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ARTICLE

Struggling to Make Ends Meet: Lone Mothers and Intergenerational Support in Sweden

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Economic divisions have deepened in Sweden in recent years, and lone mothers are one group where the poverty rate has increased most (Salonen 2014). At the same time, differences between the situations of lone mothers have also increased (Lundqvist 2014). As a consequence, intergenerational support from grandparents in terms of care and financial transfers are important (see also Halleröd 2008). This article is based on a qualitative study of lone mothers in Sweden and analyses the care and financial support provided by grandparents. This article poses the following questions: how is intergenerational support for lone mothers carried out; how do lone mothers experience this support; and how is this support negotiated in terms of dependency on grandparents? The article concludes that for the lone mothers in this study grandparental care arrangements are very important in enabling them to combine work and care. As for financial transactions, for some mothers they are crucial in making ends meet, while for others they mainly maintain a standard of living.

Introduction

Grandparents are important in the everyday lives of many families, providing financial, emotional and practical support. Although such support can be important for many, it is perhaps more crucial for lone parents, especially in times of social and economic change (Arber and Timonen 2012, pp. 5–6). Over the last 20 years, economic differences have increased between families with children in Sweden. While double-income, middle class families have a higher income and standard of living today than ten years ago, other social groups have experienced the opposite (Salonen 2014, p. 17). Approximately every fifth child between the age of 0 and 17 lives with a lone parent in Sweden, and the majority of single parent families are made up of children and mothers (Socialförsäkringsrapport 2009, p. 4). Lone mothers and families with a non-Swedish background are the two groups for whom the poverty rate has increased most (Salonen 2014, p. 7), with quantitative studies showing that their financial situation has remained stagnant since the early 1980s (Barnombudsmanen 2015; Välfärd 2009). At the same time, differences within the lone mother group have also increased (Lundqvist 2014). While some middle class mothers in full-time employment are able to make ends meet, many experience financial precarity, and rely on outside help to balance their income and outgoings. Although the financial situation for mothers differs, they are united in problems combining work and care (Alsarve 2015).

It has been argued that the presence and engagement of grandparents in child-rearing has been enabled in recent years due to increased life expectancy allowing them to be more emotionally and physically present in their children's and grandchildren's lives. In addition, grandparents tend to have more financial resources compared to previous generations (Halleröd 2008, p. 223; see also Bengtsson 2001). Intergenerational parenting may therefore present a potential solution in trying to solve the work-care dilemma (Hagestad 2006; Ciabattari 2007). The presence of grandparents could result in a closer relationship between grandparents, parents and children, but also in increased dependency and potential conflict (Bengtson 2001, p. 6; Mason, May and Clarke 2007; Arber and Timonen 2012).

Studying intergenerational relations is not new: as early as 1955, sociologist Peter Townsend (1957/1963) noted that many grandmothers were very involved in bringing up their grandchildren. Townsend's work has influenced many researchers; Sara Arber and Virpi Timonen (2012) argue that he was a pioneer for those who have come to advance the concept of "intergenerational solidarity" (see e.g. Bengtsson and Roberts 1991; Katz and Lowenstein 2010). The term intergenerational solidarity refers to a number of relationships of solidarity, including associational (staying in touch frequently), affectual (feelings towards family members), consensual (sharing the same attitudes), normative (valuing family coherence) and functional solidarity (practical support given or received). However, these relations of solidarity should not only be viewed positively: they can also generate conflict, ambivalence, and a lack of solidarity (Luescher and Pillemer 1998).

Although the presence of grandparents has been regarded as important for lone mothers in Sweden by several quantitative studies (see e.g. Björnberg and Latta 2007; Björnberg and Ekbrand 2008a; 2008b; Halleröd 2008), the way in which this support is carried out and experienced differs between different lone mother groups, and requires further qualitative analysis. In this article, I will look further at the practice of grandparents' functional solidarity in terms of care and money. I will ask what intergenerational support means to the lone mothers, and how dependency on grandparents is negotiated. I will also examine in what way this support varies according to class differences.

