

## The International Corner

### Work and Family in Finland

By Ulla Kinnunen



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**Bio:** Ulla Kinnunen is a professor of psychology at the University of Tampere, Finland. She received her Ph.D. in work psychology in 1989 from the University of Jyväskylä, Finland. Her research focuses on occupational well-being from the perspectives of stress, burnout and recovery, including the work-family interface. Dr. Kinnunen's work examining gender differences in work-family conflict and well-being from a longitudinal perspective was a "top 20" Kanter award nominee, and won the top paper award in *Work & Stress* in 2006. Dr. Kinnunen's work has appeared in scholarly journals, including *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *Work & Stress*, *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, as well as numerous edited volumes. She serves as an associate editor of *Work & Stress* and on the editorial boards of the *Journal of Organizational Behavior* and the *Journal of Personnel Psychology*.

With a population of 5.3 million, Finland is one of the Nordic countries where the role of the state is active in reconciling the demands of work and family. Finland has almost equal employment rates for both men and women (73% vs. 69% in 2010) and both genders are typically employed full-time. This is possible as Finland has determined child care to be a universal social right. Fees for child care correspond to family size and income, and lower-income families do not pay for child-care services.

### Family-Leave Policy

In a comparison of parental leave policies in 21 countries with high-income economies, Finland belonged to the four countries that stand out as among the most generous with respect to paid leave and among the most gender egalitarian (Ray, Gornick, & Schmitt, 2009).

More specifically, at present, the duration of paid maternity leave is 105 weekdays (18 weeks including 6 weekdays per week) and parental leave is 158 weekdays (26 weeks) to which either parent is entitled. In addition to the opportunity to take up parental leave, fathers are entitled to paid paternal leave of 18 weekdays that can be extended by 1–12 weekdays if the father uses the last 1–12 days of parental leave. In addition to parental leave, either parent is entitled to a child-care leave with full job security until the child is 3 years old. Parents of children ages 8–9 years (i.e., until the second year in primary school) are also entitled to work reduced hours, provided that they have full-time employment. In addition to part-time leave, parents of children under the age of 10 are entitled to temporary leave of up to 4 days in the case of the child's illness. Employee dismissal because of pregnancy or during maternal/parental leave is legally prohibited in Finland.

Income received during both maternal and paternal leaves, as well as the amount of the parental leave allowance, depend on family income. Since 2007, fathers who take paternal leave are entitled to an additional allowance (father's bonus leave period). Parents who take home-care leave are entitled to an allowance that is

paid as a flat rate with supplements that are bound to family income. Also, part-time child-care leave is financially supported by the state, provided that the parent's working hours are reduced to a maximum of 30 hours per week.

Nearly all Finnish mothers take maternity leave, and about 70% of Finnish fathers take paternity leave, which lasts for 18 weekdays. Despite Finland's attempt to improve family policy for fathers by implementing the father's bonus leave period, it is estimated that only 9% of all fathers who qualify for this bonus leave period actually take advantage of it. Therefore, despite Finland's gender-egalitarian reputation, more progress needs to be made before fathers are equally taking parental leave. The likelihood of a father using shared parental leave depends on both the mother's position in the labor market (e.g., level of education and type of employment contract) and persistent gender roles related to care and breadwinner responsibilities.

### **Perceptions on Work-Family Interface**

Two recent Finnish studies assessed levels of work-family conflict and enrichment to determine the prevalence of four types of work-family balance—beneficial, harmful, passive, and active (Rantanen, 2008; Rantanen, Kinnunen, Mauno, & Tillemann, 2010). Beneficial work-family balance was found to be the dominant type among two samples of Finnish upper white-collar workers (university professionals and managers) and one community-based sample of middle-aged workers (age 42) with spouse and/or children. About half of the respondents belonged to this beneficial balance type, which refers to the simultaneous perception of high work-family enrichment and low work-family conflict. Less than 10% of the employees in the samples experience the harmful type (i.e., perceiving simultaneously high work-family conflict and low work-family enrichment). Of the other balance types, active balance (both conflict and enrichment perceptions being high) was quite common among professionals (about 30% belonged to this type), whereas passive balance (both conflict and enrichment perceptions being low) was typical among the 42-year-old employees (about 25% belonged to this type) but not among the professionals (under 10% belonged to this type). Those belonging to the beneficial balance type seem to be more often living with a partner, having fewer children living at home, and working fewer hours per week compared to the harmful balance type.

### **Conclusions**

Altogether, although the picture of work-family balance among Finnish employees seems to be quite positive, there are still issues to be resolved. Single parents experience work-family challenges. Not having a partner creates additional day-to-day stress, for example, in the case of having atypical working hours or not having a supportive network of friends and family. People especially want to reconcile work and family life when their children are small but may also experience challenges at some later stages of family life, such as when they are taking care of their aging parents in addition to own children. Thus far not much attention has been paid to these needs. The legislation regarding family leaves, social income transfers, and services is an important support for families reconciling their work and family life, but in the end the opportunities enabled by policies are realized in the everyday practices of families and workplaces. On the basis of these practices, we can conclude that there is still room for improving equality among Finnish women and men in managing their working life and family.

### **Further information:**

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