

Some Sociological Aspects of Elderly Women in the Gap of (precarious) Work as Political Concept in Modified Enlarged Family

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Abstract

As in Slovenia we face the so-called long-lived society, the issue of intergenerational solidarity and the quality of life of individual groups, especially older women in the family life network, is being raised. Due to the intense rise of older people who are still working productive and prolonging life expectancy in contemporary postmodern society, it is becoming increasingly important to establish positive intergenerational cooperation and promoting education for ageing and older people; especially between the younger and the older generation. Due to the harsh economic situation and fragile jobs of the young, the modified enlarged families are re-gaining on the importance as they offer the young families various forms of support (emotional, financial, material, instrumental, etc.). This stands out the role of older woman.

Methods: The contribution outlines the life stories of thirty older women in their third life period, active in a modified enlarged family, which we individual interviewed. The purpose of the study was to analyse their activities within the extended family and to examine whether their work is experienced as precarious and, if so, how individual transitions affect the accomplishment of their lifestyle. In order to show fully the value (many times for granted) the work that older women do in an enlarged family, we conducted individual guided interviews and compared the responses.

Results: demonstrate that the emergence of the precarious work of older women in a modified enlarged family significantly is affected by the relationship between generations: grandparents, parents and grandchildren, with an important role for older women. Their support and intergenerational transfers are very important and welcome due to the relatively well organised work, educational and other activities. The analysis of the macro position has shown that the key idea of this work is self-explanatory, which is also one of the key strategies. With the survey, we find that their work, regardless of their education and occupation, carried out in their active lives, is often self-evident, ignored, overlooked and unevaluated, undervalued.

Conclusions: research recognitions warn us of the unoptimistic images of intergenerational coexistence within a modified family when we treat older women work in the institute of extended households. Although there are problems in such family harmony (often), in the statements of interviews the willingness to continue their activities in the light of the so-called generational peace was recognized. The greatest challenge within such activities would represent the immaterial recognition of the activities of older

women, which is assumed by life in such a family, but requires a dominant discourse based on the idea of neoliberal ideology that, in particular request, every family member responsibility for his duties, which requires regular self-discipline and responsible behaviour of all.

Keywords: older women, precarious work, modified enlarged family, long-lived society, intergenerational solidarity

INTRODUCTION

In Slovenian society, new terms: precarity, precarious, overwork have already been tamed, but for many people there are still unknown and incomprehensible phenomena when speaking about family. Although more and more people are beginning to understand them, especially as a critique of precarious, unstable, usually low-paid forms of work that reflect changes in either structural employment conditions on the labour market or work in the household. For granted, because the evaluation of this work is "defined" by collective reason. This work is the foundation of social integration and is not only important for family members, but is also essential for the functioning of Slovenian society. At the same time, this form of unpaid work is an important factor in the family economy, because without people provided work on a daily basis, there is no production and unpaid work for older women in the context of a modified extended family, it is also a free complement to the welfare system for the state. Whether it admits it or does not!

According to Seymore (2012), precarity is a new face of old incidence, built into neoliberal capitalism, in which growth is based on financial risk and indebtedness, a weakened labour market and an increasingly loose social protection system, all of which are experienced by members of an extended modified family. When Nielson and Rossiter (2008) argue that, in such a situation, Fordism should be seen as an exception and precarity as the norm; precarity can also be understood as a political concept, even in family circumstances. Especially if we understand his conception through the context of an economicist policy, which understands the social situation only as a narrow relationship of determination in family relationships.

In the harsh living conditions (including extended) families, families increasingly appear to be experiencing the normalisation and institutionalisation of precarious forms of work in the labour market of young people, the active population (their children) and the political dimension, which bring many social problems (e.g. unstable employment, low wages, depression, excessive work or burnout, late decision-making for parenting, poverty, lack of mobility and the possibility) of self-deprating young families.

These events, however, also meet older women living in a modified extended family in the complexity of the interplay of their roles.

Older women in the grip of family responsibilities

Research in Europe show that women still do the vast majority of domestic and family work, whether they are employed outside the home or not. Applications are more integrated in leisure activities and decision-making. But even when men get involved in family work, they are very likely to engage in more enjoyable tasks, such as games, walks, and in less routine and emotionally strenuous work. Women are still treated as socially irresponsible than men if the household is unregulated, or if children have problems at school (Kraut, 2001). Functionalists are convinced that sexual differences contribute to social stability. Talcott Parsons thus stresses the importance of a clear division of family work by gender for the good functioning of modern industrial societies.