Lone mothers and intergenerational transfers in the Swedish welfare state

The need for intergenerational financial support from parents to children must be understood in relation to different welfare systems. Intergenerational financial transfers can act as key social support as well as complement or substitute other forms of welfare (Arber and Timonen 2012, pp. 5–6). In welfare states with generous support, family members have largely been released from having to support each other (Brandt and Deindl 2013, p. 236; Björnberg and Ekbrand 2008b). Nevertheless, researchers argue that private transfers are important even if the state provides

sufficient social services (Nilsen et al 2002; Attias-Donfut, Ogg and Wolff 2005; Brannen 2006; Halleröd 2008). Sweden can be described as a “social democratic welfare regime” with publicly funded and organized welfare state institutions, a social security system and general financial support. The purpose of the state funded support was to release families from dependency on and the good will of family members (Esping Andersen 1999).

Combining work and childcare can be problematic for two-parent households in Sweden, but it is especially challenging for lone mothers (Ciabattari 2007; Yazdanpanah 2008; Molander 2011; Minotte 2012). Many studies of two-parent households focus on how paid work and household work are balanced. Political solutions in Sweden have also focused mainly on couples with children and Swedish policies on gender equality have been designed as a “dual earner dual carer model” with the aim of enabling couples with children to combine and share paid work and childcare (Ahrne and Roman 1997; Leira 2002; Ellingsaeter and Leira 2006; Lundqvist 2011). This model has largely been achieved through the expansion of the welfare state: with public institutions such as nursery schools and day-care centres, a social security system with paid parental leave, and the possibility of reducing working hours until the child is eight years old (Esping-Andersen 1999; Bergqvist and Nyberg 2002). This led to what political scientist Helga Hernes has called a “women friendly welfare state” (Hernes 1987).

However, the extent to which this model is “women friendly” has been questioned in recent years (Leira 2002; Orloff 2009; Lundqvist 2011), as women remain the primary care givers, work part time to a greater extent, are paid less and do the majority of housework (Ellingsaeter and Leira 2006, p. 271; Roman and Peterson 2011; SCB 2012; Anving 2012). Over the last decade an increasingly flexible labour market has resulted in flexible working hours (e.g. starting and finishing between certain hours rather than at specific times), short-term contracts, temporary positions and hourly employments – the latter three being conditions that more often applies to low skilled jobs (LO & Svenskt näringsliv 2016). Altogether this means that work outside office hours no longer are exceptions (Hill 2008; Standing 2011). The

availability of day-care does not necessarily line up with irregular working hours, with day-care in Sweden usually available between 6am to 6pm. The increase in flexible and irregular working hours may therefore become an overwhelming barrier to solving the work/care dilemma – especially so in lone parent households.

In terms of class, lone mothers can be divided into two main groups: those who have a relatively high standard of living, and those who live under financially tight conditions. A high employment percentage is a major factor in reducing the poverty rate among lone mothers (Fritzell 2011). Compared to lone mothers in other European countries, rates of employment for lone parents in Sweden are high (Fritzell 2011). Nevertheless, lone mothers still dominate poverty statistics (Salonen 2014), with the Children's Ombudsman (Barnombudsmannen) concluding that among children living with a lone mother, 43% are in a financially vulnerable position (Barnombudsmannen 2015). Although social security is intended to be a safety net in case of unemployment, studies have shown that social security levels have not maintained parity with income (Palme 2002; Socialförsäkringsrapport 2009, p. 4).

