assessed changes related to unemployment are assessed in Article IV. Subjective change in wellbeing was measured by asking the respondent *whether her/his general wellbeing had improved or worsened as a consequence of unemployment*. Subjective consequences on family relationships were measured by asking *how positively or negatively unemployment had affected the relationship with the spouse and the relationship with children*. Understanding of the mechanisms through which unemployment may affect family relationships was broadened by including non-financial work motivation (in addition to financial strain) in the consideration. Non-financial work motivation was measured by a scale based on a slightly modified version of the Work Involvement Questionnaire developed by Warr and colleagues (1979). The scale used in the article consists of six statements such as *‘Even if I won a great deal of money on the pools I would like to work somewhere’* and *‘I would soon get bored if I had no job’*. Financial strain was assessed by using a three-

variable scale including, for example the following question: *'Have you or has your family had difficulties in paying running costs, such as food and rent, during the past year?'*

Non-financial work motivation and financial strain are regarded as potential mediators between unemployment and experienced changes in wellbeing and family relationships. A strict precondition for the use of the term 'mediator' would be that a mediator variable is influenced by the independent variable (here unemployment) (see e.g., Baron and Kenny, 1985). In a cross-sectional approach, a path from the independent variable to the mediator cannot, however, be verified. In the article, the term has a more colloquial meaning and it is not required that unemployment has factually affected the work motivation of an individual. Actually, there is some indication that a person's work motivation may even decrease during unemployment. A potential explanation for this is that a person has succeeded in meeting psychosocial needs related to paid work within other life domains (Nordenmark, 1999a; 1999b). The basic expectation here is that the initial psychosocial importance of paid work is an important determinant of non-financial work motivation during unemployment. Then, those psychosocial needs that can no longer be met within the work domain become 'active' or 'visible' in the everyday life of an individual, and the part that is not met within the other life domains is the actual mediator between unemployment and wellbeing change. Considering financial strain as a mediator does not either mean that unemployment *per se* has caused all financial difficulties that the person or the family face. For a person who already had financial difficulties before unemployment, the effect is partially moderating and partially mediating, whereas it is entirely mediating for a person who did not have any financial difficulties before job loss. Financial strain was assessed by using a three-variable scale including, for example the following question: *'Have you or has your family had difficulties in paying running costs, such as food and rent, during the past year?'*

#### 5.4. *Methods*

Descriptive statistics (e.g., mean values and percentages) are used in all four articles to demonstrate the commonness of the aspects investigated in the countries or population groups under consideration. Binary logistic regression analysis (Article II), ordinal regression analysis (Article III) and analysis of (co)variance (Article IV) are also used. All the analyses are based on cross-sectional data. Cross-sectional comparisons provide highly useful information regarding the association between two variables. However, with regard to causality between the variables, conclusions cannot be based only on the analyses made (e.g., de Vaus, 2002; Moser and Kalton, 1985). One way to avoid this uncertainty regarding the direction of cause and effect is to determine the cause and effect by the question wording. This method is used in Articles II and IV.

When the causality can be quite reliably determined on the basis of earlier studies, or when it is otherwise highly probable that the causality is in a particular direction, it is here considered as known. When instead the causality is unclear, care is needed when interpreting the results obtained. This aspect concerns, for example, the relationship between policies and attitudes (Article I). Even if it is well founded to conclude that attitudes are affected by policies, there is also the possibility that attitudes have a bearing on policy formation and that the two mutually influence each other (e.g., Jo, 2010; Nordenmark, 2004). In addition to pre-existing theories and studies, real-life reasoning may suggest the most probable direction of cause and effect between two variables. It is, for example, more likely that long working days cause interference from work to family domain roles, than that adverse effects from work to family domain roles (e.g. having too little time for other family members) make a person work longer (Article III). In summary, although cross-sectional data does not give a 100 per cent certainty about the direction of cause and effect, it is often justified to consider the causality as known.

Cross-sectional comparisons that are based on self-reported data can also be criticised for the potential influence of negative affectivity on the outcomes. That is, when exposed to similar conditions, individuals who have a pessimistic disposition (a personality variable that involves the tendency to experience negative emotions) are more likely to report negative experiences than individuals who have an optimistic disposition. For example, in Article III, a pessimistic disposition could have the effect that a person perceives working conditions negatively (even when the conditions would not be that negative when objectively measured) and reports work-to-family interference. It can be noted, however, that working conditions may influence whether a person has a positive or a negative outlook, and a negative outlook may be the result of job strain (Spector et al., 2000: 89–90). Therefore, controlling for negative affectivity (not possible in this study) would probably lead to underestimations of shortcomings in working conditions. In any case, self-reported stress at work has been associated with extensive work-to-family interference regardless of an individual's level of negative affectivity (Stoeva et al., 2002).

In all four articles, the interest is on the subjective assessments, feelings and opinions of the mothers (and other respondents). Many factors intervene between the objective condition and an individual's perception of the condition (Lee and Marans, 1980), and therefore a subjective interpretation of a mother might not correlate with the objective situation. For example, a mother who values family time more than career progression may evaluate career consequences as smaller than they actually are (Article II). Nonetheless, subjective assessments provide valuable information about everyday life and the life quality of individuals and families. For example, how career consequences are perceived indicates how much mothers feel they sacrifice when they take care of their children at home (see Ejrnæs, 2011) and this might, in addition to the

life quality aspect, have a bearing on various decisions relating to family and work, thereby affecting society. By focusing on mothers' perceptions, this study provides a complementary aspect to earlier knowledge based mainly on objectively measured outcomes.

On the whole, taking into consideration the main aims of this thesis, the data and the methods can be regarded as adequate. However, due to the limitations described above, some of the findings are suggestive rather than conclusive; pointing out what should be investigated in future by using a greater sample size and/or longitudinal data.

## 6. RESULTS

What differentiates Finland from the other European countries included here is greater freedom to choose between maternal care at home and work participation for around two years after the parental leave period. Is this particularity, then, reflected in the attitudes of Finnish mothers, in the time they stay at home because of childcare and, further, in their subjective assessment of the negative career consequences related to time spent with children at home? Cross-country comparisons reported in Articles I and II are discussed here with the focus on these questions (Sections 6.1 and 6.2). In addition, a few amendments (not included in the articles) concerning Finnish mothers are included in the related sections. For Article III, the findings are discussed that in particular could have a bearing on the popularity of long home care periods in Finland. The results are divided into two sections. The first (6.3) concentrates on the work-related experiences of working mothers, and the second (6.4) on life satisfaction among both working and stay-at-home mothers. In the last section (6.5), the results regarding unemployment (article IV) are discussed.

