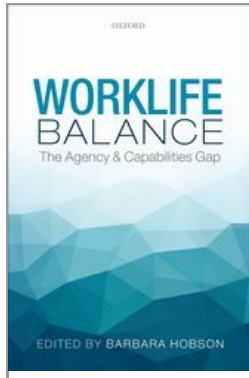


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Worklife Balance: The Agency and Capabilities Gap

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A sense of entitlement? Agency and capabilities in Sweden and Hungary

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[–] Abstract and Keywords

Using a unique specifically designed for analysing the capabilities and agency gap, conducted in Budapest and Stockholm, chapter 3 compares two societies with a long history of the dual-earner family model, focusing on different worklife balance policies. The survey enabled to access the cognitive level of capabilities, perceptions of the scope of alternatives and a sense of entitlement to make claims. The weak capabilities and agency for WLB among Budapest parents were underpin by traditional cultural/societal norms, long working time regimes, and precariousness in the labour market. The cognitive level of capabilities also revealed profound differences. The Stockholm parents expressed a strong sense of sense of entitlement to make WLB claims and to exercise WLB policies; For Budapest parents the wide agency and capabilities gap is expressed in their weak sense of entitlement and their narrow scope of alternatives for making change in worklife

balance and quality of life.

Keywords: Amartya Sen, capabilities, worklife Balance, parental leave, flexible work, gender

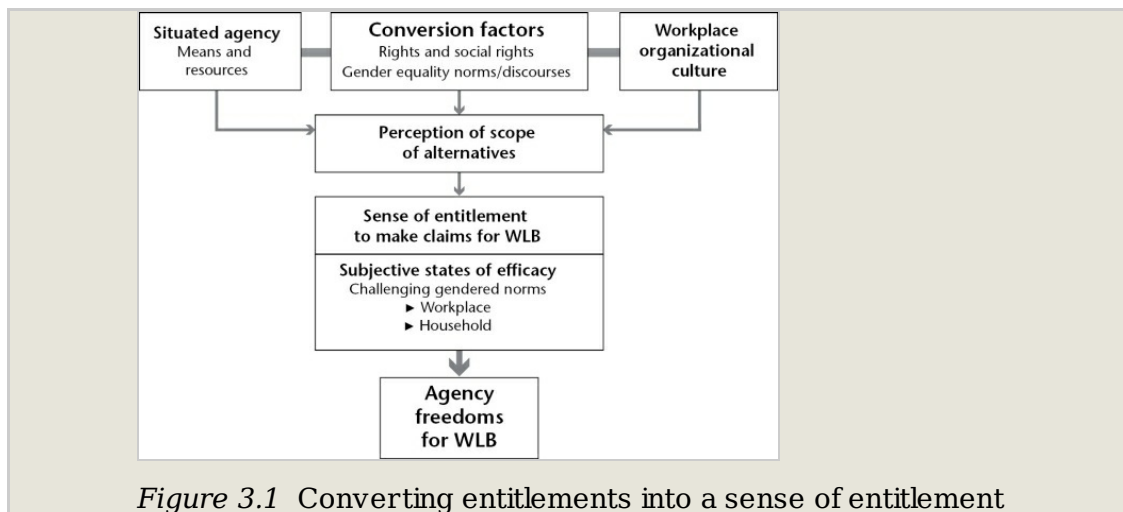
Introduction

Many scholars are engaged with worklife balance (WLB hereafter) and its importance for quality of life. An expanding literature has emerged with cross-national comparisons addressing the time pressures and difficulties individuals experience when trying to accommodate the demands of both home and the workplace (Perrons et al. 2006; Van der Lippe and Peters 2007; Drobnič and Guillén 2011). Some focus on job resources and the quality of jobs, workplace policies, and their effects on WLB (Lewis et al. 2009 and Bäck-Wiklund et al. 2011). Others focus on reconciliation policies in different welfare regimes and their effects on WLB practices (Leitner and Wroblewski 2006). There is growing recognition of the complexity in explaining the patterns of WLB across societies, what Crompton and Lyonette (2006) refer to as the ‘work–family articulation’, encompassing the structural (national social policies and regulations) and the relational (people’s attitudes and practices embedded in the cultural normative context). Understanding how the agency and capabilities gap in WLB capabilities operates in different societies necessitates models for capturing these different levels and dimensions and their interactions, and strategies that reveal processes underlying agency inequalities for achieving WLB.

Sen’s multidimensional agency-centred approach provides conceptual tools for analysing the agency and capabilities gap across societies. The model of conversion and capabilities that we have adapted to WLB (see Figure 1.1, Chapter 1) offers a framework for comparative analysis: considering the policy, firm, and household levels as sites for making claims for WLB and how agency inequalities are situated within these different layers of institutional **(p.58)** and normative context. In this chapter we apply a capabilities framework for WLB to agency inequalities of mothers and fathers with young children in two institutional contexts (Hungary and Sweden) with differences in working time regimes and divergent gendered discourses around parenting norms. These differences shape expectations and perceptions of the constraints and possibilities to make claims for WLB, and capabilities for making alternative choices for a better quality of life. We have designed a survey tailored to the capability approach that enables us to reach the subjective-experiential layers of agency/agency inequalities. This cognitive dimension in capabilities is important for understanding not only what one does or would like to do, but also the perceptions of the scope of alternatives; what is seen as feasible or within the realm of the possible. The sense of entitlement for making claims in our analysis is a dimension that offers conceptual leverage for explaining differences in the agency and capabilities gap across these two societies as well as differences within them. This level of analysis is introduced in our model below (see Figure 3.1).

The chapter is divided into three parts. The first presents the cognitive model; the second provides a brief summary of the institutional features of our two cases: Sweden and Hungary; followed by a brief presentation of the research design. The rest of the chapter is devoted to analysis of the subjective-experiential perceptions of working

parents derived from the capabilities survey, concluding with a discussion of how agency/agency inequalities for WLB among working parents reflect different institutional normative contexts.



(p.59) A Model of the Theoretical Framework

The model below provides a framework for analysing the agency and capabilities gap for WLB across several dimensions. It builds upon the multilevel dimensional structure elaborated in Figure 1.1 (Chapter 1), but our focus in this chapter is on the conversion of rights and policies into claims for WLB, the different sites where claims are made, and the normative and institutional constraints and opportunities for exercising them.

As Figure 3.1 shows, conversion factors bracket both situated agency and workplace organizational cultures. In our survey, these conversion factors include specific policies at the state and firm level that legitimate a sense of entitlement to make claims for care leave and for flexibility in times and place of work. Regarding care leave, not just the rights themselves but also whether these are social rights are critical for converting entitlements into capabilities for WLB (Deakin 2003).

The workplace firm level is where claims are mediated. A workplace organizational culture that reflects sensitivity to WLB acts as conversion factor for WLB claims (see Chapter 8). In our survey, workplace organizational culture can generate its own norms on work performance that weaken capabilities for WLB, even within societies that are considered family friendly, such as Sweden.

Gender equality discourses and norms in themselves can be seen as conversion factors enhancing a sense of entitlement to claims for WLB. Men's care work has been the subject of government campaigns and media coverage, promoting active fatherhood (Hobson 2002; Brandth and Kvande 2009). Gender equality discourses empower men to confront their bosses for care leave and women to ask their partners to do more. How policies are discursively framed affects the cognitive level of agency. If care leave is anchored in a discourse of gender equality and fathers' rights to care, it makes it easier to challenge gendered norms in the workplace and household. Alternatively, if care leave

is cast only in terms of activating mother's labour force, or child wellbeing (Daly 2011), fathers' sense of entitlement is weakened, particularly in societies where care is considered to be the primary responsibility of mothers and breadwinning the obligation of men (see Chapter 4).

We highlight the *cognitive* facets of capabilities in this chapter, expressed in the perception of scope of alternatives and sense of entitlement to make claims for WLB and how these dimensions are linked to situated agency. For example, the scope of alternatives for WLB is connected to situated agency, mirrored in how individuals view their futures: those with the least skills and resources may not have access to secure jobs, may have experienced precariousness in employment or may expect to in the future. Workplace organizational cultures (**p.60**) overtly, as well as covertly, limit the scope of alternatives and agency freedoms for WLB. The risk in making claims for WLB is often tacitly recognized by employees as a tradeoff between career and family priorities (see Chapters 8 and 9). Narratives of risk about penalties for those who make claims for WLB, including job loss and discriminatory treatment in pay and promotion, travel through work organizations, an aspect that we include in our survey.