The 1990s was a watershed for lone mothers as a group in Sweden, due to the rising unemployment rate and increased the risk of poverty. This was especially the case for lone mothers with a non-Swedish ethnic background and young working class mothers without a university education. The income level among lone parents decreased at the same time as compensation through social benefits fell and rules for means-tested benefits, such as housing benefits and income support, became stricter. From the mid-1990s until 2006 the proportion of lone parents on low income more than doubled from 13% to 29% according to the National Insurance Office, and the differences that deepened during the 1990s were cemented at the beginning of the 21st century (Socialförsäkringsrapport 2009, p. 7). This drastic increase points to a feminization of poverty that researchers in other contexts have been highlighting since the late 1970s (Pearce 1978; Mullan Harris 1993). On the other hand, lone mothers with a university degree and a secure career have not experienced a decrease in living conditions (Molander 2011; Lundqvist 2014). This is in line with the population in Sweden at large, where class differences have increased

over the last two decades (Salonen 2014, p. 12). Financial support from others, such as grandparents, will therefore possibly also have different meanings for lone mothers from contrasting financial backgrounds.

Method and material

The focus of the research project, 'Lone Mothers and Long Hours: Gender and Work in a New Welfare Regime' (VR 2011:5462) was to examine the challenges that different groups of Swedish lone mothers face when combining work and family in a flexible job market. For the study, we interviewed 39 mothers from different class and ethnic backgrounds (25 were classified as middle class/upper middle class and 14 as lower middle class/working class). The research team consisted of four researchers, two of whom conducted the fieldwork. For this article I have made a detailed analysis of the 14 interviews I conducted.

The 39 mothers were recruited via immigrant women's associations, NGOs, web forums for lone mothers (in all these cases we were permitted by those responsible to advertise on their websites and the mothers then contacted us), day-care centres, unions (after an article about the project interested mothers contacted us) and snowballing (where participants forwarded us to other potential participants). Although we expected some difficulties in contacting interviewees, the opposite turned out to be the case, with many mothers wanting tell their story.

To capture participants' experiences of what it meant to be a lone mother in Sweden today, we conducted semi-structured interviews. The interview guide consisted of a number of recurrent themes and questions but was also open to reflections and for the interviewee to bring up other issues that she found particularly important. It covered themes such as paid work, care work, work-family conflicts, the financial situation, social support and networks, and the path to lone motherhood. In order to encourage the interviewees to reflect more fully upon important relationships, emotional and practical support, we also used concentric circles (see e.g. Mason and Tipper 2008; Eldén 2013). The purpose of concentric circles is not only to capture important relationships, but also to examine in what ways they are important. Most of the interviews lasted around two hours, varying between 1.5 and

four hours. After each interview notes were taken. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim, and the women were later asked to approve and comment on the transcribed interviews. All interviews are anonymised: information on age, domicile, and sometimes children's gender and ages were changed.

The lone mothers in the study constituted a very diverse group (see also Rowlingson and McKay 2005; May 2010) with the common criteria that they all had caring responsibilities for children up to 18 years of age, and that they were bringing up their child(ren) without a resident partner. Of the 14 mothers in the detailed analysis, ten were the main caretaker and one shared the caregiving responsibility to some extent (the children sometimes visited their father during holidays). The remaining three shared caregiving responsibilities evenly. In eight cases grandparents' roles were identified as important. However, grandparents were not the only significant others mentioned: friends, neighbours and other relatives were important (see Alsarve 2015). Nonetheless, the women's own parents held a particularly important position in terms of care and financial support.

The number of children varied from one to three (from a few weeks old to 18 years), and the women also ranged in age (24–48). They lived in different areas of the country, both rural and urban. Their stories of how they ended up as lone mothers also differed: some were lone mothers from the time their children were born, while others had divorced their partner. One woman, out of the 14, had become a mother by assisted donor insemination (1984).

In line with Bourdieu's definition of class, the mothers' class is understood here not only in relation to their financial resources but also their educational background and position in the labour market. Of the 14 mothers, nine had a higher level of education (university degree) and a job that demanded that level of education, or a managerial position. They often worked office hours and most often had the option of flexitime. This group is classified as upper middle class/middle class (subsequently middle class). Five mothers had no university education and were in low skilled jobs with often insecure employment. In several cases they were employed by the hour or on temporary contracts. This group classified as lower middle class/working class

(henceforth working class). Two of the mothers in this group were studying to obtain a formal qualification at the same time as they were working part time; one was unemployed at the time of interview. In terms of ethnicity, a majority of the women were born and raised in Sweden; one had a parent from a non-European country and two were born outside Europe.