### 6.1. *Attitudes of mothers towards cutting down on paid work (Article I)*

In light of the cross-national comparison, attitudes among Finnish mothers do not appear familialistic. Fewer than one in four of the Finnish mothers thought that a woman should be prepared to cut down on paid work for the sake of her family. Only in Sweden and Denmark were mothers less likely to agree with the statement (for further details, see the original article, Table 1, p. 14). The ‘leading position’ of the three Nordic countries basically supports expectations concerning the reflection of employment supportive defamilialization policies on mothers’ attitudes. In general, variation in the attitudes corresponds quite well with variation in the scores obtained for defamilialization. By contrast, in the cross-national comparison, mothers’ attitudes and behaviour do not correlate with each other. For the Nordic countries, the inconsistencies are clear, especially for Sweden and Finland. In these countries, attitudes are consistent with strong long-term defamilialization (day care and family leave policies), whereas behaviour is consistent with, and apparently affected by, short-term familialization (family leave) included in long-term defamilialization.

In Finland, a familialistic attitude was more common among mothers with infants than among mothers in general. A familialistic attitude around the time of short-term familialization can perhaps be understood, at least in part, as a response to the signalling effect of childcare policies regarding normatively appropriate behaviour in that specific life situation. Theoretically, the adaptation of attitudes to ongoing behaviour (e.g., Berrington et al., 2008) could also explain why so many mothers with a child under one year old thought that a woman should be prepared to cut down on

paid work. It is noteworthy, however, that an ongoing home care period did not have a marked role on the probability of a mother to report a familialistic attitude; around half of those mothers in Finland whose youngest child was one to two years old – i.e. mothers who were entitled to a child home care allowance – were at home at the time the data was collected, and the attitudes of these mothers did not markedly differ from those of Finnish mothers in general.<sup>15</sup> On the whole, the results regarding all mothers in Finland, and in particular those who had recently decided whether or not to prolong a child home care period (mothers whose youngest child was one or two years old, see above), suggest that the child home care allowance does not have a marked role on the attitudes of Finnish mothers. The possible importance of the allowance was evaluated further by taking a closer look at mothers who had stayed at home with their children for more than four years. These mothers more often reported a familialistic attitude than Finnish mothers in general (38.4% and 23.3% respectively, not shown in the article). The observed difference might indicate that the attitude of some mothers had changed during a prolonged home care period. On the other hand, it could also signify that mothers who previously had a familialistic attitude had acted in accordance with their attitudes. In any case, the majority of mothers in Finland who stayed at home with their children for a very long time reported a non-familialistic attitude. In countries where mothers were entitled to longer-term childcare leave, but not to unrestricted access to day care services, attitudes were generally more familialistic than in Finland. Since Finnish mothers are able to, but not obliged to, choose home care after the parental leave period, they probably see a long period of home care as a privilege or a free choice, instead of an obligation.

Summing up the main findings: 1) a marked variation between the investigated countries is found for mothers' attitudes, with the least familialistic attitudes in the three Nordic countries, and 2) no clear support is found for the importance of the child home care allowance on the attitudes of Finnish mothers; some signs of neofamilialism can be seen in the short-term behaviour of Finnish mothers, but the increased choice related to the child home care allowance does not, however, lead to familialistic attitudes.

## 6.2. *Perceived career consequences related to childcare at home (Article II)*

In each of the countries investigated, a minority of mothers thought that taking care of children at home had harmed their occupational career. There were, however, clear cross-country variations. Despite the relatively long duration of child home care, the

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<sup>15</sup> The detail wherein working mothers with the youngest child being one to two years old reported a familialistic attitude less often than did Finnish mothers in general suggests, however, that the decision to return to work may affect, or be affected by, attitudes.

perceived negative career consequences were less common in Finland than in the other countries. Fewer than one in five of the Finnish mothers reported negative consequences. Negative consequences were almost as rare in Denmark, whereas mothers in Sweden were somewhat less confident about the non-existence of career consequences (for further details, see the original article, Table 3, p. 1149). How long a mother had stayed at home with her children appeared to have more influence in Sweden than in the other two Nordic countries (for details, see the original article, Table 4, p. 1150).

Mothers in Finland who reported more than four years full-time care of children at home perceived negative career consequences more commonly than Finnish mothers in general (23.3% and 17.6% respectively). The difference between mothers who took very long home care and other mothers is, however, small when compared with corresponding differences in most other countries. This finding basically contradicts the idea suggesting negative effects of longer-term childcare leave on the occupational careers of Finnish mothers. It further suggests that lengthy periods spent with children at home might not markedly increase the risk of labour market marginalisation.<sup>16</sup> The low number of mothers, however, restricts the generalisation of the results obtained. Also noteworthy is that in the present study, child home care exceeding four years does not necessarily include three years of continuous childcare at home, which would be the most harmful for career prospects. Nevertheless, support for the conclusion (that there is no severely increased risk of detriment) can be found from official employment rates; in 2005, although the employment rate for mothers with children under three years old was among the lowest in Europe, for those mothers whose children were three years or older, it was among the highest (OECD, 2007; see also OECD, 2015).

Should one then conclude that the child home care allowance did not harm the careers of the mothers concerned. As long as the interest is focused on subjectively assessed career consequences, it would seem so. Subjective assessments might not, however, in all cases correlate well with the objective situation. A mother who values family time more than career progression may possibly evaluate career consequences as smaller than they actually are and a mother who values family time very high is likely to stay for a prolonged period at home. Therefore, despite the uncommonness of subjectively assessed career consequences and the high employment rates for Finnish

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<sup>16</sup> To obtain a broader understanding of this aspect, a closer look was taken at the 50 mothers who had stayed at home for more than four years because of childcare, and whose youngest child was three or older (not shown in the article). Of the mothers concerned, the majority (38) participated in paid work, a few (3) studied, and 6 were registered as unemployed. The major proportion of the mothers had thus found a place in the labour market.

mothers, one cannot conclude for sure that the child home care allowance was always entirely harmless.<sup>17</sup>

The results for Finland (and Denmark) are characterised by a marked difference between negative perceptions among mothers with infants and those whose youngest child was school age (for Finland, respectively around one in four and one in ten). There might be various explanations for the difference between the two groups. First, a mother who is still at home or has just recently returned to paid work might report expected rather than actual career consequences, and it is possible that these expected career consequences never materialise. Second, career consequences might be most evident after the child home care period and then even out over time. Objectively measured outcomes based on family wage gaps (e.g., Napari, 2010; Kellokumpu, 2015) support this latter explanation. In any case, if a mother does not report negative career consequences when her youngest child is of school age, she has either never perceived any negative consequences or the previously perceived consequences have been short-term and she has ‘forgotten’ them. The severity of career consequences perhaps affects how long a mother reports them after the career recovery.