Clearly the sense of entitlement to make claims for WLB is shaped by the perception of one's scope of alternatives. However, the sense of entitlement cuts through many layers of capabilities. Whether a policy has statutory backing increases a sense of entitlement (Lewis and Smithson 2001), yet even when these laws exist, employees may not have a sense of entitlement to ask for them in the workplace.¹ A sense of entitlement increases self-efficacy² to challenge gender norms around men's breadwinning and women's care that are taken for granted and persist in the household, workplace, and community. Within the context of WLB claims, the sense of entitlement to make a claim is the conceptual lynchpin connecting capabilities to agency for WLB.

Deakin (2003) and Browne et al. (2004), among others, address the question of how entitlements are converted into achievements. They recognize that the existence of laws and policies can indirectly lead toward a 'different ethos' or 'seed' new norms that can destabilize gendered norms and practices. In our analysis of capabilities within specific institutional contexts, we study how this seeding mechanism operates when laws become legitimized in a society and institutionally embedded so that they have an impact on norms in the workplace and household. Alternatively these seeds may fall onto barren ground where the normative and institutional environment does not foster a sense of entitlement and capabilities for WLB are weak.

These aspects of capabilities emerge from the questions in our survey that allow us to reach into the subjective experiential level of capabilities. This emphasis in the survey allows us to address different aspects of agency freedoms and agency inequalities: what alternatives a person would choose to improve his/her WLB. We ask specific questions on alternative scenarios for organizing WLB: what would lead to change and what stands in the way of achieving this?

Two Institutional Contexts

Hungary and Sweden are interesting comparative cases for WLB and capabilities. Both countries have had an institutionalized dual-earner family model for many decades. However, these dual-earner societies emerged from different socio-political contexts.

(p.61) Hungary, like other Central Eastern European societies, followed a dual-earner family model. Even after the demise of the regime, Hungary continued generous state support for parental leave and affordable childcare. Yet traditional patterns of care and housework were not disturbed during the former regime and remain in place (Oláh 2003; Tang and Cousins 2005; Lewis et al. 2009). The foundational policies of the dual-earner model emerged in Sweden in the 1970s. Although increasing women's labour force was a rationale for a dual-earner family model, gender equality discourses and politics were key forces shaping the formation of policies (Hobson 2002).

These societies vary along dimensions that have been used as indicators of capabilities for WLB: labour force attachment, working times, and fertility (see Table 3.1 for the comparative statistics). Women in Sweden have higher labour force participation and more mothers of small children are employed compared to women in Hungary: more mothers in Sweden work part-time. Though there is little difference in the working hours set by collective agreements in the two countries, average actual weekly working hours in Hungary are significantly longer among men and women with small children than for parents in Sweden (Hobson and Fahlén 2009). Levels of unemployment should affect agency and capabilities to make claims for WLB, as joblessness generates a sense of risk and insecurity among working parents. In the year we conducted our survey, unemployment was higher in Hungary than Sweden and the difference between women was even greater. Finally, there are striking differences in the fertility rates in these two countries—Hungary has one of the lowest fertility levels in Europe and Sweden has among the highest. Uncertain economic futures, as well as long working time regimes (see Chapter 1) are some of the explanations for the low fertility rate in Hungary and other Central Eastern European countries (Hobson and Oláh 2006).

In comparing these two societies, we confront the agency and capabilities gap by focusing on specific policies: parental leave, flexible hours, and rights

Table 3.1 Contextual indicators for Hungary and Sweden

	Hungary	Sweden
Total fertility rate 2008 (1)	1.35	1.91
Female employment ratio, 25–49 years (2)	64.1	79.8
Maternal employment ratio, child 3–5 years (2)	53	81.3
Part-time as % of total female employment, 25–59 years (3)	5.1	37.1
Male unemployment (%), age 25–59 years (4)	6.8	4
Female unemployment (%), age 25–59 years (4)	7.2	4.5
Trade union density (5)	16.8	68.4
Collectively agreed weekly working hours (7)	40	37.5

Source: (1) Statistics Sweden (2009a) and KSH (2009). (2) OECD Family database (2007). (3) Eurostat 2008a. (4) Eurostat (2008b). (5) OECD (2012), data for Sweden from 2012 and from 2008 for Hungary. (5) Eurofound (2009).

(p.62) to reduce hours; we analyse how working parents perceive the constraints in exercising these. We provide a multilayered lens for capturing these agency inequalities: seen from the construction of policies, the work organizational culture in firms, and the individual household situation; gendered norms permeate all these sites for WLB claims.

Methodological Approach and Research Design

Our qualitative survey was conducted in two capital cities, Budapest and Stockholm,³ which are fairly similar in population size. We used three main selection criteria for participants: each had to be the parent of at least one child younger than 7, living as part of a couple, and having been employed during the previous year. The sample of 100 respondents in each city (50 women and 50 men aged 25–57 years), was stratified by firm size⁴ and firm sector (public and private sectors), with equal proportions within each category for both cities. In our sample, we also sought to approximate the educational attainment levels in each city. Given the contextual differences in our two cities, there are variations in educational attainment, size of public and private work sectors, and the proportions of small, medium, and large firms. The Budapest sample has a larger proportion of individuals with low levels of education, while the Stockholm sample has a larger proportion with high levels of education. The public sector is much smaller in Budapest than in Stockholm and there are fewer small firms in Sweden than in Hungary, which was also reflected in our samples.⁵

The survey has a semi-structured design. We obtained socio-demographic data from a questionnaire sent prior to the face-to-face interviews. Specifically designed for an agency and capabilities approach, the survey considered many aspects of WLB, though in this chapter we focus on *employment* and the organization of *working times*, *parental leave*, *work environment*, and *workplace culture*.⁶ We analyse the responses of parents concerning their use of parental leave and flexible working times. We also consider the respondents' assessments of their work organizational culture and family-friendly work environments, which reflect perceptions of agency and capabilities. Finally, we posed questions that directly address agency inequalities: what our respondents could ask for or would refuse to do regarding working times and what they would change.

Agency and Capabilities in Two Cities

In this section, we conduct comparisons across three policy areas: parental leave, flexible working hours, and more generally we consider differences in family-(un)friendly workplace practices. We analyse the cognitive aspects of **(p.63)** the scope of alternatives embracing not only boundaries around choice and agency, but also what our respondents perceive as possibilities for change.

Parental Leave

We begin our analysis with parental leave, as this has been a crucial policy for enabling

parents (particularly mothers) to combine employment with family. It has also been cast as a policy that can reduce inequalities in the family and labour market (Gornick and Meyers 2003; Hobson et al. 2006), specifically the proactive measures for fathers' leave. The exercise of parental leave rights is dependent on whether and how it is compensated and the strength of the laws and protections for job security. Beyond these basic rights, parental leave claims are nested within normative/societal and institutional contexts that shape the capabilities of mothers and fathers to use it. This differs markedly across the two societies.

Both Hungary and Sweden have relatively generous parental leave benefits linked to previous employment. However, in Hungary the national policy provisions on childcare leave allow for an exceptionally long period of three years, an income-related two-year benefit at 70% of income for two years, and a low flat-rate benefit⁷ not tied to previous earnings. This is also available to those who wish to extend the benefit beyond the higher-level income-related benefit period up to another year beyond the two years. In the case of childcare allowance (GYES) there is the possibility of transferring leave entitlements to a grandparent, provided that the child is older than 1 year, and raised and cared for in the household of the parent.

The common pattern is that women take the entire three years of benefit, although there is a gap between the highly and less skilled. In one of our cases, a Hungarian woman was on leave for nine years (with three consecutive children). Highly skilled professional women are exceptional, and are more likely to take a very short leave (3–9 months), compared to those working in routine administrative jobs or blue-collar occupations (Plantenga and Remery 2005).

The three-year leave policy reinforces gender role expectations, as it assumes that mothers will take the leave (Neményi and Takács 2006), and reproduces the gender divide in care. It weakens the capabilities to return to the labour market after the long period of parental leave, especially for mothers with lower education and those living in smaller communities. According to one EU study, more than 75% of Hungarian parents on parental leave (mainly mothers) said that they planned to continue working after their leave was over. However, the actual return rate is less than 45% (Plantenga and Remery 2005; KSH 2006). There are various reasons for this, including firm closure or the termination of the former position and the creation of a new position that is unsuitable for the employee's skills (Spéder and Kamarás 2008). This **(p.64)** outcome suggests that, while EU case law has strong protections against firing women who take maternity leave, these are not well-enforced in Hungary.