The group of mothers is also diverse in the sense that they have different experiences, backgrounds and understandings of what it means to be “lone”. Some of the women called themselves lone mothers, while others preferred not to use this term. Sociologist Vanessa May writes of defining the category ‘lone mother’ not on the assumption that all lone mothers are ‘alike’, but rather on the basis of the structural conditions that categorize them as ‘lone mothers’ (May 2010, p. 434). In line with May I have in this article decided to use the term ‘lone mothers’ to refer to women who have brought up children and live without a resident partner.

Discussion: Grandparents, care and intergenerational transfers

In the interviews, participants’ parents were often identified as playing an importance role in balancing employment, financial, and caring responsibilities, as well as providing participants with emotional support. In the discussion below the focus is primarily on functional solidarity (supporting and delivering childcare) and financial transactions from parents to children. The analysis is divided into three parts. In the first two parts I discuss the two main areas in which grandparental support was of particular importance: care and financial transactions (goods and money). Thirdly, I will discuss how the different forms of support are understood and related to by the lone mothers and how this may differ by class.

Grandparents’ care

This section focuses on the care work (functional solidarity) that grandparents helped with. This includes both practical and regular care work, and less regular and non-existent grandparental care.

An increasingly flexible labour market with work outside office hours, short-term contracts and short-term notice of working, combined with a lack of day care

outside office hours, can result in lone mothers being prevented from taking certain jobs (Lundqvist 2014). Thus the possibility to work irregular hours and take care of children often depends on outside support. Geographical proximity is necessary as grandparents are to deliver care regularly. Some of the women in this study lived close to their parents before they had children, but several moved closer after becoming a lone mother. Susanna, a truck driver employed by the hour, had an eight-year-old child and moved closer to her mother after becoming a lone parent. Moving to her mother's village meant moving further from schools, grocery stores and friends; nevertheless, she said that moving closer to her mother had "saved her". Working as a truck driver meant that she often had to work long hours and was not always sure when she would be home in the evening. Without her mother's help to drop off and pick up her son from school, leaving him at her mother's when she had to start work early, she would not have been able to keep working. They usually also ate at her mother's several times a week.

In contrast to this some important forms of care were performed irregularly. Yasmine had emigrated from the Ukraine and had lived in Sweden for almost seven years. She had one child and was an economist by education; however, could not get such employment in Sweden and had therefore decided to train to become a chef. When we met, she was training and working extra shifts at a restaurant. In spite of this, her financial situation was very tight. Talking about her life with her child, she said:

So no, I don't like weekends because it's hard for me to come up with something fun to do, partly because I don't have any [money] [. . .] I don't have much left over to go somewhere or. . . Yes, sometimes we visit friends of course, that doesn't cost anything [laughs] and. . . Sometimes his [paternal] grandmother comes to visit and, or we go to grandma, or. . .

[author's parenthesis]

Financial limitation results in radically reduced possibilities for leisure time activities. For Yasmine, visiting grandparents formed an opportunity to spend leisure time

with her son and received some help delivering care to her child, despite the cost of travel. Yasmine spoke of this kind of irregular grandparental help as important to her, as a form of care and cheap activity that lessened her burden.

While regular and irregular care was regarded as very important by the mothers, unwillingness to be involved in caregiving by grandparents was identified as a source of conflict between mothers and grandmothers. Olga, who had a teenage daughter and worked full time for a worker's union, mentioned that her mother had sometimes helped her when her daughter was young. However, she also stated that she would have liked more care and support than she received:

So she did help out when she could, but it was also like, no, not now. And so we had some fights, and I thought, you are soon retiring, they don't care if you take some time off work, what does that matter?

Olga's mother's decision not to help her as much as Olga wished was a source of conflict and upset. Olga made a distinction between their careers, defining her own as more important since her mother was older. The fact that her mother was not there when Olga needed her was something that she was still upset about.

