

Basic Income, Parenting Leave, and Gender Equality

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Paper in progress with Ann-Zofie - *Basic Income:
The Potential for Gendered Empowerment?*

Research Questions

- Could a basic income replace parenting leave?
- If a basic income replaced parenting leave, what might be the consequences for gender equality?
 - Basic Income might (or might not) replace other benefits, some of which are multi-dimensional in the way that they support citizens, going beyond the financial support that a Basic Income offers.
 - One example is parenting leave, which can have multiple aims (including, but not exclusively gender equality in care as well as in the labour market), met by a multidimensional approach to implementation.

Approach

- Theoretical reflections in the absence of empirical data on basic income (BI)
- Review of rationale and debate around BI
- Look for overlaps between aims of BI and parenting leave
- Consider lessons learned from PL for BI
- Not country context specific – international perspective

Basic Income

“an income paid by a political community to **all** its members on an individual basis, without means test or work requirement” (Van Parijs, 2004: 8)

- An empowerment project with the aim of greater human flourishing
- No conditionality on how money is used
- Only conditionality of access is being eligible (still some conditionality then...)
- Possible response to incoming technological changes in the workplace, which is predicted to result in reduced employment prospects
- Attractive as widens focus beyond early parenthood – money for carers and for being cared for
- Consensus (and dissent) across political spectrum – not clearly L/R

How Much is Basic?

- Everything turns on how much a basic income would be considered to be
 - All experiments thus far have been for a very basic amount – not enough for the ‘basics’
 - Confusion then, between minimum social assistance and a basic income
 - A basic income would need to be higher than many social assistance minimums to match many parental leave payments

Basic Income: no empirical data for this question (yet)

- Political parties around the world are increasingly considering the potential merits
- Yet to be introduced by any national government (De Wispelaere, 2016)
- Problem that all experiments aimed at those on low incomes and offer low amount
 - Finland experiment - €560 paid to unemployed sample (Olli Kangas at KELA) – recently stopped
 - Canadian/North American 1960s & again (Macdonald, 2016)
 - Experiments – or feasibility of experiments mooted in Netherlands, Scotland
- Alaska Permanent Fund–yearly payment which varies (from \$878 in 2012 to \$2,072 in 2015 back to \$1,100 in 2017)
- Swiss voted in 2016 to reject higher rate proposal (CHF 2,500/2155EUR/20772SEK per month)

A Summary of the Main Claims Made For and Against a BI

Issue	Arguments for BI	Arguments against BI
Poverty reduction	✓	
Bureaucracy reduction	✓	
Improved job quality/sustainability	✓	
Unconditional payment	✓ (seen as a positive)	✓ (seen as a negative)
Support for carers and those needing care	✓	✓ (concern opposite might occur)
Reduced spectrum of benefits	✓ (seen as a positive)	✓ (seen as a negative)
Reducing unhealthy dependencies within personal relationships	✓	✓ (concern opposite might occur – household income dynamics)
Gender equality	✓ (increased personal independence)	✓ (reinforcing current gender system)
Social inclusion	✓	✓ (what about non-citizens)
Funding		✓ (how to fund)
Moral hazard		✓ (e.g. the lazy surfers)

Parenting Leave

- Covers maternity, paternity, primary carer, parental and childcare leaves
- Multi-dimensional in aspects of implementation and benefits
 - Income/wage replacement
 - Employment protection & retention of 'talent'
 - Duration (linked to norms around early years)
 - Family/individual/child entitlements
 - Father bonus/co-parenting emphasis
 - Flexibility (can leave be taken in various formats)
 - Supporting same sex parents (or not)

Core Aims of Parenting Leave Policies

Potential core aims of parenting leave policy	Overlap and complementarity with core aims of basic income
Gender equality: labour market discrimination	No
Gender equality: increase in men caring/co-parenting	No
Gender equality: individual income	Yes
Public health (primarily mother and child, but also father and child)	To some extent
Parental well-being (relationships)	Potentially
Child well-being	Potentially
Pro-natalist	Potentially

Comparing BI and PL highlights the Wollstonecraft's Dilemma

McLean (2015:2) notes that “*Basic income is in some ways a microcosm of wider feminist controversies regarding how the state can recognize the unpaid work women largely do without reinforcing existing inequalities, also known as Wollstonecraft's Dilemma (Lister, 1995; Pateman, 1988)*”.

- Both political projects, both aim to build capabilities/enable individuals
- Concern that whilst addressing maternal poverty, a BI risks further entrenching rather than undermining a gendered division of labour as seen in current practice worldwide
- PL is more radical than BI, at least from a feminist perspective

Lessons learnt from PL for BI?

- Gender equality (or any other aim) has to be an explicit policy aim addressed in the design of the policy for it to be realized
 - Only in those countries with an explicit goal of shared parenting have we seen take up by fathers of more than a few days leave (Castro-Garcia and Pazos-Moran, 2016)
 - Thus, to assume ‘gender neutrality’ in labelling would be sufficient for continued change towards shared parenting is questionable.
- Distribution of benefits
 - Need to consider the position of all women (and men) across the income distribution
 - Parental leave often excludes too many
 - But, money doesn’t buy gender equality, necessarily! Arguably, the better off also are in need some state support (beyond the financial benefits, but also those (e.g. wage replacement))

Do we need both parenting leave policy and a basic income?

- Yes, probably – as would support different groups
- It is not clear that a BI on its own, would create the conditions in which parental caregiving could become less gendered
- Concerns (e.g. by Anke Hassel) that a BI would further entrench social stratification/reduce social mobility and integration of migrant groups
- Unless BI was paid at a much higher level than has been usually proposed, it would need to be topped-up to match (a) levels of Maternity leave pay found in most countries; and (b) levels of Parental leave pay found in those countries that have designed Parental leave to actively promote gender equality (which are a minority of countries, such as the Nordic countries, Germany, Slovenia, and Quebec in Canada).

Unknowns

- How might a BI over the life course impact on savings behaviour – shifting risk to individual to cater for specific needs at a given time?
- How might a BI encourage or reduce the demand/make the realization possible for different kinds of parental team work than currently predominate?

Conclusions

- Basic Income would provide some financial support for many of those carers not eligible for leave
- BI would not attend explicitly to the gender equality and employment protection functions as PL does
- Therefore, a BI could not replace these PL welfare benefits in full
- A question: could we design a BI to effect change in the gender order? (Gender neutral labels alone do not seem to be sufficient to enable more fathers to care)