The belief that women must play an expressive role, i.e. caring for family, child socialisation and emotional support for husbands and children, applies to women even when they retire, to the problem of sexual inequalities with other aspects of social class, such as age, class or ethnicity, which also

affect the situation of older women. Their work in the institution of a modified extended family household has the nature of unpaid work, which is soothed for "women's work", which completely changes the relationship in the division of work.

Older women devote much more time to this work than older men, even if they hire help for these tasks, as they still have care and control over the work they do. Older women's work ranges from routine activities - eating, dressing, protecting and caring - to nursing a sick family member. This family work is social reproductive work and just as important as the work that is taking place in a situation of formal market economy. Nevertheless, we still experience that housework has a negative label mainly because it is seen as a "woman's job" for granted.

However, older women are being attributed to account for their family, home and (adult) children even after they have already created their own family. Many people believe that this kind of work or "employment" of older women is "normal, self-evident" or that this role belongs to them. More and more older women feel this as a pressure on them, even though they are willing to help the young family (as nannies, cooks, grandchildren's transport to school and leisure activities, financially, etc.). They are sued for imagining and planning their life after retirement in order to dispose of their time alone, they can participate in activities that they were unable to engage in in their active part of their lives because of their many obligations. However, as they face changing working schedules and the risky employment of their children, most often the mother of grandchildren, the acute housing and financial problems of a young family living under the same roof, who face the disappearance of the concept of "orderly" working hours and working hours, by erasing the boundaries between work and family, they themselves "succumb" to new, challenging tasks. They are faced with a large-scale work, the scope of which is complex, because it is difficult to determine the beginning and the end. Above all, these are works that, to a small extent, cause satisfaction because others take them for granted. Most often they include:

- household work in the strict sense; as the purchase of funds for the day-to-day operation of the institute of a modified extended family, sneezing, washing, cleaning etc.;
- the relationship work they do for their family members, including as caring work;
- emotional work, which is tied to members of the family because of emotional attachment, which is often very burdensome, especially in illness, disability, because it requires empathy. In particular, older women get into the roles of those who supply and help them overcome stressful situations;
- care work covering wider members of kinship relationships who are needy, even if they do not live in the same household (older brothers, sisters, relatives, etc.).

Older women, household work in modified extended family

The household institute in the modified extended family is a production unit. C. Delphy and D. Leonard (in Goriup, 2013, 68; Haralambos and Holborn, 2008,) treat it as the family's economic system and define its essential characteristics. Each household, based on a modified extended family, has a specific social structure and different roles:

- the head of the household (usually the elderly woman) and the family members on her work;
- the head of the household makes decisions for the unusmable function of the household. It must provide for fundamental needs; its work is often paid in kindness (e.g. holidays, attentive gifts, etc.) than by cash payment. It also has greater access and control (or even monopoly) over the family property it manages; but not with relationships outside the family;
- the type and extent of work that older women in the household are required to carry out are subject to gender and status;
- economic relations rarely contain formal contracts, so family members are more likely to take part in informal negotiations, where older women are unable to carry out household work or pay for their income, a cost-sharing problem arises.

Coltrane (2000) notes that older women do two to three times more work in the institution of the household than older men. The most common works they do are: washing, ironing and sewing, cooking and preparing food, buying food and cleaning, cleaning apartments, washing dishes etc.

Emotional work- older women in the role of grandmother

In Slovenian society, idealized and romantic performances about grey-haired grandmothers in a rocking chair are less and less. Today, grandmothers are on average about 50 years old, but some are already great-grandmothers at the age of 60. Women are becoming grandmothers at least 15 years before the magic limit of 65 years, when they are said to be "old." So it's no wonder that many of today's grandmothers are still busy, in the middle of life and living often more diverse than their children. Modern grandmothers are different, too. Working women are not looking forward to the thought that in retirement they will be exclusively housewife and protect their grandchildren. This is especially true for more educated women, who also have many interests and a wide range of acquaintances even when they retire. Conversely, women who have increasingly devoted themselves to motherhood are also more "active" old mothers. Krab (2001, 52) states that in Slovenian society the "old mother's institution" is mainly seen as the protection of grandchildren and help with household chores, Renner, Ule and Kuhar (2003, 116) that, especially in the first years of the child's life, young parents prefer to trust the protection of grandmothers than other forms of childcare, despite the fact that in Slovenia there is a well-organised network of state-subsidised as well as private kindergartens whereas young parents are often critical of the rigidity and overwork of these institutions.