Ulla, who had two-year-old twins, had a similar experience:

[S]he would take care of the kids here [...] just an hour or so, sometime, but... But when she doesn't really want to set a week beforehand, then I feel that (laughs) [...] [T]hen it didn't feel really reliable, [...] then I felt that, that, then I will solve it another way, sort of.

Ulla's mother was retired and had just fallen ill. They had previously talked about Ulla's mother coming to help, but as she did not want to set a specific time, Ulla concluded that her mother did not want to take care of her grandchildren. Therefore, she stopped asking her to come. Analysing Ulla and Olga's experiences, it seems as if intergenerational support from parent to child must also be understood in relation to grandparents' potential absence, as talking about the absence made the wish for presence visible (see also Herlofson and Hagestad 2012).

In some cases intergenerational support was necessary for mothers to continue in the workplace. In the case of Susanna, it was essential: without her mother's care and support she would not have been able to continue working at all. For others the support gave them a well-needed break from caring for their children. Care support could be transformed into financial resources through being able to take on more work (Alsarve 2015), but it could also just be a form of support that made everyday life a little easier.

The support given was highly gendered and in most cases it was the women's mothers who provided different forms of care, and it was also most often their care that was missed when not present, as in the case of Ulla and Olga (see also Björnberg and Ekbrandh 2008b, p. 255; Yazdanpanah 2008). Interviewees also related that there was a tacit understanding that parents ought to help their children when in need; when they do not do so it is regarded as a break in a moral guideline between parents and children (see e.g. Finch and Mason 1993). However, as we shall see below, receiving different forms of support can also lead to feelings of indebtedness.

Grandparents and financial support

In the interviews, financial insecurity was identified as a source of stress in everyday life by most mothers. However, these experiences differed in relation to their position in the labour market and their and their parents' class position. In the following section, grandparental financial support has been divided into two categories: indirect (buying goods such as clothes and toys) and direct financial support (money).

Indirect financial support was important for many of the mothers (see also Yazdanpanah 2008, p. 108 ff.), especially those in financial distress. Wilma was a university student with a four-year-old child, supporting herself and her child with student loans and spousal maintenance. She also worked part time to supplement this income. In spite of this, her financial situation was difficult. Her child had very sporadic contact with his father, and Wilma's own parents lived far away. They did come to visit her and their grandchild as often as they could, but they did not earn much, meaning that they could not travel often. Nevertheless, they supported her whenever possible. Talking about her father, Wilma says:

Sometimes he helps me when I have to buy winter clothes and such things. So, yes, he does. And he quite often puts money into my account so that I can buy things for my child or, like, he's said that if he doesn't need something then I can take it for myself. So he has helped me a lot really.

Wilma identified this support as both emotionally and practically important. Although the amount of money her father put into her account was insufficient to cover her rent or other major expenses, it did constitute an important extra income and she expressed her gratitude towards him several times in the interview. The flow of resources differed widely between the groups of lone mothers and Wilma's situation is not comparable to some of the other mothers from middle or upper middle class families.

Olivia came from an upper middle class background. She had one child who was five years old and was pregnant with her second child, but was no longer together with the unborn child's father. She had been a lone mother since her first child was very young. Olivia ran her own business but her income from the business went up and down depending on the time of the year. Despite this she had been able to keep running her business, thanks to her parents. She explained:

And then it is manageable when you have parents like mine, who have been incredibly generous and who are my lifeline. It's not like they saved me only once, it's like 48,000 times. They are like [laughs], I have lost count. [Long pause] It, it's for good and bad. Because it's like, yes, but if it really, if it really goes to hell, they are. . . [. . .] I have been pretty determined, that I want to be on my own, but then when you are in, like this winter it has been very hard, financially, because it has been much worse here.

The financial situation of Olivia's parents was very important in enabling her to keep running her store and thus also support herself for the most part. Even though later in the interview she said she found it problematic to be dependent on her parents, their class position was decisive for her financial situation. Olivia also lived close to

her parents; they not only assisted her financially but also took care of her child so she could work weekends and evenings. The flow of financial resources from parents to child was thus a way for Olivia to avoid negative social mobility and a decline in social status (Albertini and Radl 2012, p. 118).