How some women in our sample used the benefit reveals the high levels of unemployment and precarious labour market. While in theory one of the most important functions of parental leave is to allow a parent to take a temporary leave from paid work activities, for lower educated women in our Budapest sample the three year flat-rate childcare allowance (GYES) functioned as a quasi-unemployment benefit. This reflects a broader pattern observed between 1993 and 2005 in Hungary, reflecting the rapidly increasing proportion of women without a previous employment, and who tend to be

those with low levels of education (Bálint and Köllő 2008).

We also found instances in our sample of higher educated women using the flat-rate parental leave benefit as a stop gap measure between jobs. For example, one father reported that his partner with a high level education went on leave only for a couple of months:

We spent a few months abroad before delivery, and she didn't have a job at home. She was receiving childcare allowance while trying to find a job. (father, 42, two children, IT specialist)

A college teacher in the public sector mentioned that she received childcare allowance for a year:

I claimed it in both cases, because I was looking for a job in the meantime.

The virtually 'women only' use of parental leave found in our survey matches the national statistics (Moss and Korintus 2008). Out of 100 interviewees, we found only four fathers who had taken any leave. These fathers are the exception, and tended to have partners who earned more than them. This group also includes highly educated fathers with strong convictions regarding a father's active role in caring (Takács 2008).

The economic loss that would result from fathers taking leave is a factor for most Hungarian families, and we found instances in which mothers and fathers said that sharing was not an issue because the mother did not have a job. Nonetheless, one cannot ignore the undeniably powerful role of gendered assumptions in determining why so few men take any parental leave beyond the targeted father days after birth. The survey respondents (both men and women), irrespective of their education level, interpreted the organization of care and the gender divide in parental leave practices as natural, essentializing gender difference. Breastfeeding was repeatedly given as a reason why men should not take any of the leave.

These were typical responses:

I am the mother. This is the best way to do it. I have the patience. (mother, 33, two children, medium ed., working in the private sector as a masseuse)

(p.65) or

A child primarily needs his/her mother at this age [i.e. in the first three years]. (mother, 45, one child, high education, working in the private sector as an economist)

while a father put it simply as

I think it's a sort of a social tradition—we never considered that I should do it. (father, 36, one child, working as a public school teacher)

The gendered normative expectations in the workplace in Hungary were so taken for granted that the idea of fathers making a claim for parental leave appeared untenable. This was apparent in the account of one father who said the he and his wife had discussed the possibility.

We had doubts considering the potential reactions at my workplace. For example, if I accepted a grant to do research abroad for a year, it would make sense at my workplace even if it would cause some problems, but surely it would be accepted. But going on childcare leave! I think they can't comprehend even the fact that my family and childcare duties limit my working capacities to some extent. (father, 39, one child, high education, lecturer)

Sweden has one of the most generous parental leave systems in Europe (see Gornick and Meyers 2003; Plantenga and Remery 2005), 390 days at about 80% of previous earnings, and 90 days at a flat-rate low benefit. A person with no previous earnings will receive the basic level for 480 days. The ceiling of income replacement is fairly high; a large proportion of high income parents, especially fathers, receive less than 80%. However, all state employees receive 90% replacement of their income, and many private large employers top-up their employees leave benefit to similar or higher levels (Hobson et al. 2006).

In theory a mother could be out of the labour force for a relatively long time, using a policy known as the 'speed premium' that enables mothers who have children close together to keep the higher level of benefit if the interval between the two births does not exceed 30 months (Hoem 1993). However, the most common pattern is to return to work for a short period after the first birth, often reducing hours, as a strategy for keeping one's foot in the workplace. Reintegration in employment has been the driving force of the parental leave policy in Sweden; it has enabled mothers to sustain a WLB over the life course in which motherhood embraces both caring and earning (Ferrarini and Duvander 2010).

The Swedish leave system is highly flexible. One can choose to take fewer days per week or even divide the days up to 1/8 of a day, with a proportional decrease in leave benefit. For mothers flexible use of the leave can be a strategy for extending their leave time. However, we found that highly educated women are less likely to take the extended leave than the middle and the less educated. About half the highly educated women in our survey took less **(p.66)** than ten months of the leave. This flexibility facilitates the father's use of the leave, as he can take scattered days off, or shorter periods of leave, without interrupting his work routine. Yet this very flexibility in the leave may work against a change in redistribution of care and change in gender norms (Hobson et al. 2006).

On the one hand, the flexibility in the leave can encourage WLB strategies that result in the sharing of care and work responsibilities. For instance, five highly educated women in our sample opted for a part-time division of the leave with their husbands after the first few months. This allowed the father and mother to have a continuous work connection

during the parental leave period.

The Swedish parental leave system is best known for the two non-transferable 'daddy months'. This entitlement has increased men's capabilities for claims for care. Since the daddy months were introduced, the father's share of parental leave has increased significantly. During the year of our survey, 84% of fathers took some of the leave before their child's 8th birthday and fathers' share of the leave reached 21.5%; recent figures show that the proportion of men's leave is now above 24% (Swedish Social Insurance Agency 2011).

The Stockholm sample shows a slightly higher proportion of fathers who use more of the leave than the national average: about one-third claim that they have taken more than the two daddy months. Fifteen percent of the fathers shared the leave fairly equally, defined here as 40/60%, compared to the national average of 8.7% (Ferrarini and Duvander 2010). These tended to be highly educated fathers, a result that is confirmed by other Swedish studies on parental leave (National Social Insurance Board 2003; Hobson et al. 2006).

When asked about the division of parental leave, most mothers and fathers interviewed said that they were satisfied with the way they divided the leave: this was especially true for women, even if they took almost all the parental leave, and this was also found in a national study of the Swedish insurance board done a few years earlier (National Social Insurance Board 2003). Still, even though the majority of fathers said that they agreed with the division of the parental leave, about one-third said that they would have liked to have taken more. This figure is higher than the Insurance Board study in which 20% of fathers made a similar claim (Hobson et al. 2006). Fathers in our study said that the main obstacle standing in the way of not taking more daddy leave is the household economy, that there is less of a reduction in household income when the mother, who usually earns less, stays at home; however workplace demands and career goals figure prominently in the reasons why men did not take more leave than the daddy months. Consider the case of a father who would have liked to have taken more leave, however, he was concerned about the effects on his work situation: **(p.67)**

I would absolutely have wanted to do that [take more parental leave], but if you look at a lot of jobs, many on parental leave are badly treated and overlooked at work. If I'd been away for 6 months with both children then I don't know if I would be here now. (father, 44, two children, managerial position in state administration)

Among those fathers who did not take their two months, we find fathers who showed ambivalence, and even appeared apologetic, yet maintained that they had little choice as the main breadwinner whose income was essential for maintaining the family's standard of living. For example, one father said:

I haven't completely pulled my weight. There's also an economic side, we don't make ends meet when I'm on parental leave. We lose loads of money. So I've had a month with each child together with vacation so then you get more time off...I have

lots of 'daddy days' left. But we can't afford it. Sure I take days here and there but I'm not home for an extended period of time. (father, 38, two children, medium education, working as a superintendent of estate management, public sector)

This father, typical of many middle class families, is the main earner in his family, whose wife earns a much lower salary as a caretaker for elderly and works 75%).

In cross-national comparisons of traditional gender attitudes toward work and family, Sweden stands out as a society with one of the lowest proportions of persons holding such attitudes (Wall 2007; see also Chapter 2). To be sure, gender norms around earning and caring persist. These norms endow men with a sense of entitlement to assert their role as the primary earner, but also confer on women their sense of entitlement to make claims to be the main carer. For example, when asked what she would have said if her husband wanted more leave, one mother rejected this outright.

No, not if he'd wanted to take half. I wanted to be home. We talked about it [how to divide the leave] and we were in complete agreement. (mother, 44, two children, medium education, working with purchasing in the public health sector)

We found very few cases of women feeling entitled to take all the leave (only six cases), three of which were women who did not want to return their former jobs. Nor did we find rationales for women taking all or most of the leave based upon naturalized gender roles of maternal care and bonding, in contrast to our parents in the Hungarian sample. This was true even among the few Stockholm fathers who did not take any leave. Their reasons were related to their job situation or economic factors, rather than the mother's natural role.