However, we point out that modern mothers are in a working relationship that requires them to be regularly and long-term daily absences, which causes the grandmother to become a very important (co)educator of her grandchildren and that sometimes even because of her mother's absence she assumes the role of principal educator. Many young parents would rather leave their child to their grandmother than send him to kindergarten, at least in the first three years of the child's life. The grandmother is often a very desirable member of the family. Especially if there is a small or pre-school child in it. But we often hear criticism for her grandmother's treatment of grandchildren, saying that she spoils them and continues to play his role as a mother. Slovenian grandmothers are very important because they often go to kindergarten for their grandchildren (immediately after their parents) and after they have completed care they also attend other obligations that parents are unable to do because of the growing and (often) time-very complex work of a work day. Above average, they often care after the children of single/never married parents and the highest educated living in larger cities. Grandmothers are seen as an important supporters of young families even in afternoon childcare. Thus, according to the *Parents between Work and Family Survey* (Kanjuro Mrčela and Černigoj Sadar, 2004, 23-25), in the life of the extended family grandmothers are the second most important person in the afternoon (27%).

Care work of older women

It is typical for women to move from one type of care to another throughout their life - from caring for children to caring for parents, grandchildren, for their partner's parents, for their partner, of other relatives. So they experience a vicious circle of worry; many have no time in life when they don't care for someone. The caring work of older women is very important because they are exposed in relation to all family and kinship members. They are the most numerous informal carers, as in a modified extended family they care for a sick and/or disengaged family member (especially grandchildren, but also partners and relatives). They are often automatically pushed into informal family care, which means they are doing unpaid care. The resulting situation is understood and taken for granted in society, because in the context of Slovenian society formal care is also feminized. The caring work of older women is economically devalued and pushed into the private realm of life. However, older women experience this type of work as a great pressure on their health, which also has implications for their participation in activities that they would otherwise like to take part in. This kind of work and its family is one of the areas in Slovenia, which is very neglected from the point of view of the state.

Purpose of the survey

Several methods were used to find answers to the research questions asked. In the theoretical work, we carried out an analysis of secondary sources, reviewed relevant theories and carried out some empirical research that focused on various aspects of precarity. For the purposes of the research, we carried out our own qualitative survey, based on pre-prepared questions for insight into the life and working circumstances of older women in a modified extended family.

In addition to figuring out whether older women living in a modified extended family, after retirement, they experience their work as precarious to their relationship to work and their own role in an extended family, we interviewed thirty older women, time-limited individuals. During the active period, interviewees did various jobs – doctors, shoppers and farmers; all were married, mothers and grandmothers and all over 65 years of age. We focused on interviewees' self-assessments of their own quality of life, on the level of health, shape and amount of leisure time, the interplay of work and leisure, whether they experience being trapped in everyday life, what affects their work satisfaction, and whether they feel work-related identity, because we were also interested in the wider context of their living circumstances. From the point of view of a social gerontologist, we asked 3 research questions for the need for research because we were interested in:

RQ 1: Why did they choose to do this kind of work in the context of a modified extended family?

RQ 2: What does their work as part of a common household cover?

RQ 3: Could the work they do in their modified extended families be seen as precarious work?

Analysis and interpretation of empirical data obtained

To obtain the desired empirical data, we used the technique of individually guided interview, which took place between 21 and 30 December 2022, in the "festive atmosphere of December", which allowed us a relaxed atmosphere. We visited every interviewer at home; they decided to take part voluntarily in the interview we recorded. They were granted anonymity; ethical principles of research work have been respected. They answered the questions asked extensively, with an explanation of parallel events, with pleasure and without embarrassment.

For the purposes of the analysis of the survey, we will present the key and most representative data on interviewees.

Description of the sample

In an unusual, dedicated sample, we included 30 women over the age of 65, all retired. In the case study, we present only 3 of them:

Person A, who was a family doctor. After completing medical school and specialization, she took a job in the Medical Centre, married and created a family. She gave birth to six children, and after 34 years of marriage, her husband died, who was also a doctor. Because of her loneliness, she moved in to live in the extended family of her youngest son, with grandchildren (twins) and daughter-in-law, who is also a doctor. The pension she receives is sufficient for her personal needs. The household participates "as needed"; it also protects grandchildren when their parents are away on business for a long time, or when they become ill.