Different kinds of financial support, direct and indirect, were important to the mothers in different ways. While the lone mothers in this study shared some experiences, their own and their parents' class positions resulted in major differences (see also Rowlingson and McKay 2005, p. 40). Those women whose parents could help out financially had a sense of economic security, and did not experience any downward social mobility. However, women such as Wilma did not share the same sense of economic security. She and her parents were working class and financial difficulties for her were the main problem with being a lone mother. She faced issues of not being able to take her children to certain activities, buy winter shoes, travel or take holidays. She also had occasional difficulties paying bills and rent. Unlike for example Olivia, Wilma remained financially insecure as the financial support she received from her parents was occasional, additional help rather than continuous, decisive assistance for everyday life. As with other working class mothers Wilma also missed the feeling of knowing that her parents could help her financially if she needed them to, which was most often the case among the middle class women (see also Roman 2017 p. 97).

Dependency and guilt

Receiving a gift is not only something that makes one feel grateful but also creates social bonds and reciprocal indebtedness (Björnberg and Ekbrand 2008). As has been discussed above, many of the women interviewed received different kinds of assistance from their parents; in relation to irregular working hours, this support was often a precondition to be able to combine work and care. However, help from parents also made the women feel that their parents should have a say in their life.

Susanna had moved closer to her mother after becoming a lone parent. She explained that doing so meant that she was able to keep working. However, being dependent on someone else was also a problem:

That's the problem when you're a single mother, you are so dependent on others. Normal families are too, they sometimes depend on others, but you are even more exposed, because otherwise life would never work, it's not possible. [...] No, so . . . It would, like I said, without them I wouldn't have made it.

One of the main problems with being a lone mother for Susanna was the increased dependency on others and their willingness to help out. Even though she said that couples might depend on others too, she described her own dependency as greater and her position as more vulnerable. However, Susanna also noted that her position was not as difficult as that of lone mothers without intergenerational support: "I would have been in deep shit if I had had three children and been on my own". Dis-identifying with others, as Susanna did above, was a recurring theme of the mothers in order to socially position themselves: even if they were in a difficult position, it could have been worse.

Rose-Marie from a working class background, lived with her child and was hardly in touch with the child's father. At times, she was working two or three jobs – gardener, cleaner and shop assistant – to make ends meet. Her parents' help had been essential:

I can like, I've had a lot of help from my parents, and in some ways it's like then they have a lot of opinions about everything from interiors to, it can drive me crazy, because I have such big debt of guilt, it's like, and that's such a big debt of being grateful, and it's, and it's like a debt of guilt, in some way. [...] But I help them, I help them mowing their lawn and such things sometimes . . .

In order not to feel guilty about her parents' assistance, Rose-Marie tried to help them in exchange. This was partly an act of reciprocity (Albertini and Radl 2012), but more importantly something she did to feel less guilty. However, Rose-Marie had also decided to take further measures by leaving one of her jobs that had entailed a commute and often irregular hours. Although her financial situation thereby worsened,

she no longer felt as dependent on her parents. Compared to Olivia above, the assistance Rose-Marie's parents gave with childcare meant that she could work longer hours and take on several jobs in order to earn enough money. However, they did not uphold her class position through financial transfers. Rather she felt so guilty that she even gave up one job. In her case there was a limit to how much assistance she could accept in terms of maintaining her independence.

Nea, on the other hand, had a well-paid job as an engineer and no problem supporting her children financially. This is reflected in the quote below, where she talks about deciding not to accept any help from others:

Yes, it's like, it's a little like I said before, that I, as a person I've chosen not to accept that much help when it comes to practical matters from those around me. I'm a bit like that, I think it feels good being able to sort things out on my own and I don't want to burden my friends and family (laughs), it's a bit like that.

