

Småbarnsföräldrars vardagsliv

Omsorg, moral och socialt kapital

av

Therése Wissö

Akademisk avhandling

som med tillstånd av samhällsvetenskapliga fakulteten vid Göteborgs universitet för avläggande av filosofie doktorsexamen framläggs till offentlig granskning fredagen den 26 oktober 2012, kl. 10:15 i hörsal Sappören, Institutionen för socialt arbete, Sprängkullsgatan 25, Göteborg.

Fakultetsopponent är docent Lars Plantin, fakulteten för Hälsa och samhälle, Institutionen för socialt arbete, Malmö Högskola.

Loga
GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET
Institutionen för socialt arbete

Abstract

Title The everyday lives of parents of small children. Care, moral and social capital.
Author Therése Wissö
Key words Parenthood, family practices, moral, care, social capital, gender ideology.
Distribution University of Gothenburg, Department of Social Work, Box 720, S-405 30
Göteborg.
ISBN 978-91-86796-87-7
ISSN 1401-5781

This thesis is a study about the everyday lives of Swedish parents of small children. The empirical data comprises individual interviews, couple interviews and focus groups with 30 parents, as well as focus group interviews with 22 child health nurses in order to investigate their perception of parent's daily lives and need for support. The objective of the thesis is to analyse the family practices of parents with small children, and the ways in which daily routines are negotiated in relation to various resources, as well as to norms regarding gender, family and parenthood. The aim of the thesis is also to investigate how the concept of social capital can be used in order to analyse the institutional, informal and market-related resources, as well as the values ascribed to them, to which the parents have access and of which they make use in their daily lives. A central point of departure is that parenthood is a process of doing, and the view of the family as a doing and negotiating activity. Theoretical concepts as family practices, welfare regimes and gender ideologies are used to analyse the data. Social capital is another central concept, both to describe actual resources in the form of formal and informal social relationships, but also expectations and perceptions of the significance of these relationships.

Information, practical assistance and emotional support are important for the social capital in parenthood. The results reveal that places of work and colleagues contribute to the social capital of families, since the community of colleagues is a source of informational and emotional support in parenthood. Parents who, for various reasons, are excluded from the labour market, have inferior access to social capital in parenthood. Parents also have varying degree of social capital in the form of practical assistance, which is due to access to actual resources, but also a common moral of care. Hence, the construction of family affects the accessibility of social capital. The parents primarily relate the concept of family to a heterosexual nuclear family, in which biological parenthood forms the foundation. They also express a distinct moral of caring in which biological family ties, close relationships and longstanding transactions are described as the basis of good care. Existing norms that surround the family practices, and the moral of care that is associated with family, make it difficult for parents to create social capital outside the limits of the heterosexual nuclear family. Since we live in a changing society, the resources that are perceived of as social capital might however change. The thesis for example indicates that parents negotiate with themselves and with actors of the market with regards to how the moral of care should be formulated.

Social arenas for parents, such as parent groups, open pre-schools and internet forums, can function as positive resources in the everyday lives of parents, thus contributing with social capital, since emotional support and information can be found in these arenas. However, the arenas are hierarchic and normative, which can lead to the exclusion of certain parents. Furthermore, the thesis shows that parents' access to formal support, for example via child health centres, is affected by the construction of gender by professional actors. Mothers are more severely scrutinized while fathers, and their relationships with their children, tend to be made invisible. Professional actors who meet parents on a daily basis must have the courage to question their own perceptions as well as the prevailing discussion about parent support and family, thus opening up for new opportunities to create resources in parenthood.