Person B married immediately after finishing her education at a high vocational farmer school; she gave birth to two children; she and her husband built a house where they live with their daughter's family, which housed four grandchildren. She worked in a food store for most of her seniority. After her retirement, she "accepted" the role of housewife, grandmother and housewife.

After finishing high school in the secondary agricultural and horticultural school, the farmer (person C) took a job at the florist shop, where she "flourished" because she was very happy with the work.

However, when she met her later husband, she also realised that after the wedding she would not be able to combine the role of employee and the role of farmer, as the latter had needed the farm, which he had taken over as a young takeover farmer husband, in all her activities. She gave birth to three children. She was always in the care of her husband's elderly and sick parents while working on the farm, she was a housewife, a wife, a mother, a daughter-in-law. He now looks after the extended household, as the family of his eldest son lives at home, which is intended as a farm transferee, even though his wife, a mother of two, is employed in the public sector.

Results

The basic objective of our research was to determine the disparity of knowledge about the role of precarious work of older woman in the large modified family to avoid their discrimination and the real situation. Therefore, we wanted to explore:

RQ 1: Why did you choose to do this kind of work in the context of a modified extended family?

Person A stated that she had not decided to do this kind of work, but that she would "jump in" to protect her grandchildren, when necessary. In the household she participates, as stated, "conditional", e.g. prepares breakfasts and brunch when she and her grandchildren spend a long time alone. Washing, ironing and cooking for all family members she declines; she cleans up when needed. She helps her grandchildren with school commitments, she often attends with them theatre, film and other performances; protects and supplies them when they get sick.

Person B performs all the work of a housewife in a shared household, which she considers to be "normal", as her mother did. He has a genuine relationship with his grandchildren, as well as with his daughter and son-in-law. She is glad that she can contribute to everyone's satisfaction that "they have something to eat when they return home, put on clean and tidy clothes so that their daughter can be calm because the grandchildren are safe."

Person C has not experienced a transition from active working period to retirement. However, she pointed out that during her active work she had "missed her working hours, as she is on the farm without restrictions." She takes the extended-type household for granted, since she took on such a role after her husband took over the farm from her father-in-law. She is happy to be able to help her son's family and relieves her daughter-in-law, who has a "very demanding job and makes a significant contribution to the family budget with her income." It is a great pleasure to raise grandchildren, but she is aware that she is their grandmother, not a mother.

RQ 2: What does your work as part of a shared household cover?

Person A "helps in his son's family when necessary." Most involved in the protection and care of grandchildren and their upbringing. She believes that "children in family education form an important part of cultural capital". She supports his daughter-in-law because she "knows the specifics of the medical profession" and cleans up the apartment if necessary. If the grandchildren' parents are away for a long time, they organise meals outside the home. She takes care of sick grandchildren.

Person B performs "all the work requested by the household institute". She estimates that this is "her duty to intergenerational understanding," even though she herself did not. She likes to work; she likes to hang out with all the family members. He quotes grandchildren, regardless of gender, on household chores "so that they will be independent in life, to make it easier for them."

Person C took the role of "head in the kitchen" for granted, as she experienced it with her mother-in-law. But it does everything that "the kitchen requires, which is sometimes for her quite exhausting." Although the care of an eight-member family no longer allows her to work in the field and in the vineyard, she is happy to cultivate her own garden, which is "not only an obligation and duty, but also a pleasure and a relaxation."

RQ 3: Do you experience the work you do in your family as precarious work?

Person A knew, understood and answered the question negatively, saying that she "wants to preserve her personal freedom, even if she helps the young family, when necessary." The phenomenon of precarious work binds more to young, insecure jobs employed by women and to migrant women from the former Yugoslav republics. She declares that she "still lives her life, has hobbies she has not previously been able to exercise, she meets colleagues, friends, she indulges in a trip abroad twice a year.

Person B did not understand the concept of precarity, but did not rate his work in the institution of the household of a modified extended family, by explanation, as such. "It's true that she's never thought about it that way, because she is convinced that older people need to help the younger ones... that even when necessary, it will be the other way around! "She likes to work for her people!" For "the prize, young people pay her during the potato holidays because she gives it rheumatism."