In an ideal situation, the careers of all mothers would have recovered (in their mind) by the time the youngest child is of school age. This was not true for every tenth mother in Finland, and the circumstances affecting this require further consideration. In the cross-national comparison, however, the proportion of mothers reporting negative career consequences when the youngest child was of school age is notably low in Finland.

To obtain a broader understanding of mothers’ perceptions regarding the harmfulness of childcare at home, part-time work was included in the investigation. A basic hypothesis was that the option (enabled by childcare policies) to choose full-time work instead of part-time work decreases the perceived negative consequences related to part-time work. This hypothesis is largely supported by the results obtained. The smallest reported negative career consequences were found, again, in Finland and Denmark (for details see the original article Table 7, p. 1152). Swedish mothers reported career consequences somewhat more often, which can to some degree be understood in the light of different durations of part-time work. A further explanation could be a different selection of mothers into part-time work in these countries. When part-time work is almost the norm, as it is in Sweden, mothers who have high ambitions related to career progression, as well as the theoretical possibility to progress, may have chosen this option. A mother who has decided to work shorter

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<sup>17</sup> No matter whether or not career consequences do exist, mothers who stay for a very long time with their children at home are exposed to an increased risk of poverty later in life. Until the 2005 pension reform, a person receiving the child home care allowance remained outside the pension provisions (Hietaniemi and Ritola, 2007). Today, even if there is pension accrual during the childcare leave, the amount of that benefit is not comparable to that accrued for paid work participation (Finnish Centre for Pensions, 2018).



hours for a certain period probably will not apply for a new job during that time. Afterwards, she may then think that her choice to work shorter hours has delayed her career progression. On the other hand, many of the mothers in Sweden who had turned to part-time work had stayed at home for a relatively long time and the experiences related to these two types of care at home are connected with each other. A mother who reduces her regular working hours immediately after the full-time home care period cannot perhaps afterwards determine which one (full-time care or part-time work) was the foremost reason for a delayed career progression and holds them both responsible. This might provide a partial explanation for the observed differences between Finland and Sweden, even in general. By using data from one point in time it cannot be concluded, however, whether (and how) participation in one type of care at home affects experiences related to the other type of care. This aspect needs further consideration. Another aspect that could not be differentiated is the nature of part-time work. A mother who reduces her regular working hours is entitled to return to full hours after the intended part-time work period. However, a mother who did not have a regular (permanent) full-time job before the birth of the child might not find one after the voluntary part-time work period and might find herself in involuntary part-time work once she is prepared to work full hours (for part-time unemployment, see e.g. Haataja et al., 2011).

As stated, in certain respects, the results obtained are suggestive and cannot be generalised to all mothers with the same attributes. The results, however, strongly suggest that self-assessed negative career consequences related to childcare at home are relatively uncommon in Finland, regardless of whether the interest is on full-time care at home or on part-time work. This is most probably connected with the opportunities for mothers to adjust the length of time they take care of their children at home to suit their plans and the opportunities related to career progression and position at work. This also applies to mothers whose choice was affected by an inadequate supply of jobs. The possibility to prolong child home care provides an alternative identity to that of (long-term) unemployed, and this alternative identity has, perhaps, been regarded as beneficial in a job search situation.

In summary, compared with mothers in most other countries, Finnish mothers rarely perceived negative career consequences. Even those who had stayed at home with their children for a very long period did not seem to have markedly suffered from this choice. Thus, with regard to the subjective equality between mothers and childless women, time spent with children at home does not seem to have a marked eroding role.

### 6.3. *Working conditions and work-to-family interference (Article III)*

As discussed above (Section 2.1), reconciliation of motherhood with paid work may produce both plusses and minuses with regard to a mother's wellbeing and her family

life. In this article, the foremost interest is on minuses. Focused are interferences from work to family domain roles. Such interferences are not only a matter of life quality among employed mothers but, as already mentioned (Section 2.4), could increase the attractiveness of child home care with a prolonged duration.

Interference from a mother's work to the home domain in general appears not especially common in Finland. However, Finnish mothers reported detrimental effects concerning other family members more commonly than mothers in the other countries examined. More precisely, they more often felt that their work prevented them from spending the time they would like with their family members, and that family members were fed up with the pressures of their work (for details, see the original article Table 1, p. 79). Almost three quarters of Finnish mothers experienced the first mentioned (time based) and more than half the second mentioned (strain based) interference, at least sometimes. The first mentioned interference was a regular experience for one in every three of the mothers and the second mentioned was often or always experienced by more than one in ten.

With regard to work characteristics, there were several advantages for Finnish mothers compared with mothers in all, or almost all, of the other investigated countries. These advantages include the opportunities to influence the organisation of work, to change or choose the pace of work and to decide when to start and finish work (for details, see the original article Table 2, p. 82). On the other hand, Finnish mothers reported longer working hours than those in most other countries. Atypical working hours and work contracts with a limited duration were also reported more commonly by Finnish mothers than those in all, or in almost all, the other countries. Of these characteristics, long working hours explain time-based interference from work to family members. Until other aspects of work were controlled for, atypical working hours also explained interference. Atypical working hours may refer to shift work or may indicate the inability of an employee to complete work tasks within regular working hours, thereby extending weekly working hours. In the latter case, atypical working hours can be seen as a response of an employee to time pressure at work. Time pressure increased both time- and strain-based interference. Job (in)security, by contrast, is not among the factors explaining work-to-family interference. This could possibly be related to the different responses of individuals to stress caused by an insecure work situation; whereas some women might try to cope by increasing the effort put into work (increasing interference), others might respond to job insecurity by withdrawing psychologically from their work (decreasing interference; see Kinnunen and Mauno, 1998). Of course, for some of the investigated mothers, casual work might have been an intended option with the purpose of leaving more time and energy for the family.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> In addition to the selected work characteristics, the age of a mother, age of the youngest child, number of children, family type, and the mother's education were tested (for further information, see the original article, the Table 3 markings on page 83).