(p.68) Several studies in Sweden and other countries show that highly educated fathers tend to take more parental leave than those with less education (Sundström and Duvander 2002). A recent study of Haas and Hwang (2009) maintains that there is a class effect;⁸ working class men are less likely to be able to make claims for leave at their workplaces. In our survey, we do not find a class effect but a sector/job effect: private versus public; high skilled versus less skilled; flexible versus inflexible jobs.

Work organizational culture was a determining factor in men's claims for parental leave, consistent with the most comprehensive study of fathers' parental leave in Stockholm: Bygren and Duvander (2006) showed that the likelihood of fathers taking leave and the proportion of leave were dependent upon previous men's parental leave practices in the firm, after controlling for education, time in the firm, and firm size. This indicates that specific workplaces can be conversion sites for WLB claims, re-enforcing the sense of entitlement generated from the policy and discourse surrounding fatherhood and care (SOU 2005).

Alternatively, an organizational culture in which the norms are unstated and unchallenged can weaken agency for WLB, as several of the fathers in our survey revealed in their reasons for why they did not exercise their full rights to parental leave.

The tensions in men's parental leave decisions express the agency and capabilities gap in WLB as well the potentialities for change: the push and pull of involvement in family and work; the expectations of bosses and workmates; and the perceived costs of alternative scenarios of taking more leave within the family economy. However, alongside these perceived constraints is a strong sense of entitlement among men for claiming their parental leave rights, a right that has been seeded in policy and practice.

Parental leave policy and practices in the two societies reveal profound differences in capabilities for mothers' WLB. These reflect policy formulae as well as labour market regulations in employment protections and security linked to leave policy, which reflect and shape gendered norms in parenting and care. The most striking differences between Hungary and Sweden are seen in the incentives and disincentives for women to re-enter the labour market and the pro-active policy for fathers in Sweden to use their parental leave rights. For Swedish women, the parental leave system not only facilitates continuous labour force attachment, but also reintegration into their jobs and work organizations. These policy outcomes interact with other capabilities in the welfare regime, such as high levels of employment and secure jobs. In contrast, the extended leave policy in Hungary and the precariousness in the labour market weaken women's capabilities to re-enter the labour market.

(p.69) Flexibility

Flexible working hours (other than the right to work part-time) in terms of organizing one's schedule for family needs is not inscribed in EU law, but was rather put forward as an example of good practice to promote WLB (see EC 2008). One can distinguish between two dimensions in the EU policy framework: (1) external flexibility, in which the aim is to ease the hiring and firing of workers and use of more flexible contract arrangements; and (2) internal flexibility, geared towards achieving more flexible patterns within the work organization either to meet market fluctuations or the employer's need for flexibility (Lewis and Plomien 2009; Viebrock and Clasen 2009).⁹ The crucial divide in flexibility and capabilities for WLB is whether it is employer driven to maximize productivity or employee drive to facilitate WLB (Purcell et al. 1999; Fagan 2004).

In comparative studies, Hungarian and Sweden appear at different ends of the spectrum regarding the level of flexibility and the extent to which they are characterized as firm-oriented or worker-oriented: Sweden exemplified the high flexibility/worker-oriented model; Hungary was placed in the low flexibility/firm-oriented category (Ramioul and Huys 2007). However, other factors need to be taken into account when considering within-country flexible work options: gender, education, job sector, and work structure; and whether the job is task or time dependent.

Although flexibility encompasses a range of situations, we operationalize flexibility as employee-driven, that is, whether individuals are able to organize their working time and/or rearrange their workday schedule to suit their family's needs. In the survey we asked a series of questions concerning the perceptions of flexibility at the workplace, as well as specific questions on the right to refuse extra working hours and asocial hours

such as night and evening work. We also included a series of questions that related to the general work environment; whether their workplace was family friendly and, more specifically, whether they had personal experience or knowledge of particular instances of mistreatment at the workplace for those prioritizing family (what we refer to as narratives of risk). These questions allowed us to capture the extent to which workplace organizational cultures support or hinder agency and capabilities for WLB.

Considering our direct question on the *perceptions* of flexibility at the workplace for organizing time to fit family needs, we found very little difference between our Stockholm and Budapest parents: 77% of Stockholm parents and 75% of Budapest parents said that they were able to organize their time and workday according to their family's needs. Moreover, in both there were gender differences in working time flexibility.

In the Hungarian sample, more men than women said that their work situation was not flexible (19% and 32%, respectively). Men working in the **(p.70)** public sector were the most dissatisfied, while both male and female respondents working in the private sector were satisfied with their work flexibility. This reflects the high proportion of self-employed Hungarians (20% in our sample), both those working in micro-enterprises and the significant levels of outsourced home-based work among the self-employed; more men than women in our sample were self-employed.¹⁰

The self-employed private entrepreneurs had the most opportunity to organize work schedules and had flexi-time, as these two examples suggest. One, a self-employed mother stated that:

as an entrepreneur I am family friendly. However, conditions are determined by the clients—although it is not like you must comply with them. You may decide not to work for them next time. (mother, 40, two children, medium education, decorator)

The other, a father and a self-employed carpenter, declared:

I think entrepreneurship is family friendly because I decide on my schedule and nobody tells me what to do and when, though financially it is not profitable. (father, 35, two children, medium education)

It is important to keep in mind that the category of 'self-employed' covers a range of employment situations, from small business entrepreneurs to irregular workers who depend on contract work from both private and public sector employers and may lack social benefits. For the latter group, particularly among women, what appears to be a tradeoff between security and flexibility does not reflect choice, but rather is the result of weak capabilities, as many are precarious workers who cannot be assured employment contracts. This is supported by our finding that most would prefer to work more hours if it meant a gain in hourly pay.

Among the parents in Stockholm, there was less of a gender difference in work flexibility,

20% of women and 26% of men say they lack flexibility in their work. When comparing men and women in different work sectors, we see the same pattern as in the Hungarian sample: men in the public sector have less flexibility compared to women; and women in the private sector have less flexibility than men. We also find that less educated and low income mothers and fathers have less flexibility than highly educated and high income parents.

Flexibility was widely accepted in Swedish firms; and the classic distinction between task- and time-oriented jobs mainly explained why some Swedish working parents said that they were unable to reorganize their schedule. Those who tended to have jobs that did not allow for any flexibility included bus drivers, restaurant workers, and nurses and care workers in both the public and the private sector. For example, one woman working in the private (**p.71**) sector characterized her work situation as inflexible as she was responsible for someone's care; she had a specified time shift and had to remain with her client until her replacement arrived. A policeman in our survey also claimed that his work demands allowed for little or no flexibility in rearranging his work schedule.

Everything is controlled by external events. The jobs that come in we have to do. All the time in between we have open cases and assignments that we plan out together and do, but when something happens we have to drop all that and leave to do those jobs. So it is very free, but sometimes very controlled. (father, 38, three children, high education)

Nevertheless, this same man had reduced his hours to 75% and maintained that he could leave work if there were family responsibilities that he had to attend to; he did not see his workplace as being family unfriendly.

It is never a problem; the social things come first, and then work...No one ever complains. There are never any angry glances in the workplace because you are leaving.

Highly educated working parents in Sweden have the most flexibility; the bottom line is getting the task done. One respondent describes his situation in terms of work cycles: there is overtime and undertime; sometimes he works a 40 hour week, sometimes 20 hours, and sometimes 60, and this can involve evenings and weekends. The sense of lack of boundaries and borderless working times resonated in responses among white-collar employees in the private sector. As one father explained:

Talking about 40 hours doesn't seem relevant. I have a full-time job, but no idea really of how many hours I put in. It's more a job that has to be done. My bosses want me to get things done but then it's very much up to me how and when I want it done. (father, 34, three children, high education, working in the IT-sector)

A similar statement was made by another father:

It is freedom with responsibility. Usually the responsibility bit is so big that you

work much more than the others do...With responsibility comes limited freedom unfortunately. (father, 37, one child, high education, working as a marketing director in the private sector)

The majority of our Stockholm respondents said that they could work from home (over 60%), and only slightly more women than men. Among these women we found greater reluctance to have work spill over into family time; for them, it meant working late in the evening after the children were asleep. There were several fathers who affirmed the value of being able to take work home and were encouraged to do so by their employers. Yet this opportunity (p. 72) was linked to being available and on call for extra work. Blue-collar workers or service workers suggested that they would like more flexibility in their jobs; as one father said:

I can only trade in my lunch breaks. (father, 43, three children, low education, working as a nursing assistant in the public sector)

However, they were rarely asked to work overtime and were compensated if they did. These different takes on flexible work are echoed in scholarly debates about whether regulated and predictable work schedules lead to better WLB (Lee and McCann 2006; Perrons et al. 2006).