Just like Nea, the women in the study wanted to be able to survive on their own. But unlike several others Nea was enabled by her financial and class position not to ask for practical help – she had a daytime job, meaning she could take her children to day care, a good income, and a supportive network of friends. Striving for independence was nevertheless common to many of the women interviewed, although the possibility to realise it differed.

The women participating in this study wanted to make it on their own without too much help from their parents, especially since this relationship often left them with a feeling of guilt (see also Alsarve 2017; Björnberg and Ekbrand 2008 a, p. 75). However, in order to combine work and care, it was often difficult for these participants to turn down the opportunity for intergenerational assistance. This was particularly the case for the women who worked irregular hours, since day care was unavailable at such times. The possibility to position oneself as an autonomous individual who could make it on her own consequently depended on other factors, such as working hours, financial position and being in good health.

Conclusion: Lone mothers, intergenerational support and class

The meaning and importance of intergenerational transfers in Sweden have, from a qualitative methods perspective, not received much attention. Intergenerational transfers as presented above do not appear to be solely financial; rather direct financial support, indirect financial support and practical care support are often intertwined. The practical care the mothers received from their own parents comes across as important for both working and middle class mothers, in that it enables them to combine working with caring for their children. It is a key social support that in some cases determines whether their everyday life will work out. It is also a form of functional solidarity between generations that can, in turn, result in other forms of solidarity, such as associational solidarity (staying in touch) and affectual solidarity (feelings towards family members). However, these are forms of solidarity that can be regarded as not only positive but also potentially problematic, giving rise to mixed feelings, not least of indebtedness. Combining work and family is a challenge for the group of lone mothers as a whole, but those working irregular hours or on short-term contracts – the case for many of the women from lower middle class and working class backgrounds – were placed in an even more vulnerable position. These mothers were more dependent on others for help caring for their children as their needs for care outside of office hours were often not met by public day care and after school care. In the case of this study, this help largely came from the women's own parents and their mothers in particular. This is a result that points to the differences within the group of lone mothers and address the importance of also analysing class. The possibilities of being able to combine work and care consequently not only depend on whether you live in a two-parent household but also largely on your position on the labour market.

The type and extent of intergenerational help received by participants varied along class lines. Previous quantitative studies on intergenerational care in Sweden have concluded that attitudes towards providing financial support for family members are restrictive in Sweden, which must be understood in relation to the capacity of the Swedish welfare state. However, it has also been concluded that older generations with good incomes tend to give more financial help (Björnberg & Ekbrand 2008b, pp. 253–254). Whilst this is not surprising, it means that the flow of resources between parents

and their grown-up children reinforces class differences. As Halleröd states, “[t]he relationship between generations can’t compensate for social differences in society as such. On the contrary, divisions based on class are further strengthened by the economic resources that flow from parents to their grown up children” (2008, p. 240; author’s translation). Whether these kinds of transactions are increasing in number and importance in Sweden today is beyond the scope of this article. However, the quantitative findings are supported by this qualitative study as affluent middle and upper middle class parents of lone mothers are able to help their children maintain their class position, which would otherwise be problematic. In the case of working class mothers, financial help was a well-needed form of assistance when available, but the resources offered were less and did not alter the mothers’ position in the long term.

The Swedish welfare state with its transfers to state members has enabled a far-reaching individualism, with the aim of reducing dependency amongst individuals and within families (Roman and Peterson 2011). In recent years, as changes in a neoliberal direction have resulted in welfare cuts, researchers argue that what we see today is a re-familialization of the welfare state, where people have to rely on their relatives to a larger extent (Borchorst and Siims 2008, p. 215). The material forming the basis of this study is qualitative and small scale; it thus does not give any statistical answers as to whether this really is what we see here. Nevertheless, it is interesting to observe that most of the women in this study talked about how they had to rely on family members in order to combine work and care and/or to make ends meet or, in financially better-off families, to maintain a particular lifestyle or avoid downward social mobility. It can consequently be argued that for the women in this study intergenerational support and the influx of care and money from parents is for many decisive.

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Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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