Because of the many similarities in day care policies, along with different working patterns among mothers with small children, Sweden is an especially interesting country to compare Finland with. However, because the investigation also includes mothers whose youngest child was somewhat older (up to 12), the difference between the average weekly working hours for mothers in the two countries was only around two hours. Longer working hours only partially explained why Finnish mothers more often than Swedish mothers felt that their job prevents them from giving the time they want to their partner or family. In view of the fact that the two types of interference are connected, a further explanation might possibly be related to the higher prevalence of strain-based interference in Finland. Why Finnish mothers experienced strain-based interference more commonly than Swedish mothers, is not revealed by the analyses.

Finding work mentally burdensome has been connected with an increasing, widening and exacerbation of work tasks (Lehto and Sutela 2008: 66–67; Lehto et al., 2015). The present study includes time pressure, but not qualitative work overload in the cognitive or emotional demands of work that is exceeding one's capabilities or resources. According to the results that were obtained, the vast majority of Finnish mothers gain social support from their co-workers when they feel they need it, and this respite should, at least to some extent, diminish stress they feel caused by any overly demanding work (Karasek et al., 1982). A buffering effect of social support was found for strain-based interference. Nevertheless, the positive aspects of interpersonal relationships do not rule out the existence of negative aspects, such as bullying and harassment (e.g., Parent-Thirion, 2007), and such negative aspects are something that might cause emotional strain for employees (e.g., Lehto et al., 2015).

Theoretically, all the conditions at work that have been associated with work stress, or with work stress related disorders (for more detail see e.g., Nieuwenhuijsen et al., 2010), could be explanatory factors for negative spillover from work to family roles. Therefore, a greater number of working conditions in the analyses could possibly have revealed why Finnish mothers experienced interference from work to family members more commonly than other investigated mothers in general. On the other hand, based only on mothers' perceptions, it cannot be concluded that Finnish mothers had actually spent less time with family members than those in the other countries, or that their family members had been fed up with the pressures of their work more often than family members in the other countries. An alternative explanation could be that mothers in Finland are more sensitive to perceiving and reporting detrimental effects of work that concern their family members. It could even be considered that the child home care allowance, or discussions that concern the best interests of the child, have affected Finnish mothers so that they have become more conscious of the detrimental effects of work, in particular regarding children. The detail that interference from work to family members was common not only among mothers, but also among fathers in Finland, could potentially be related to the 'new familistic' values (e.g., Jallinoja,

2006). That is to say, these ‘new familistic’ values are perhaps being reflected in the ideals of Finnish parents regarding family time. Yet, as stated here, all the different work characteristics that could produce work-to-family member interference were not included in these analyses. In any case, negative effects are perceived not only by parents but also by children in Finland. As reported in a study regarding nine to ten year old children, around half of them wished for some changes to their parents’ working life, while most of the children wanted more time with their parents (Vasikkaniemi, 2013).

The present study reveals, even now, a few working conditions that should be taken into consideration when organising mothers’ work. First, slightly shorter working hours could decrease time-based interference from work to family. Second, both time-based and strain-based interference could be decreased by reducing time pressure at work. Although time pressure was not shown to be more common among Finnish mothers than among the others on average, it was too common; almost half of the Finnish mothers thought that they did not have enough time to get everything done at work. On the whole, the present study underlines the importance of organising work so that it is sufficiently employee and family friendly. In practice, it should be ensured that mothers have adequate opportunities to reduce their working hours, that they do not have to cope with too much time pressure at work and that they have adequate support when the qualitative or quantitative demands of work surpasses their skills or resources. Challenges are thus posed with regard to work legislation as well as to the supervisors of the mothers.

Overall, the present study reveals only some work-related circumstances that could have increased the appeal of long home care periods particularly in Finland; interference from work to family is notable in this respect. This interference is common among both mothers and fathers in Finland. Eventually, in particular in families where both parents experience work interfering with family roles, a practical solution can be that out of the two parents, the one who earns less (typically the mother, see Korkeamäki and Kyyrä, 2005) withdraws temporarily from work.

Do difficulties in the reconciliation of parenthood with paid work increase the probability of a mother staying at home for a prolonged period? Earlier studies touching on this subject have mainly included mothers (or parents) who stay or have recently stayed at home with a child for a long time (e.g., Närvi, 2014b; Repo, 2007; 2010). Based on these earlier findings, difficulties related to reconciliation may increase the attractiveness of long home care periods. For example, some of the parents pointed out that by taking care of their children at home they avoided challenges related to the everyday life of families where both parents work, such as rushing to the day care centre in the morning and rushing back to pick up the children in the afternoon (Repo, 2007; 2010). A further advantage reported by many parents was the greater amount of time spent with their children. Studies including only mothers (or

parents) who chose to stay at home for a prolonged period do not verify, however, that these mothers (or parents) actually experienced (or expected to experience) detrimental effects more commonly than those who did not choose the child home care allowance or only chose to take it for a short time.

A longitudinal approach would be needed to more reliably discern the importance of the precise interference included in the present study (lack of time for other family members and family members getting fed up with the pressures of work) on a selection of mothers to long home care periods. In particular, it would be of interest to see whether the influence of experienced (or expected) interference depends on the career orientation of a mother, or on some other characteristics that vary between mothers and families.

#### 6.4. *Life satisfaction (Article III)*

Except for interference from work to family and the opportunity to choose when to start and finish work, life satisfaction among Finnish mothers is shown to be practically independent of circumstances related to work.<sup>19</sup> Neither did it make any difference whether a mother participated in paid work or was taking care of a child at home. Life satisfaction among both groups of Finnish mothers was higher than among the investigated mothers in general, and somewhat higher than among the included Finnish reference groups (e.g., working women with no children, for details see the original article, Table 5, p. 85). The fact that both working and stay-at-home mothers stated they were satisfied with their life can perhaps be seen as an indication that Finnish childcare policies have succeeded in promoting preferred work and care situations, as well as the financial wellbeing of families. It could obviously also signify that children and family are important sources of life satisfaction among Finnish women in general.

To be able to definitively conclude how much a particular work–care situation affects a person’s life satisfaction, it is necessary to know how satisfied that person was before the particular work–care situation. Even so, it can be clearly seen that mothers in Finland who stayed at home with their children were satisfied with their life<sup>20</sup>. Childcare policies may have influenced the life satisfaction of these mothers through various ways, even by facilitating child bearing. In particular, when opportunities on the labour market are scarce, having a child may bring with it meaning and continuity

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<sup>19</sup> With regard to the option to choose the pace of work, a positive connection was very close to statistical significance.