We asked our respondents if they could refuse to work extra hours, weekend nights, and evenings, questions that directly show capabilities and agency for WLB. Here we found some variation in our two cases. The vast majority of Swedish mothers and fathers (62 out of 87) said that they could refuse to work evenings, weekends, and overtime, and claimed that family reasons were nearly always considered a valid reason for doing so. We also found examples of men and women who said that this was an irrelevant question as their job was organized around finishing a task and the responsibility for getting the work done. Nevertheless, family responsibilities and family time are given special status in Sweden. Several of our respondents said that they were not even asked to work extra hours, as it was known that they had small children.

Intense working time regimes and expectations of commitment to the firm are mirrored in the responses of Budapest parents, mainly fathers. Typical of this group are the highly qualified fathers working for private companies of which they are partial owners. Consider this terse response of one such father:

There is no such thing as overwork—there are only tasks to be completed. (father, 44, one child, high education, sales engineer)

Compare his response with that of a father in the Swedish sample who claimed that he felt that overtime was often part of the job, although he received generous overtime pay.

I have never, in the 20 years that I have been here, had someone tell me that I need to work overtime. However, you know what needs to be done and you take your responsibility. So, no one needs to tell you that you should work overtime but

rather it's something you do when it's necessary. (father, 40, two children, medium education, engineer in the private sector)

The question of whether they can refuse extra hours, or work on weekends or evenings, was not an issue for some Budapest respondents who claimed that would not say no to extra hours. These included less educated fathers (**p.73**) with large families, typically working in the private sector. The primary concern was their economy; more work meant more money:

I could say no but I rarely would, as extra money is always welcome. (father, 32, three children, low education, security guard)

In contrast, a mother with high education working as an advisor in the public sector appeared to have more choice. She asserted that time was more important for her than money:

I am not getting paid for the extra hours. Extra work should mean extra money. If I would get extra money, and I still would not want to do it, I would bring up family reasons. I already have so little time to spend with my child. (mother, 41, one child, high education)

The Right to Reduce Working Hours

There were significant differences between our Budapest and Stockholm parents regarding their sense of entitlement to exercise their rights to reduce hours. Every parent in Sweden has had the right to reduce working hours until the child is 8 years old for several decades. About half (46.3%) of mothers with a child younger than 7 used this right (Statistics Sweden 2009b), about the same proportion we found in our Stockholm sample.

In Hungary, there is no statutory right for parents of young children to reduce hours. The Budapest parents considered the opportunity to reduce hours a sign of a family-friendly workplace. The Hungarian labour market is characterized by a very low level of part-time employment (see Table 3.1). A woman in our Hungarian sample who was an office worker claimed that it took six months to find a job that would allow her to work six hours a day.

When they learned at the job interviews that I had a child, I was immediately dismissed. Working only six hours was out of the question. (mother, 33, one child, low education)

Similarly, a father working full-time as a journalist in a large private company revealed the difficulties in making claims for part-time work:

You are not given a hard time if you have children. However, there is no opportunity to get transferred to a part-time job. (father, 42, one child, medium education)

The above examples on part-time work in Hungary illustrate that even though a right may be inscribed in EU law, it may not become a statutory right in national law. This was a crucial difference in Sweden and Hungary around rights for part-time work: without a formal right, the capabilities to convert resources into claims are weaker. The real litmus test, however, is **(p.74)** whether WLB policies are recognized in the daily practices of firms and work organizations; what the costs or penalties are for using parental rights or more broadly prioritizing family needs when there is conflict between them and work demands. Within this context the workplace is a crucial site for WLB, not only for mediating the exercise of rights but also for the very sense of entitlement to claim them.

Family-Friendly and -Unfriendly Practices

We asked a series of questions to capture perceptions of the family-friendly or -unfriendly character of the work environment. First we posed a general question about whether the respondents considered their workplace family friendly. Then we asked about specific instances of mistreatment and discrimination at workplaces. Our purpose was to examine parents' expectations around what a workplace should provide for its employees, obviously linked to their perceptions of their scope of alternatives for achieving WLB and a better quality of life. The capabilities framework recognizes that expectations and norms shape agency, what is possible and what can be imagined. This cognitive level comes into play when assessing one's work environment as friendly or unfriendly.

More than half of the Budapest respondents (54 out of 93) viewed their workplace as family friendly, while more than one-fifth (21 out of 93) said theirs was unfriendly. Three fathers in blue-collar jobs in the private sector claimed that they did not know what family friendliness meant. One of them, a semi-skilled construction worker explained:

Well, I'm at a loss as to interpret this question. Obviously, one must support his/her family so working is a must. You have no choice. Well, I wouldn't mind to leave earlier sometimes. However, we don't have a say in this matter. (father, 26, one child, low education)

Beyond an inability to interpret the question, low expectations for achieving WLB were revealed in the responses of manual workers in Hungary with only a basic education. For them, being employed was seen as an asset in itself. WLB lay outside the possible or imaginable. This is illustrated in the response of this father, working as a repairman in a large Hungarian state-owned company. For him WLB was an individual problem to be solved by increasing his wage. Asked if his workplace was family friendly, he responded:

Most of the employees are men. This is not an issue here. In fact, I do not know anything about it. I wish I could make the same money in fewer hours so I can spend more time with my family. (father, 38, one child, low education)

(p.75) In the Stockholm sample, regardless of levels of education and skill, working parents understood the notion of a family-friendly workplace and were aware of their rights. WLB is an idea that has been featured in Swedish media and political debate. We

found only one atypical father in our Swedish survey who was unaware of his parental rights, a truck driver with low education and with a large family, four children and two step-children.

The vast majority of the Swedish respondents (76%) perceived their workplace to be family friendly, and defined it in terms of specific policies and work organizational practices. Family friendliness was associated with flexibility: being able to work from home, having the ability to plan the workday, having flexible working hours, and being able to bring children to work if the childcare centre or school were not open. Another example given was the scheduling of meetings sensitive to parental needs, which meant no early mornings or late afternoons that would interfere with taking children to and from daycare or after-school care. In addition our respondents noted the pro-active family-friendly policy in some private sector firms that top-up the parental leave benefit to compensate for the 80% wage replacement. More generally, parents portrayed a family-friendly work culture as one in which their employers and workmates demonstrated understanding and support for parents on parental leave or those off from work caring for sick children.

Gender differences in the perceptions of workplace friendliness were primarily related to the work sector in our Stockholm sample. The public sector, predominantly female, is acknowledged as a gender-sensitive work environment, and many women move from private to public sector jobs after they have children (Hoem 1995). Therefore, it is not surprising that women in the public sector characterize their workplaces much more positively than those working in the private sector. Conversely, we found several mothers in the private sector who stated that their workplaces were 'unfriendly' and both men and women who maintained that that gender-role expectations in male-dominated firms worked against women. Among men who reported that their workplaces were family unfriendly, there were no differences between those working in public and private sector firms.

In the Budapest sample, this pattern is reversed. Respondents, especially women working in the private sector, found their workplace more family friendly than those working in the public sector. Once again this can be explained by the higher proportion of self-employment in Hungary compared to Sweden. The self-employed in our sample did not always work long hours or unsocial hours and some tended to work less than those not self-employed. In fact, the majority of self-employed women in our sample showed a working time capability deficit (Lee and McCann 2006) as they would have liked to work more hours. In this context working hours may be **(p.76)** flexible, but may not reflect greater capabilities for WLB and better quality of life, given the high proportions of men and women who have irregular, precarious jobs.

In order to capture the penalties and risks involved in putting family first, we asked our respondents about their own experiences of mistreatment at the workplace, or whether they knew or had heard about others who faced discrimination in pay, job task, or promotion because of prioritizing family. These *narratives of risk* travel through organizations and act as warning signals to others.