Person C met for the first time with an explanation of the precarious work, but she refused to understand it as such. She never accepts her work as a burden, although she "admits that over the years her work is getting a little slower, sometimes harder, as she needs more time for a work to be done than she did years ago." She does not feel exploited. She is still an active member of the Farmers' Association, where she "is educating for the modern preparation of locally produced food; on Sundays and major public holidays she goes to church".

Conclusion

Precarious work has made the availability as well as the quality of jobs riskier and uncertain. The consequences of this are not restricted to work and the workplace but also affect many non-work domains, including family household, individual health and well-being (e.g. owing to mental stress, poor physical health), family formation (delayed entry into extended large family and having grandchildren), and the nature of family life more generally (community disintegration and declining social cohesion). Moreover, the anxiety, anger, anomie, and alienation produced by the spread of uncertainty, insecurity, and inequality associated with precarious work have motivated older women to adopt protective strategies to defend themselves. Coming after long periods of economic and social development after World War II, the current upsurge in precarious work has raised concerns that hard-won gains by workers during this period may be lost, a situation that seems likely to erode the legitimacy of established institutions (Standing, 2011).

Precarization within family is not a marginal phenomenon, even in the regions of Slovenia. In the leading neoliberal industrial Slovene society, it can no longer be outsourced to the socio-geographical spaces of the periphery where it only affects others. It is spreading even in those areas that were long considered secure. It has become an instrument of governing and, at the same time, a basis for capital accumulation that serves social regulation and control (Lorey 2015, 1).

For older women in a modified extended family in Slovenian society, the field of domestic work is "still some must"; it can be a source of satisfaction and quality intergenerational assistance and mutual understanding; it can also be a source of conflict because of the different perceptions of older women and other family members about what they do and how they work – for example, because of different hygiene standards, different ways of performing a particular task and, last but not least, because of the markedly unequal share of domestic and caring work done among family members. These inequalities can be understood in the context of dissatisfaction in relations between members of a modified extended family, when the self-importance of extensive work in the institution of the household and the unequal division of household, emotive and caring work represents an important part of relationship satisfaction for older women. Discrediting the importance of the quality and quantity of work done by older women is, especially in the absence of emotional closeness, more than just a conflict about what an older woman is doing and how much she works, but it is also an important question of her identity, as Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) said.

An important driver of precarious work of older women is becoming the digital revolution, which has aided all of the above trends by reducing capital's need for work of older women, accelerating the mobility of capital and the family management of global commodity chains, and expanding the ability

of their working contribution to monitor value creation at the family level. The ubiquity of mobile devices has also fuelled the growth of the “on-demand,” “gig,” or “sharing family economy,” allowing forms to use digital platforms as their organizational structure, redefining older women as workers as independent contractors who can be made to assume risks previously handled by the family members (Schor, 2015). Partly for this reason, Davis (2016) goes so far as to speak of the “vanishing corporation,” arguing that the most highly capitalized forms in the world today (Facebook, Google, Netflix, Apple) have relatively little need to employ older women in anything resembling the staffing patterns of the past.

Interviewers have largely highlighted their emotional attachment to their child's family and, above all, to grandchildren. The profession they were practising and their level of education seemed to have had a significant impact on their willingness and decision to “take on” household responsibilities and works. As well as the pattern they experienced in the transfer of roles themselves, when they were younger they were experiencing the role of either their mother or mother-in-law. They did not think about the negatives of their work, except for Person A, who strongly emphasized the need for “free decision-making about their life.” However, Person B and Person C pointed out that they miss “more human contact with other people”, i.e. the social dimension of the work, which they described as a lack of “a sense of belonging, the development of social gatherings, communication skills in the society, a more supportive environment of all family members, than a simple chat, and that the relatively greater freedom and flexibility of organizing work is a double-edged sword, so it is necessary to organise it well, “That you've got a minute of framing to stretch your legs”.

The interviews also showed both, the positive and the negative, impact of work on their health. In the case of a negative health impact, Person B and Person C have highlighted stress and that they “cannot afford to be sick” in the event of illness because they are in work, which is certainly a bad effect on their health in the long term.

We can conclude that, albeit on a small and unrepresentative basis, we have found that domestic work for modified extended families for older women represents a strong part of their identity. For them, this kind of work is a source of personal satisfaction and help for young families, and they are often exposed to the conformity of their work with their values when they value the social relevance of their work. So despite their efforts they expose the joy of work. Even when they pointed out that this work is a way of life for them, the boundaries between this kind of work for family members and their personal lives are blurred.

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