<sup>20</sup> Mothers who stayed at home with a one or two year old child, i.e. mothers who received the child home care allowance, appeared to be the most satisfied. The difference between the mean value for these mothers and all the mothers was, however, small: 8.7 and 8.5, respectively, when the maximum value was 10.

in life (Sutela, 2013: 161), as well as a status and a justification for non-participation in paid work.

Lastly, it can be briefly speculated as to why the working conditions included did not have more bearing on life satisfaction. Some answers might possibly lie in the foundations of life satisfaction. First, satisfaction is mostly a matter of comparing life as it is, to standards of how life 'should be' (Veenhoven, 1991) and the latter might be related to the commonness of the overall condition in question in society or among the peer group. Second, the overall evaluation of life does not depend only on comparisons, but also on how one feels affectively (Veenhoven, 1991); and in working life, negative and positive feelings may arise concurrently. For example, an imbalance between work tasks and regular working hours increases the likelihood of experiencing time pressure and related emotional strain. At the same time, a person who experiences time pressure may experience positive feelings such as feelings of accomplishment and success (cf. needs for self-actualisation, self-respect and respect from others; Maslow, 1954) each time a work task is successfully completed, and these positive feelings may soften the effect of negative feelings on the overall evaluation of life.<sup>21</sup> A further explanation for the weak connections between working conditions and life satisfaction might lie in the high value women (and men) in Finland place on children and family when weighing up sources for a good life (Pekkola and Lehtonen, 2015; see also e.g., Jallinoja, 2009). The vast majority of Finnish mothers consider that family life gives them the strength they need in working life (Sutela and Lehto, 2014). Among some of the investigated mothers there was possibly a positive spillover between family and work. That is, when needs important to wellbeing are met within the home domain, positive emotions related to home are reflected in the work domain roles, so that unfavourable working conditions do not markedly reduce a person's life satisfaction. However, when family time is hampered because of work, positive emotions may be restricted. The working mothers in the most unfavourable situation were those whose work interfered with family roles. This is in line with earlier findings (e.g., Martikainen, 2006) and underlines the importance of interventions that reduce work-to-family interference.

### 6.5. *Unemployment and family (Article IV)*

As discussed above (Section 2.3), the wellbeing of an unemployed individual may be severely endangered by a loss of earned income, meaningful activities and a worker's identity. On the other hand, even if work is generally good for wellbeing, various

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<sup>21</sup> In knowledge work in particular, many employees suffer from continuous time pressure, are emotionally stressed and work overtime, but at the same time find their work interesting and satisfying. Despite the positive feelings, prolonged work overload may lead to stress-related disorders and finally work exhaustion (Pyöriä, 2002).

psychosocial aspects of work can also endanger a person's wellbeing (e.g., Waddell and Burton, 2006). Participation in paid work may have the effect that a person does not have enough time for other family members, and family members may be troubled by the pressures of a person's work (Article III). In the fourth article, the focus is on unemployed individuals' perceptions regarding the consequences of unemployment on their wellbeing and their relationships with other family members. The main aim was to examine whether a family can substitute for paid work among unemployed women in Finland. By including women in different family situations in the analysis, it was possible to evaluate the importance of family related identities (mother and wife) and family responsibilities on the experience of unemployment. To discern the importance of female gender, the results for Finnish women were compared with the corresponding results for Finnish men.

Based on the analyses, the family situation is not decisive for how the consequences of unemployment are experienced. Men reported a negative change in wellbeing more commonly than women, but this difference could not be explained by the different effect of family on women and men. It was also found that unemployment is not necessarily a negative experience. This applies especially to the relationship between a mother and her child or children. More than half of the investigated mothers considered that the effect of unemployment on the mother-child relationship had been positive. Only one in seven reported a negative effect (for further details, see the original article Table 1, p. 376).

One probable explanation for the experienced positive 'net effect' of unemployment on the mother-child relationship is increased family time (Jönsson, 2001). Increased family time could possibly also provide a partial explanation for the lacking connection between financial strain and experienced change. By restricting the opportunities of all family members to participate in activities and hobbies outside the home, a lack of money perhaps increases common activities between mothers and their children. It is important to note, however, that the uncommonness of negative changes in mother-child relationships does not mean that the majority of children are protected from the negative effects of a mother's unemployment. By affecting an unemployed mothers' wellbeing and/or the relationship between the parents, unemployment influences the atmosphere at home. In families where unemployment leads to financial hardship, it may also have a direct effect on children's wellbeing (e.g. nutrition and the inability to participate in activities and hobbies that were previously important). Children's economic inequality, at worst, can lead to discrimination by peers, exclusion and bullying (Hakovirta and Rantalaiho, 2012).

In some cases, a positive effect on family relationships may suggest that unemployment has ended previous interference from work to family members. Nevertheless, based on experienced changes in wellbeing (see above), family domain identities or family responsibilities cannot be regarded as serious substitutes for

identities and responsibilities related to paid work, at least not to the extent that would exceed the advantages individuals in non-family situations have when they are unemployed. Whereas family identities and family responsibilities may play a certain role in the fulfilment of psychosocial needs important for wellbeing among unemployed mothers, unemployed single women avoid the financial pressures and 'moral' responsibilities related to the subsistence of other family members. They also have better opportunities to look for employment outside the local region and therefore, at least in theory, more positive scenarios.

Although the majority of the Finnish women reported either unchanged or improved wellbeing, one in three of them considered their wellbeing had deteriorated because of unemployment. Financial strain and non-financial work motivation explain negative change. The results obtained suggest that lone mothers in particular could benefit from interventions that are aimed at reducing financial strain. However, it would be at least as important to secure the supply of jobs. This would be of primary importance to those people with a high non-financial motivation to work. The strength of a person's work motivation did not depend on gender or the family situation.



## 7. SUMMARY OF RESULTS AND CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

This chapter sums up the main findings of the four articles included in the thesis (Section 7.1) and examines policy implications. As the influences of policy decisions are not only restricted to mothers, other viewpoints are also noted (Section 7.2). In key conclusions, the focus is on childcare policies, in particular on the child home care allowance scheme. The commonly debated need to reform the scheme is deliberated in the light of the findings of this thesis (Section 7.3).