Compared to Stockholm, more Budapest respondents brought up cases of mistreatment (slightly less than one-fifth), regardless of gender and work sector. Though relatively few in number, these cases of overt mistreatment allow us to see how disciplining of employees reproduces agency inequalities in WLB. For example, a mother working as a clerk for a multinational company in Hungary described the situation at her workplace:

One of my colleagues had a sickly child. That multinational [company] would not stand for that. She was continually being called in. She wasn't sacked, but left. It was completely unfair. She did not know that she would bear a sick child. I have yet to see a man take a lot of time off for family reasons. It is always lumped on the woman. (mother, 33, one child, low education)

This blatant case of mistreatment involved a multinational corporation; more subtle forms of mistreatment were more commonplace.

For the most part, there seemed to be more tolerance for women to prioritize family needs, as care for children is still viewed as mainly women's responsibility in Hungary. In this context fathers' WLB claims at the workplace entailed greater risk, as this sales representative working in the public sector confided to her male colleague:

They [i.e. other colleagues] thought that he was not telling the truth when he said that he needed time off for his family.

Another related the story of her husband who was told not to come back work after he had taken one day off because their child was ill.

It was unfair and inhumane.

We found far fewer cases of mistreatment and discrimination among our Stockholm parents; only two out of ten cited their own experiences of being mistreated; the others had heard about instances of mistreatment. Second, we did not find important gender differences in work sectors, neither in first hand experiences of mistreatment nor knowledge about penalties for others prioritizing family. However, there were slightly more cases of women being treated unfairly. This reflects the fact that the majority of cases of (p.77) discrimination involved parental leave.¹¹ Mothers tend to take much more of the leave than fathers, and private sector firms have difficulty finding replacements in work teams for parents who take more than a couple of months. The discriminatory processes that result from the gendered norms in workplaces around parental leave were made visible in this narrative by a male senior project leader working in a private company in Stockholm. He himself had taken parental leave and was actually sympathetic to the push and pull of family and job responsibilities. Yet, he admitted that, in the company, there is a different attitude toward men and women in job recruitment.

If a 32 or 28 year-old girl walks in on the verge of pregnancy I know that there will be trouble involved in hiring a person like that....The company probably has an official policy that it isn't a problem at all, but in a hiring situation I know that young

women are mistreated. (father, 35, two children, high education)

His response is a classic example of how statistical discrimination can operate in societies with generous parental leave policies and high take-up rates by female workers (Mandel and Shalev 2009). The same respondent claimed that, although it is not official policy, he felt that it was not sustainable to hire women who will have kids:

With travel and overtime project work, women with small children fail to deliver or quit.

A higher share of low income parents in the Stockholm sample, especially fathers, have experienced or knew about mistreatment in the workplace. In these cases, the mistreatment relates to the care of sick children and the redistribution of the workload among the colleagues, especially in the private sector. Colleagues, who felt forced to take on an extra workload, talked behind the parent's back or made comments that the person was away too often to take care of sick children. This illustrates tensions within the work organization that can occur when parents exercise their legal parental rights.

In many instances in our Stockholm sample, the discriminatory patterns are covert or understood, as exemplified by this father who felt his family involvement put him in a vulnerable position in the firm.

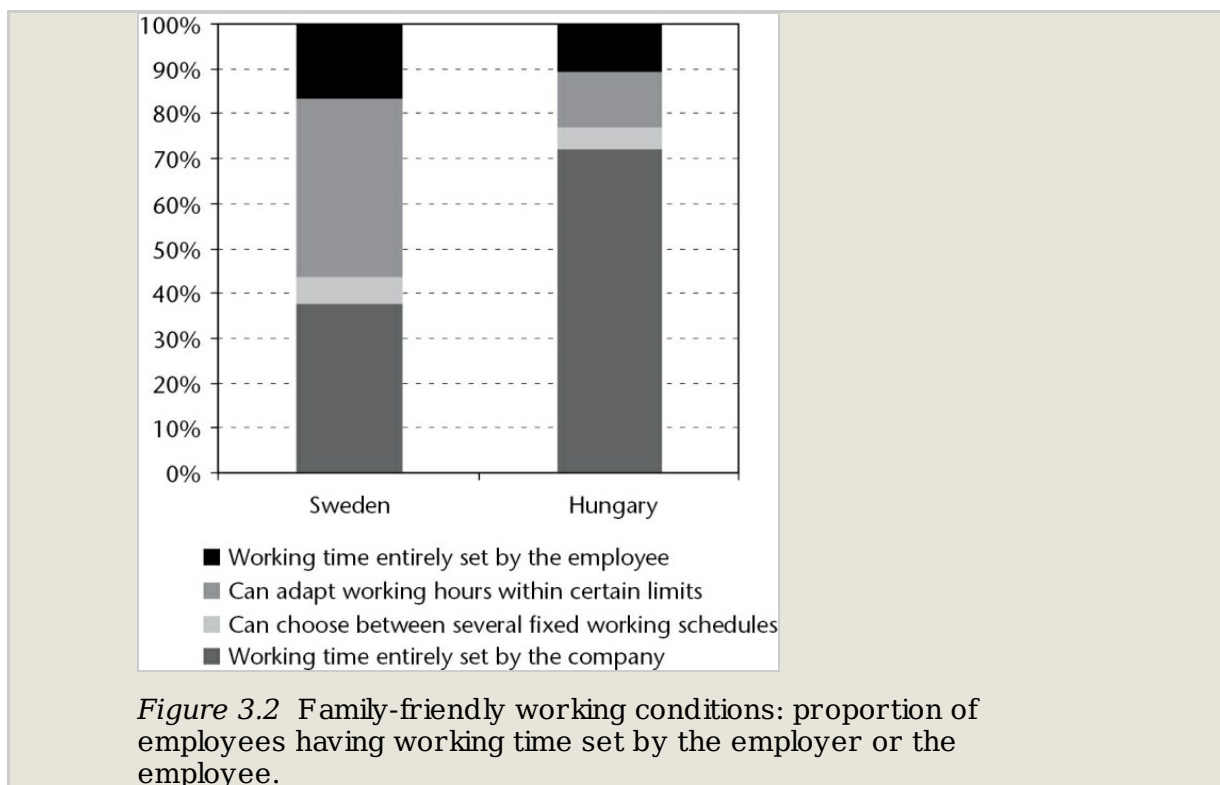
There's a lot of talk behind the back. Partly it's been suggested that some people think that you're lying if you're home with sick children, or that there are some mean-spirited rumours....An employer cannot treat some differently because of their family circumstances, that's against the law. But behind one's back talk goes on. (father, 28, three children, medium education, working in a public warehouse)

(p.78) This example above suggests that overt cases of mistreatment are the tip of the iceberg in terms of work organizational cultures and the gendered norms within them. Nonetheless, they can tell us something about what is interpreted as mistreatment in the two societies and the contextual differences in perceptions of rights, as well as the importance of legal rights and protections for assessing capabilities. One difference we found in these narratives of mistreatment for prioritizing family was that, in Hungary, the outcome most often was losing one's job or not being called back.

For the most part, the accounts of discriminatory treatment in the Stockholm sample related to parental leave and pay rises. In these exceptional cases, the parents, two men and one woman, maintained that they were disadvantaged during wage negotiations since they were not at the workplace. The Swedish Parental Leave Act (SFS 1995: 584) should protect parents from wage discrimination during parental leave, as well as guaranteeing them the right to return to a similar position. Both men and women cited this law as giving them a sense of entitlement to make a claim for family, yet in some workplaces informal norms and expectations override this. We found only one instance in the Swedish sample in which taking up parental leave rights resulted in the loss of a job. This involved a father at a multinational corporation, employed on a project basis, who had to resign when he

started his parental leave. Given the widespread support for father's rights in Sweden and the law underpinning the exercise of parental rights, it is not surprising that we did not find cases of open and explicit discrimination. More often the unstated norms and narratives of risk that run through organizations, particularly in competitive, high end private sector jobs, reproduce the agency inequalities for WLB for both women and men.

Considering workplace organizational cultures in the two societies, we find similarities in the Swedish and Budapest samples. In both cases workplace cultures can foster highly competitive environments that undermine agency and capabilities for WLB. Many mothers and fathers in our Swedish sample noted that flexibility in working times allowed for greater agency and capabilities in WLB, specifically mentioned was the possibility of taking work home. This allowed them to pick up their children from daycare early and work in the evenings. Excluding the self-employed, parents in Sweden appear to have more flexibility to organize their work schedules around family needs than in Hungary. This is mirrored in aggregate statistics on family-friendly working conditions in the degree to which the employee or employer sets working times. In 2007, a much higher proportion of employees in Sweden than Hungary had the ability to adapt working hours or choose between different schedules (46% compared to 17%), and 38% of employees in Sweden had working time entirely set by the company compared to 72% in Hungary (see Figure 3.2 below). **(p.79)**



Alternative Scenarios: Obstacles to Change

The essence of Sen's capabilities approach revolves around agency freedoms: what the capabilities for achieving alternative ways of living are (in our case WLB and quality of life).

