

Comparing demotherisation regimes: a cluster analysis

Cristina Solera (Università di Torino); Emmanuele Pavolini (Università degli Studi di Milano); Nicolò Marchesini (CNR)

In comparative welfare state literature many concepts have been introduced to gendering analysis and reaching new typologies. Particular popular have been the concepts of (de)familisation, care, work-life balance and social investment. Yet, as argued by Daly (2022), none of these are necessarily gendered to the extent they are silent on the gender distribution of domestic and care work within families or they see care as an obstacle to the full “activation” in the labour market that must be outsourced to the state/market, devaluating it. Based on Fraser pioneering work (1994), several authors (Crompton, 1999; Gornick and Meyers, 2003) have pointed out at alternative arrangements to the traditional roles envisioned in the male breadwinner ideal or in the universal breadwinner or adult-worker model that force women “to be the same as men”, failing to valorise care and conceptualise it as a citizenship right (Solera 2020). The universal caregiver or dual earner/dual carer model is the only model that aims at transforming gender relations inside and outside the labour market by inducing “men to become more like most women are now – that is, people who do care. Building on these feminist insights, a new conceptual tool—the “demotherization” of care work— has been introduced to address gender inequalities in advanced countries, to avoid false gender neutrality, and to shift the weight of the analysis from “families” to “mothers” (Mathieu 2016). Demotherisation can occur transferring part of mothers’ caregiving responsibilities to the state, to the market, to grand-parents, or to the partner. Yet, only the latter, challenge the traditional division of labour and leads to higher gender equality.

By drawing from this debate, in this piece of work we shall focus on demotherisation through fatherisation that is, through the promotion of the dual earner-dual carer model, and we shall see, with means of cluster analysis, how OECD advanced countries differ in degree and types of demotherisation. Unlike in previous studies (Gornick and Meyers, 2003, Bettio and Plantenga 2004; Leitner 2003; Cho 2014) demotherisation is conceptualised and operationalised both at institutional and cultural level. Social practices are surely influenced by the set of opportunities and constraint offered by various policy measures or packages, They are also strongly influenced by predominant norms and values concerning the “correct” division of labour, the “correct” models of motherhood and fatherhood, and the “best of the child” (Pfau Effinger 1998; Grunow and Evertsson 2016). These cultural norms are also institutionalised that is, assumed and produced by social policies. Yet, they are also independent, so it is important to capture them as a distinctive dimension (Naldini et al 2016).

We begin the paper with a conceptual delineation of demotherisation to reveal its important aspects in order to achieve better operationalization. Drawing from OECD family database or OECD social expenditure database , we shall then build two institutional cluster variables at country-level, one measuring demotherisation through defamilisation (availability of full-time childcare services) , the other measuring demotherisation through fatherisation (based on characteristics of leaves policies). Drawing from ISSP 2012 “Family and Changing Gender Role”, we shall also build two cultural clustering variables, based on opinions about: (a) how parents should divide the responsibilities of economic provision and unpaid work; and (b) whether and how parents should divide paid parental leave between them. Then a cluster analysis is performed to identify possible different demotherisation regimes, with also a profiling of the clusters identified across the institutional and cultural variables chosen and with a preliminary effort to validate the cluster solution showing differences in outcomes, that is, in men’s time spent in unpaid and care work.

Promoting a dual earner-dual carer society is “good” not only for women but also for men (Flood 2019; King and Elliott 2021) and children (Gornick and Meyers 2006; Looze et al 2018). Classifying OECD advanced countries along different measures of institutional and cultural de-motherisation, we shall contribute to the debate on welfare regimes typologies producing new insights useful for capturing some macro contextual factors that impact not only on gender (in)equality but also on women, men and children wellbeing.