### 7.1. *Main findings*

In addition to the quality of life in the work and care situations included, possible indications of neofamilialism are evaluated in this thesis. The long home care periods enabled by the child home care allowance have raised concerns regarding the position of women at work and at home. It has even been stated that, in place of the gender-equal policies still pursued in the other Nordic countries included here, Finland has taken a turn towards neofamilialism. Through mothers' attitudes and their behaviour related to childcare at home, the present study provides an opportunity to evaluate whether neofamilialism is found in Finnish society. With regard to the attitudes, the only group of mothers that could be ascribed as familialistic is composed of those whose children were less than one year old (Table 3). More than half of these mothers considered that a woman should be prepared to cut down on her paid work for the sake of her family. With regard to behaviour, the findings show clear inconsistency. Concerning full-time care of children at home, Finnish mothers were more familialistic than were mothers in most other countries. By contrast, a relatively small proportion of them had reduced their working hours. In light of these results, *Finland cannot be ascribed as particularly (neo)familialistic.*

The experiences of mothers relating to unemployment further contradict the idea of generalised neofamilialism in Finnish society. Concepts focusing on traditional gender roles suggest that women have better opportunities than men to cope with unemployment because they can better compensate for identities and activities related to paid work within the family domain. This traditional viewpoint is not supported by the results obtained. Although mothers reported an improved relationship with children more often than fathers did, the family situation was not decisive for the experienced effect of unemployment on unemployed women's wellbeing (Table 3). Therefore, it can be concluded that family domain identities or family responsibilities cannot be regarded as serious substitutes for identities and responsibilities related to paid work among unemployed women in Finland, at least not to an extent that exceeds the advantages that individuals in non-family situations have.

Even if mothers in Finland had stayed at home with their children for a relatively long time, they did not report much related detrimental effects (Table 3). Negative consequences on occupational careers were perceived less commonly than in the other investigated countries, and mothers who took care of their children at home at the time of data collection were satisfied with their life. Similarly to stay-at-home mothers, working mothers were also satisfied with their life. At the same time, however, they more frequently reported detrimental effects of work that concerned other family members compared with mothers in the other countries investigated. Almost three quarters of the Finnish mothers felt at least sometimes that their work prevented them from spending the time they would like to with their family members, and more than half considered that their family members were fed up with the pressures of their work. The first-mentioned interference was a regular experience for one in every three of the mothers, and the second mentioned for more than one in every ten.

There were several advantages in the working conditions for Finnish mothers compared with mothers in all, or almost all, of the other investigated countries (Table 3). Among these advantages was, for example, the opportunity to decide when to start or finish work. Apart from long working hours, the analyses do not reveal other characteristics of work that could explain why Finnish mothers reported work-to-family interference more often than mothers in, for example, Sweden. The excessive interference reported by Finnish mothers might be partially unrelated to (differences regarding) work. It could for example be suggested that Finnish mothers are more conscious of the negative effects of work that concern their family members. On the other hand, all the conditions that might hamper the successful reconciliation of motherhood and paid work could not be included in the analyses. Regardless of this, the perceptions of mothers regarding work interfering with family members should not be ignored. In addition to the fact that perceived interference hints that family members are bothered by the situation, mothers may, according to the results obtained, become less satisfied with their life when they find that their family members, or activities with family members, are adversely affected by their work.

**Table 3.** Key findings for the included work and care situations.

	Relative commonness/ length/level in a European comparison	Connected with	Policy recommendations/ main conclusion
<p><b>Home/Child home care</b></p> <p><u>A familialistic attitude</u></p> <p><u>Duration of home care</u> <i>Full time</i> <i>Part time</i></p> <p><u>Perceived negative career consequences</u> <i>Full-time care</i></p> <p><i>Part-time work</i></p> <p><u>Life satisfaction</u></p>	<p>Uncommon (except for mothers with infants)</p> <p>Long Short (Uncommon)</p> <p>Uncommon</p> <p>Uncommon</p> <p>High</p>	<p>Age of the youngest child (Duration of care)</p>	<p>No support for such reforms (child home care allowance) that would decrease a mother's choice.</p> <p>An idea of a longer- term childcare leave differentiating Finland from the other social democratic welfare regime countries was not supported overall</p>
<p><b>Work participation</b></p> <p><u>Working conditions</u> Working hours Time pressure Contractual job insecurity Subjective job insecurity Atypical working hours Working time autonomy Work autonomy Social support</p> <p><u>Work-to-family interference</u> <i>General interference</i> <i>Involving other family members</i></p> <p><u>Life satisfaction</u></p>	<p>Long Not especially common Common Not especially common Common High High Common</p> <p>Not especially common Common</p> <p>High</p>	<p>Working hours Time pressure Social support Work-to-family interference Working time autonomy</p>	<p>Expanded support for reduced working hours</p> <p>Incentives for employers to reinforce work-family balance</p>
	Main finding	Connected with	Policy recommendation
<p><b>Unemployment</b></p> <p><u>Self-assessed changes</u> <i>Wellbeing</i></p> <p><i>Relationships with other family members</i></p>	<p>Family situation not decisive</p> <p>Positive effect on mother- child relationship</p>	<p>Non-financial work motivation Financial strain</p>	<p>Securing the supply of jobs Sufficient benefits</p>

## 7.2. Policy implications

The results obtained at one point in time might not in all respects be generalisable to a different time period. In particular, whenever data is collected some time ago, as in the present thesis, it is justifiable to ask whether there have been, or will be, marked changes in any of the context-specific settings. Even if there have been certain changes in Finnish childcare policies over time (Chapters 3 and 4), the main components have not changed; similarly for mothers examined here, mothers today are allowed to choose a child home care allowance instead of municipal day care for their small children. In working life, driven by, e.g., globalisation and technological development, there is indeed a process of change that is undergoing here. The increasingly expanding digitalisation and automatisisation is envisaged as affecting the number of jobs and also the quality of work, and yet the nature of that change is not clear in all respects (e.g., Brynjolfsson and McAfee, 2014; Dufva et al., 2017). In terms of future mothers, uncertainty about such changes casts doubt on the external validity of some of the findings of this thesis. Still, the unclear future of the nature of work also means that the future of that work can still be shaped. Taking this outlook, it is especially important to allow for both the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ features of work in terms of one’s subjective wellbeing and the best balance between work and family life.

Today, following a protracted financial crisis, the economy of Finland is growing once again. Despite this positive development, there are still challenges and pressures for implementing savings in welfare state spending (Finnish Government, 2017a and b). The policy implications presented here are based mainly on the analyses made here. Even if other standpoints are noticed, a priority is thus given to both the respondents’ subjective views and their subjective life quality.