At the end of the survey, we devised questions that would allow us to tap into the cognitive experiential layers of capabilities and contextualize agency and agency inequalities in the two societies. We asked questions about dream scenarios: what would enable them to achieve a better WLB, what they would change, and what were the obstacles that they would face. The responses reveal the scope of alternatives; the limits on what can even be imagined.

We started by asking our respondents what their scenarios for change were;¹² providing a list from which to select the most important factors that would result in a better WLB, including length of work days, flexibility of working hours, shorter distance to work, more relief from housework or childcare, better access to childcare, flexible hours at childcare, better economy, more time for themselves.¹³ We then asked them to elaborate further on what were the circumstances and situations that inhibited a change in WLB.

When asked about the most important factors that would result in a better WLB, economic factors were cited most often among parents in the Budapest sample (42%; 23 women and 19 men) and had the greatest salience among **(p.80)** the low and middle income households. In Stockholm, only ten respondents noted economy as the most important factor. For Stockholm parents, having more time was the overriding issue: 57 respondents claimed time (shorter work days, shorter distance to work, more time for themselves, and their own suggestions related to time) was the major factor that would lead toward a better WLB (30 women and 27 men); this was true for both middle and high income families, particularly mothers working full-time (more than 35 hours a week).

'Time for themselves' ranked highest for about one-fifth of parents in the Stockholm sample. Slightly more mothers than fathers expressed this desire, which cut across income levels. Researchers on mothers' working times refer to the exhaustion and pressure women experience as the time squeeze of the double burden women carry (Wiesmann et al. 2008).

Lack of time also stood in the way of improving Budapest parents' WLB and more so for men. This relates to men's long working time regimes in Hungary: more time meant 'shorter workdays' (19 out of 50 specified this). When we looked at responses in which they listed their three most important priorities, better economy appeared as the dominant concern for our Budapest parents, which is also evident in their presentation of the obstacles they would have to overcome in order to achieve a better WLB.

Few of our respondents considered flexibility as a main priority for achieving WLB, but it was still a factor for parents in Hungary, specifically those who were not self-employed highlighted lack of flexibility as an obstacle for achieving a WLB. This included reducing working hours, rigid work schedules, poor time-management skills and a work organizational culture that was insensitive to family needs. For Swedish parents, flexibility was not high on their list of things that would improve their WLB: rights to reduce hours when children are small have been in place for decades and flexibility in organizing schedules and working times has become the norm in many workplaces. Shorter days,

rather than flexibility, was the way to achieve WLB for parents with young children in Sweden (Hobson et al 2006).

Contextualizing Economic Constraints in the Two Societies

Economy featured as an obstacle to achieving WLB in both samples, but its contextualized meaning reveals differences in capabilities for Swedish and Hungarian parents. Though having a better economy was not listed as top a priority for WLB for Stockholm parents, economy was interconnected to issues of time and underlay the possibilities of realizing an ideal balance between work and family life. In the Swedish sample, economic constraints not only involved families from lower and middle economic groups, but were just as likely to be experienced by parents in more secure and better economic circumstances. Here, economy was a question of maintaining their living (p.81) standard. For example, one highly educated mother working in the private sector would have liked to reduce her hours, but framed the consequences for doing that in terms of 'economic scope'. A father, who claimed that he would like to reduce his working hours to have a better WLB, made a similar point in his elaboration of economic scope versus economic constraints. In his dream scenario he wanted to work between 9 pm and 3 am, and then have the rest of his time with his family. However, he did not imagine that he would be able to achieve this. When asked what prevented him from having a better WLB, he answered:

A good balance, it's about money to a large extent. I wouldn't be able to go down a lot of working hours. But that's about priorities as well. We've chosen to have the car that we do, we've chosen to live here and do what we do and go on the holidays that we do. That money has to come from somewhere. That's the way it is. (father, 33, two children, high education, working as a project manager in the private sector)

In Budapest, financial circumstances were invoked again and again as the main obstacle standing in the way of achieving a better WLB, especially among those with basic and middling education, exemplified by this father:

It is so hard nowadays to earn enough to cover the cost of living. (father, 32, three children, low education, working as a security guard in the private sector)

or even among those with a high school degree

There is no choice: both of us must work in order to cover our living costs. (father, 35, three children, medium education, working as a courier in the private sector)

Budapest parents highlighted the increased level of stress within the family that resulted from the combination of economic pressures and long working hours. Here, economic poverty and low incomes are conjoined with time poverty, a combination that produces the weakest capabilities for WLB. This was most evident among the less educated, seen in this example of a mother who pointed out that

Someone from the family has to work a daily 10–12 hours in order to make ends meet. But then the family cannot be together, and in the end the family will fall apart this way. (mother, 34, three children, low education, working in the private sector)

In light of the long working regimes for both men and women in the Hungarian sample, and the limited opportunities for part-time work among women, one would expect that time would be a top priority for WLB, though economic problems were the dominant concern for our Budapest parents. **(p.82)** About one out of four respondents referred to the lack of time as a hindrance to achieve a better WLB, and twice as many men as women claimed that more time was important for WLB. This difference in time stress is reflected in a study by Hobson and Fahlén (2011) in which 44% of fathers compared to 25% of mothers claimed that their work prevented them from giving time to their partner and family, a finding reflecting men's long working days; yet surveys, such as the European Social Survey, showed that most men would increase their hours slightly if it meant a loss in hourly pay (see Chapter 2).

In Hungary, time stress is reflected among full-time working mothers who also have nearly all the burden of housework and care; 13 out of 22 of the full-time working mothers said that they shouldered nearly all of the housework demands (compared to 9 out of 25 in the Swedish sample). Hungarian mothers lacked a sense of entitlement to make claims for greater sharing of care and domestic work. Whereas Swedish mothers could ask their partners to do more, and men felt apologetic for not contributing more, in Hungary the double shift in working women's lives was taken for granted, underpinned by societal norms that released men from their responsibilities for domestic work. One mother in the Budapest sample claimed:

There should be a family counselling service, where men could be convinced that there are no such things as women-only duties just because they were socialized this way at home. (mother, 30, one child, medium education, journalist in the private sector)

As many mothers in Sweden reduce their hours when children are small, the time squeeze is most felt by full-time working mothers, who used phrases like 'chasing time' or 'on the go all the time'. A mother provided a vivid narrative of her frantic life in which she claimed that she had no time for herself since her child was born:

I almost never sit on the sofa during weekdays. It's horrible. I run around like a headless chicken, tidying and arranging, until I fall into bed. (mother, 47, one child, high education, full-time working lawyer in a governmental agency)

However, the respondents in the Stockholm sample did not frame time pressures around the men's lack of contribution, but rather within the overall time spent in unpaid work. Compared to the Hungarian case, we did not find the visible gender conflicts around the unequal division of housework among our Stockholm parents.¹⁴ Only about five women in our Stockholm sample saw their pathway to achieving an ideal WLB scenario in terms of the division of housework and care; they said that they would like their husbands to take

a larger share so that they could get more personal time. In fact, both women and men claimed that relief from housework was a priority for WLB, which **(p.83)** they imagined would be improved by outsourcing, hiring someone else to do the work. At the time of the survey, only 24 persons hired someone to help with domestic work, which can be explained by a taboo against hiring others to do domestic work, reflected in our responses, but also by the choice of either hiring someone illegally or paying the high social costs included in the wage.¹⁵ However, there has been dramatic rise in the hiring of domestic workers since the tax subsidy passed in the year of our survey (Skatteverket 2013).

