

Gender Gap in Educational Role in Asian Welfare Regimes: A Qualitative Research on Middle-Class Mothers in Singapore

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In the academic field of family sociology, there has been increased interest in "housewifization," which is a phenomenon of mothers becoming full-time housewives to fulfill the educational role for school-aged children in Asia. It is said that Singapore is one of the countries where the educational role is heavily on parents, especially mothers, although middle-class parents are able to "defamilise" childcare. The burden of education for children is considered to be one of the underlined reasons for low fertility rates and declining employment rates among women in their late 30s and beyond.

On the other hand, previous studies on international comparison of welfare regimes have overlooked the problem of gender equality regarding children's education. To answer the remaining questions of why children's education cannot be outsourced and why the burden is mostly on mothers, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 32 middle-class mothers and 3 sets of parents in Singapore.

The main findings are as follows: First, it is confirmed that the respondents have resources to outsource house-chore; however, checking children's homework, driving children to and from enrichment classes, or finding and managing private education outside of school is still mostly the responsibility of mothers. With the government's emphasis on human resources and familism at the same time, educational roles are considered as a long-term responsibility of parents; thus, neither helpers nor grandparents can fulfill the roles. Second, there are mainly two reasons why these roles mostly fall more on mothers' shoulder than fathers'. The first reason is the social expectations and pressure on mothers regarding children's education. Although many respondents explain the divided role as a choice of a couple, some mothers mention that they were the ones who would be blamed by teachers and relatives when their children's academic performance declines. The second reason is that mothers are more likely to have social networks to evaluate and introduce so-called good tutors or tuition centers (prep-school). While these middle-class women's social capital supports their children's educational achievement, it also is the reason why mothers are much more likely to be involved in their education.

In conclusion, this paper showed the importance of shedding light on the gender gap regarding children's education. Moreover, neoliberalism and workfare policies connected with familism put the social pressure on mothers to raise successful human resources. At the same time, it is important to observe what kind of communities and networks are supporting families. In the studies of welfare regimes, researchers often expect communities to be a safety-net instead of the family, state, or market. However, the mother's networks of the middle-class can only widen the social inequity, rather than to be a safety-net. Lastly, not only laws and policies but also people's

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perceptions and behaviors shape welfare regimes and gender balance. The paper shows it is worth observing parents' educational strategy and educational practice within a family.

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