The analyses reveal a few shortcomings that should be taken into consideration in policymaking (Table 3). With regard to *unemployment*, although the majority of the unemployed mothers reported either unchanged or improved wellbeing, a considerable proportion of them considered that their wellbeing had become worse because of unemployment. In particular, those mothers who had a strong non-financial motivation to work and those who struggled with financial difficulties reported diminished wellbeing.

A shorter duration for the well-compensated allowance period, as well as other cuts to benefits for people whose unemployment prolongs (Finnish Government, 2017a; Finnish Parliament, 2018a), undoubtedly increase the incentives for the unemployed to be swiftly re-employed. On the other hand, there is very little support for the idea that the real problem in a society with high unemployment is disincentives caused by too generous unemployment benefits or lack of motivation among the unemployed (e.g., Ervasti and Venetoklis 2010; Nordenmark, 1999b). When there are no (or not enough) jobs to apply for, cutting benefits will only bring with it negative consequences such as

increased poverty and decreased wellbeing among unemployed people and their families. In order to minimise such adverse effects, the chosen strategy should be adequately complemented with ‘softer’ unemployment policies; for example, subsidies for businesses that hire (long-term) unemployed and various ways to foster entrepreneurship (e.g., Finnish Government, 2016a; Finnish Parliament, 2018b; Valtioneuvoston kanslia, 2015b). The increasing social responsibility of businesses towards employees has also been brought up (see also MTV3uutiset, 2015). In general, since the risk of unemployed people ending up in a circle of unemployment periods and periods of short-term work contracts has increased (Soininen, 2015), it would be good to aim for methods that enable work attachment with a somewhat longer duration.

The other major problem (apart from unemployment issues) revealed by the analyses is *interference from work to family members*. Based on the results obtained, negative effects of work could be decreased by reducing working hours and by decreasing time pressure at work. With regard to working-time reduction, it would be important to ensure that there is a balance between work load and working hours. It would also be important to ensure that mothers have adequate opportunities to reduce their working hours without risking their position at work or the opportunities for career progression. Mostly, these conditions have to do with work legislation as well as employers.

In contrast to an earlier finding regarding Finnish mothers (Mauno, 1999), perceived job (in)security is not found here to be among the factors explaining the detrimental effects of work. It is noteworthy, however, that the findings obtained might not apply in view of the recently increased sense of insecurity (Sutela and Lehto, 2014; Pyöriä and Ojala, 2016b), especially not if the market dependence of individuals and families keeps increasing through weakening decommodification. In general, the ways policy reforms (e.g., Finnish Government, 2016b) are eventually organised will influence the work-related experiences of future mothers. Given that a considerable proportion of women in Finland work in public sector organisations, of particular importance are those reforms that involve for example healthcare and social services. Money-saving requirements and increased competition (outsourcing of services) carry a risk of work environment changes that are unfavourable for employees and their families.

What are then the possibilities for childcare policies to impede the negative effects of work? For those mothers whose youngest child is under three years old, the prevailing system provides an opportunity to concentrate merely on home domain roles, and thereby avoid interference from work to family and home. A further way would be by increasing the financial compensation related to work-time reduction. In particular, mothers who recurrently find they are neglecting family members because of work would benefit from shorter working hours. Basically, the same applies to Finnish fathers who also commonly reported work-to-family interference. Working-

time reduction might not, however, be an adequate solution for mothers whose youngest child is under three years old and who feel that such young children should be taken care of at home. The decision of the Finnish government *not* to reduce the maximum leave period available especially concerns these mothers (Valtioneuvosto, 2013; 2015). The law would have meant that some of these mothers would have been forced to act in a way that contradicts their beliefs regarding the best interests of their child or children.

Childcare policies have various targets, and these targets are partially incompatible. In policy decisions, the ultimate question is which of the targets are regarded as the most important. By reserving a substantial part of the family leave days (half of the childcare leave) exclusively for fathers, the intended law reform (Valtioneuvosto, 2013) aimed to facilitate equality between the genders. At the same time, however, mothers (families) were placed in unequal positions with regard to the choice between institutionalised care and home care for their young children. In particular, in families where the father's income is needed to sustain the family, it might not have been possible to take advantage of the whole leave period. *Gender equality or the opportunities for fathers to act in accordance with their preferences* are not among the aspects investigated in the present thesis. Based on earlier studies it seems, however, that many fathers in Finland would like to stay longer at home with children, but not at the cost of the mothers' right to stay at home (e.g., Laniola, 2014). This finding, together with other findings in this thesis, suggests that instead of restricting the choices of mothers, the choices of fathers could be widened.

The influences of policy reforms on *women's employment* and thereby public economics are not among the subjects of interest in the present thesis. According to one estimate, however, the child home care allowance in its current form leads to overly long withdrawals of mothers from paid work and, for the purpose of improving employment and thereby national wealth, the system should be reformed (e.g., Borg and Vartiainen, 2015). In a context of high unemployment, equal division of family leave days between the parents might not, however, markedly increase work participation among the mothers, at least not in the short term. Most probably, if the intended law revisions (Valtioneuvosto, 2013) had been implemented, many mothers would have continued child home care with the status of being unemployed instead of a stay-at-home mother.

To enhance gender equality, as well as mothers' employment and careers, different models for family leave have been suggested. Of these different alternative models, mothers most strongly disfavour the model that provides the shortest leave for them and the shortest leave in its entirety (Heinonen and Saarikallio-Torp, 2017). The model preferred most frequently comprises three six-month periods, of which one is reserved for the mother, one for the father, and one can be arranged the way the parents want. The leave periods can be used until the child is three years old, and outside these

parental leave periods, mothers are still entitled to the child home care allowance no matter whether or not the father takes his share of the leave (Salmi and Lammi-Taskula, 2010).<sup>22</sup> In addition to measures related to family leave policies, gender equality could be facilitated, for example, by increasing incentives for employers to support fathers' caring role (see, e.g., Eerola, 2015).