Time was a scarce resource for working parents in both societies and this time deficit cut across differences in education, occupation, and social class. Women, more than men, experienced this to a greater degree. Parents in our Swedish survey described themselves as time pressed and the time squeeze in everyday life lay behind the scenarios for change that would lead to a better WLB and quality of life. In Hungary, time poverty is pervasive: the long working time regimes for both Hungarian men and women, and for women the additional burden of two work shifts; full-time paid work and unpaid work in the home. However, financial circumstances were invoked again and again as the obstacle standing in the way of change for a better WLB. Here, time poverty was conjoined with poverty

Discussion

Representing two ends of the spectrum of agency/agency inequalities in WLB, our comparative cases, Hungary and Sweden, underscore the importance of evaluating policies for WLB in terms of agency and capabilities for exercising them. Despite the grounding of WLB policies in EU law, men and women in Hungary face greater agency inequalities in making claims for WLB than parents in Sweden. Though parents in both countries are protected by law against job loss or discrimination after returning from care leave, in Sweden, the law is enforced, strengthened by union collective agreements that regulate dismissals. Perceptions of insecurity in jobs and precarious economic situations affect individual agency to make claims. There are marked differences between the two societies reflected in the responses of the interviewees in our survey and shown in previous analyses of ESS data (Hobson and Fahlén 2008). Over a third of fathers living in Hungary reported that they had difficulties living on their income, six times greater than Swedish fathers. These data also indicate that a much higher proportion of working parents in Hungary viewed their jobs as insecure and the greatest differences were among the mothers in the two countries.

(p.84) In comparing the agency and capabilities gap in WLB in Hungary and Sweden, both dual-earner societies, we found similarities in the pressures fostered by competitive work environments and the experiences of the time deficit in WLB, the lack of time for family and leisure. Still, we found striking differences in the capabilities for WLB; reflecting differences in institutional resources (conversion factors), and the strength of traditional cultural/societal norms limiting agency for claims for WLB in the workplace and household.

Gendered norms encased the perceived scope of alternatives for making change in WLB

among working parents in both societies. In Sweden and Hungary, women still bear the main responsibility for care. Mothers in Sweden take the lion's share of the parental leave and a significant majority reduce hours when their children are small while few men use this option. Men's primary economic role in the family was a factor underlying the rationales for why leave was not shared more equally. Nevertheless, neither fathers nor mothers in our Swedish survey viewed care for children as naturalized. Gendered norms operated at the firm level, and the gendered effects mirrored the agency and capabilities for WLB expressed by working parents; workplace organizational culture and work demands were factors restraining the agency and capabilities of fathers in Sweden who claimed that they would have liked to have taken more parental leave. The gender role expectations in the private sector limited women's possibilities to find jobs in that sector and to retain them after starting a family. However, the widespread acceptance of flexibility in working schedules allowed for greater capabilities to organize family time—for instance to pick up their children from the daycare centre early.

In Hungary the normative barriers against fathers' claims for WLB policies appeared insurmountable: parental leave, in particular, was beyond the realm of the possible. Traditional norms around women's responsibilities for home and childrearing appeared deeply imprinted in the Hungarian landscape: both mothers and fathers expressed this naturalized view of motherhood and care and the three-year leave policy normalized this. At the workplace, long working days and a lack of sensitivity to family needs constrained both mothers' and fathers' WLB capabilities. The self-employed imposed long working time regimes on themselves.

The multidimensional approach in the capabilities framework provided a framework for understanding how norms are reproduced in multiple sites: in policies, in workplaces, and in families; and (2) how conversion factors, rights and social rights, and gender equality discourses, enhance capabilities for challenging them.

The cognitive level of agency and agency inequalities in our survey allowed us to explore capabilities from the perspective of the sense of entitlement to **(p.85)** make claims. We found that parents in Sweden expressed a sense of entitlement to make claims and self-efficacy to exercise rights. They knew about their rights and invoked the specific anti-discrimination law and policies as the basis for them. The right to reduce hours in Sweden predated the EU directive by decades, and women have a strong sense of entitlement to this right and use it during early childrearing years. These examples illustrate how the seeding process operates, in which rights become embedded in institutions and daily practices. New norms surrounding family life filter into the workplace. The statements from Stockholm parents, that they were rarely even asked to do overtime or weekend work as their workmates and employers knew that they had small children, reflects this. Underpinning this sense of entitlement felt by Stockholm parents are strong conversion factors: rights supported by union organization and collective bargaining, but also buttressed by public discourse and debates on the importance of family-friendly workplaces.

In contrast, working parents in Hungary had both a weak sense of entitlement and low

expectations about achieving a WLB. This is demonstrated in a recent survey of equal treatment awareness (EBH 2011) in which parents were asked to define what a family-friendly workplace would comprise: mothers with young children can keep employment; employees with sick children are not sacked; employees can go home if their children are sick; employees can go on sick leave if their children are sick; employees can go on vacation if their children are sick; vacation time can actually be used. These rights and protections are taken for granted in Swedish workplaces.

Underlying the agency inequalities in the exercise of policies and claims for WLB in Hungary, are the structural features of the economy and labour market, which were revealed in men and women's weak sense of entitlement and the narrow scope of alternatives they perceived for achieving a WLB. These include insecurity in jobs, unstable futures, and precarious economies. The possibilities for effective choice are diminished when individuals lack a sense of wellbeing (Sen 1992), which was evident in the responses of less educated fathers and mothers in Hungary. The reality for fathers in our Budapest sample with a low education was one in which just having a job and wage shaded out all other concerns. The existence of family-friendly policies, such as the ability to reduce hours, the rights to refuse hours, or claims for more flexible hours, were beyond their grasp. For mothers, the scope of alternatives and weak capabilities for WLB were reflected in their difficulties in re-entering employment after parental leave, the lack of possibilities of part-time work, and the long hours of working the double shift of paid and unpaid work.

Our survey ended in 2008, the year of the global financial crisis. In our survey we found profound differences in the agency and capabilities gap in WLB, **(p.86)** both in the existence of rights and policies and the possibilities of exercising them, but even more broadly in WLB and quality of life. The gap appears to be widening between East and West Europe (Frey 2011; see Chapter 9) but also between Northern and Southern Europe (see Chapter 5) since the economic crises and recession.

Notes

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
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
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Notes:

(1) Lewis and Smithson (2001) use the sense of entitlement to reflect how employees view support from the employer for reconciling employment with family—whether they are grounded in moral arguments, economic interests, or justice. Our agency-centred model places a sense of entitlement in relation to broader social/contextual variables and conversion factors.

(2) Here we define self-efficacy as a person's belief in his or her ability to succeed in a particular situation (Bandura 1994).

(3) The same survey was conducted in Osaka Japan (see Chapter 4).

(4) The sample in Stockholm was drawn from the Statistical Central Bureau; in Budapest the personal data of respondents was provided by the Central Office for Administrative and Electronic Public Services for research purposes.

(5) In both samples we selected equal proportions by firm size; small=1–19 employees; medium 20–249; and large over 250. The actual distributions are: in Sweden: small (14%), medium (34%), and large (52%); in Hungary: small (51%), medium (24%), and large (25%). The educational level was distributed as follows. Stockholm: compulsory level 8%, secondary level 40%, tertiary level 52%. Budapest: compulsory level 25%, secondary level 20%, and tertiary level 25%. The average number of children was 2.16 in the Stockholm sample and 1.68 in the Budapest sample.

(6) The questionnaire also includes the division of household work, a social network component, and a social policy country-specific module.

(7) The flat-rate benefit (GYES), is equal to the amount of the minimum old-age pension; parents can access this benefit even when the child is enrolled in a daycare facility.

(8) Haas and Hwang (2009) interview managers of global companies who may not have records of employee practices.

(9) Internal flexibility can be defined as overtime, flexi-time, part-time, temporary work, casual work, or sub-contracting (Viebrock and Clasen 2009).

(10) In 2006 there were approximately 700,000 private enterprises officially registered in Hungary, 90% of which were micro-enterprises with a maximum of ten employees; 50% of all enterprises were noted as self-employed sole proprietors (KSH 2008).

(11) The law itself protects against discrimination in the use of parental leave. Even in cases of downsizing, employers are not permitted to openly discriminate against those who are on parental leave. Yet employers can argue that a worker on parental leave is redundant within the organization when downsizing.

(12) For the most part, they wanted an equal split between spheres of family, work, and leisure.

(13) We also included a category: their own suggestions, which in some cases replicated or further nuanced their answer.

(14) This does not imply that there were not latent conflicts, as our section on household work reveals: one study, using our survey, found instances in which women would refer to specific examples of unfairness in household work even though they had answered in the affirmative that they thought the division was fair. See Livia Johannesson's unpublished Master's thesis, 2009.

(15) The recent legislation providing families with a tax subsidy for household services has led to a dramatic rise in the outsourcing of household services since the survey year.



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