In the present thesis, the foremost interest is on mothers, but in policy decisions, all family members should be taken into consideration. Based on the convention on the rights of the child, the primary consideration should be *the best for children* whenever the decision concerns children (UNICEF, 2015). Esping-Andersen (2002; 2009) has linked the employment of both mothers and fathers with many plusses, including children's wellbeing. Mothers' contributions in the labour market not only reduce child poverty, but also increase the enrolment of children in early childhood education, which should promote social mobility. In Finland, the proportion of full-time, dual earner families out of all the families with children is already very high, and mothers' employment rates are also high (OECD, 2015). The only exceptions in the high rankings of Finland are those families and mothers whose youngest child is under three years old (OECD, 2015). How, then, would increasing work participation among mothers in these families (assuming work opportunities) affect children, and more importantly, would the advantages exceed the disadvantages? Although Esping-Andersen does not discuss the work-related experiences of working mothers that much, he recognises the importance of parents' time investment in their children, as well as the importance of low-stress employment when children are small (Esping-Andersen, 2002: 49–50). Finnish mothers more commonly than those in the other investigated countries considered that they did not have enough time for family members and that their family members were bothered with the pressures of their work. The working hours of Finnish mothers exceeded those of mothers in most other countries investigated. In light of these findings, increasing work participation among the mothers cannot be recommended. The idea of increasing the working time of either of the parents (e.g., Valtioneuvosto, 2016) cannot be generally supported. It not only disagrees with the results obtained, but also with EU-level recommendations. The prolonged economic crisis has increased the burden on many working parents in Europe, and therefore it has been put forward that it would be important to support working parents to be physically and emotionally available for their children (COFACE, 2015).

How then about early childhood education; another advantage linked to the work participation of both mothers and fathers? For the most part, this question has to do with education theory, as well as attachment theory, and is beyond the scope of this thesis. On the basis of other investigations, certain conclusions can, however, be made.

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<sup>22</sup> It has been suggested that in order to reduce expenditures, this model could be applied, but with slightly shorter parental leave periods (Eerola, 2015).

A positive link between day care and later education has been found when comparing children with a very late starting age (sometime after the age of three or never) with other children (earlier starting age; in particular around the age of two) born in 1989 and 1990 (Karhula et al., 2016). In this study, however, children's later education was connected with their parents' education level, ties to the labour market and incomes; a direct positive cognitive effect of day care on children could not be verified. During the years of recession, many families faced additional pressures and non-employment was often beyond a parent's own choice. Even in general, stress experienced by a parent may wear out the strengths needed in a parenting ('educating') role. This is worth noting when it comes to the decisions of municipalities regarding the reduction of daily care hours for children whose parents are non-employed. However, based on what is known to date (see also Hiilamo et al., 2015), increased work participation among mothers cannot generally be justified from an educational viewpoint.

The ultimate target of welfare state policies is the promotion of human wellbeing by means of promoting the social and economic welfare of individuals and families. This means that the value of other targets is eventually only instrumental, dependent on the extent to which the wellbeing of individuals and families is promoted. In particular at times of economic recession, economic growth (recovery) easily starts to dominate policy goals. From the viewpoint of human wellbeing this is, to a certain extent, justified. National economic prosperity is among the factors explaining cross-country differences in the subjective wellbeing of individuals, and the subjective wellbeing of individuals is markedly influenced by their opportunities to achieve a decent standard of living and to escape poverty (Böhnke, 2005). However, also of note are the possible sacrifices in the private and family life made by those citizens who contribute to the wealth by work participation. In policy decisions, apart from financial considerations, it is important to take into account how people experience their life in the work and care situations the decisions concern. In particular when children are involved, costs and benefits should be carefully calculated no matter whether the interest is on material (financial) conditions or immaterial conditions in terms of family time.

### *7.3. Key conclusions*

Finnish childcare policies are characterised by increased choice in terms of work participation and childcare at home. The adequacy of Finnish childcare policies is evaluated here in light of the mothers' domain related experiences. As family leave and day care policies set both constraints and facilitations for work participation and childcare at home, it is well founded to assume that the adequacy of these policies is reflected in the mothers' domain-related experiences.

In light of the results obtained, it can be concluded that as long as the focus is on the selected perceptions of mothers, the established (current) Finnish childcare policy



scheme appears to work quite well. In particular, the relatively rarely perceived negative career consequences – also among mothers who stayed at home with their children for a very long period – as well as the relatively high life satisfaction among both working and stay-at-home mothers support this conclusion. In all likelihood, the relatively rarely perceived negative career consequences, despite the long home care periods, have been made possible by the Finnish childcare policies that enable mothers to take their plans and possibilities related to paid work into consideration when choosing the duration of home care. Further, the option to choose child home care instead of unemployment might have increased the life satisfaction of some of the mothers. Nevertheless, when influenced by labour market constraints, child home care might not be ‘the real first choice’ of a mother. This underlines the importance of interventions that reduce unemployment.

The results of the present thesis underline overall the importance of a free choice between work participation and childcare at home. A reasonable cost and high quality of day care services – the cornerstone of defamilialization policies – is the foremost means to preserve the work opportunities of both mothers and fathers. In addition, the increased opportunity to choose reduced working hours – also for mothers (and fathers) whose children are three years old or older – is recommended. Working-time reduction might not be enough to reach an ideal work–family balance but would, however, be a good start. It should be complemented by openly discussing whether there is something else in the work environment that one should try to change. Employers could possibly be somehow rewarded for adopting employee and family friendly practices.

The child home care allowance system in its current form has been seen to operate against gender equality. In light of the results obtained, however, extensive reform of the system, assuming the reform would diminish a mother’s choices, cannot be recommended. As an alternative, gender equality could be enhanced by adopting a model that increases fathers’ choices without reducing those of mothers. If the system is reformed at some point in the future, not only increased flexibility in working life, but also non-maternal care arrangements that correspond – as far as possible – to what parents consider is best for their child, would help to reduce adverse outcomes as well as facilitate the desired ones.

In the case the system is reformed at some time in the future, it would be good to include perceived career consequences, perceived consequences on work–family balance and even the overall subjective quality of life (e.g., life satisfaction) in the considerations when contemplating the consequences. In any case, provided that the occurrence of part-time work (reduced working hours) keeps increasing (Sutela and Lehto, 2014), or if the work focus of mothers changes markedly in some other respects (e.g., Dufva et al., 2017), it would be appropriate to re-examine the perceived career consequences. The result obtained here can be regarded as suggestive, a more conclusive generalisation is hindered by the relatively low number of respondents. A

greater number of respondents and a longitudinal database would enable a closer consideration of this aspect, as well as the other aspects investigated in this thesis.

Lastly, despite the different routes regarding longer-term childcare leave, more similarities are revealed between Finland, and Denmark and Sweden, compared with Finland and the other included European countries offering all mothers longer-term childcare leave. Except for the relatively long durations of child home care, there were no other clear signs of neofamilialism in Finland. The idea that longer-term childcare leave differentiates Finland from the other social democratic welfare regime countries is not overall supported by the findings presented in this work.

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