

Work Education in the Family: Similarities and Differences between the City and Rural Areas

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Abstract: The technological advancement has changed the way of working and with more advanced tools the share of physical work has declined. This has changed the attitudes towards work and new technical solutions in housework cause many previously important skills being questioned. Historically, people in rural areas have had more domestic work, because next to housework they have had different agricultural tasks. The popular opinion is that persons from rural areas are more willing to contribute to work, and accordingly, it could be assumed that children from rural families have more working skills and experiences. The aim of this study was to describe the current situation of work education in Estonian families and compare cities with rural areas. The study examines the impact of family relations on the development of work habits and inquires the attitudes in the family that create a positive attitude towards home work. In collecting data interview and open ended questionnaires were used. The analysis of the results showed that there are no notable differences between urban and rural families regarding work education. Work education consists of including children in family activities from early childhood on, where they learn work skills at first through play and then through imitation. When the child is older and more independent, working becomes more intentional and also mandatory. Work education is based on the values and habits of the family. If the family values time spent together and common activities, work still remains a part of the normal daily life in the family.

Key words: work education, family, joint activity, family values.

Introduction

Work education has undergone many big changes over time. When in former times it was natural that children fulfilled various tasks in the family along with their mother and father and acquired necessary skills and work habits, nowadays people lack time to act together as a family. A popular attitude seems to be that the child does not have to work, because his or her main responsibility is to do schoolwork (Morrow, 2011). Attitude towards work and willingness to work have changed notably during most recent decades. The values survey conducted by the Estonian Ministry of Social Affairs highlights that not so far back, a hundred years ago, children had a major role in contributing to domestic work in a traditional agricultural society. There were tasks that were considered children's responsibilities, such as carrying firewood and water into the house, looking after smaller children and herding. Social norms dictated that children had to work and be obedient. A popular attitude in Estonia today is that involving children in household chores is a child raising method. The question is what is and what is not considered the child's work and where to draw the line between work education as a child raising method and actual working, i.e. how should working for a family business or on a family farm be classified (Lapsed ja Eesti..., 2006).

The same survey revealed that 51 % of Estonian population believes tasks fulfilled by children and/or children's involvement in domestic work to be an obvious responsibility. This sentiment is popular among people aged 65 and older, also in rural regions, among people that have other ethnic origin than Estonian and in large families. People with higher education and higher income support the idea of smaller amount of household chores for children. 16 % of Estonian population, where the major share is young people aged 15-24, clearly disapproves children's work or their involvement in household chores. Hence, generations have different attitudes towards work education (Lapsed ja Eesti..., 2006).

According to Brühlmeier (2009, 120), changes in work habits can be associated with the era of technology that has greatly freed people from physical activity and shortened the time spent on working. Along with the advancement of technology, the nature of work has changed and the tools have become more sophisticated, leading to a reduced need for physical work. The continued trend of technical solutions that simplify housework has made us question many skills that have formerly been considered important – they are often replaced by knowledge of technology, skills to operate a piece of equipment and, if necessary, maintain it (Morrow, 2011). It is possible to buy various services from car wash to

cleaning and repairing your apartment. Abundant selection in stores of ready-to-eat and convenience food means that the practice of cooking from raw materials has changed within families.

Throughout history, people that live in rural regions have traditionally had more to do in their household than people in the city because in addition to daily work they have the responsibility to grow crops or take care of domestic animals. An understanding has been developed that people in rural regions are more inclined to contribute to domestic work. Consequently, it could be concluded that children in rural families have more work experience and skills. However, this might not be true today, where the number of active rural people has decreased and urban and rural households do not differ much, may be in that people that live in the country have to travel a longer distance to go to a shopping centre or a cultural centre (Eesti regionaalarengu..., 2012).

Duties in the family are divided into different areas: providing education for children, developing them emotionally, socialisation to become a member of society, but also sharing knowledge with children and teaching those skills to manage in a household, including cooking, cleaning, raising children and taking care of children (Korvela, 1999, 81). The aim of this study was to describe the current situation of work education in Estonian families and compare cities with rural areas. The study questions were following: how relations within the family help develop work skills; which attitudes prevalent in the family create a better ground for valuing work and work skills; how are tasks divided between family members; how much household work is different in cities compared to rural areas.

Methodology

A combined design was used in this study. Data were collected using interviews and a questionnaire with open-ended questions. Gillham (2000) suggests an interview in case a small number of people are being studied; people are accessible; everyone is a key person; most of the questions are open-ended and require more in depth answers; some questions are sensitive and require trust. The chosen interviewees were three families from a rural region and three families from a city. When preparing the sample, the idea was to create a basis for comparison between families that live in the city and in the country and that live in a detached house and in an apartment building. When choosing families, one of the criteria was to have many different family types in the sample. The sample included one family where three generations live together, which means that grandparents contribute to daily housework. The decisive factor for choosing one family was the fact that one parent works abroad. The sample also included a family where the mother raises two daughters (Table 1). Mainly individual and group interviews were used in the study. In some cases, all the members of the family wished to give answers together and their wish was respected. In order to avoid a bias in answers (for example, a child is afraid to express his or her opinion in the presence of his or her parents), a short individual interview followed the family interview. The interviews were recorded with a voice recorder, the text was audio typed and systematised based on the questions.

Table 1

Interviewed families

Family code	Place of residence of the family	Age of family members	Additional information
F1	City, detached house.	Mother 40, father 42, daughters 7 and 11, grandmother 70, grandfather 76.	Small garden. Father works as a private entrepreneur in addition to his paid job. Grandmother and grandfather are domestic.
F2	City, detached house.	Mother 39, father 45, daughters 5 and 19.	Garden. The family helps also relatives.
F3	City, apartment building.	Mother 46, father 53, daughter 23.	The family helps relatives in two households (in cities). The daughter lives and studies in another city, but visits her parents' home often.
F4	Country, apartment building.	Mother 39, daughters 13 and 17.	No garden. The family has 6 pets.

Family code	Place of residence of the family	Age of family members	Additional information
F5	Country, apartment building.	Mother 32, step-father 33, daughter 11 and son 2.	No garden. The family helps in relatives' households.
F6	Country, detached house.	Mother 40, father 54, daughters 12 and 19.	Garden. The father has been working in Finland for 10 years.

To collect additional information, it was decided to prepare and distribute a questionnaire. The idea of the questionnaire was to collect as much information as possible that could be used as a basis for theoretical conclusions (Hirsjärvi, Remes, 2010). The sample of the questionnaire comprised 9th grade students aged 15–16. This age group was chosen to ensure representation of young people that live in the country and in the city and may have some experience in household work. The students were distributed the questionnaire in a class and all filled out questionnaires were returned. In the rural school, 13 students (8 girls and 5 boys) answered the questionnaire and in the city school 14 students (8 girls and 6 boys) answered the questionnaire, altogether 27 young people. Four rural school students had previously lived in the city, one both in the city and in the country, the rest of the students (8) had lived in the country. 3 of the city school students had previously lived in the country, 1 both in the city and in the country and 10 had lived in the city. In total, 11 of the respondents had lived in the country, 2 both in the city and in the country and 14 in the city. The background information concerning the students that responded to the questions is presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Students that answered the questionnaire

School	Girls	Boys	Have lived in the city	Have lived in the country	Have lived both in the city and in the country
City school	8	6	10	3	1
Rural school	8	5	4	8	1
Total	16	11	14	11	2

The questionnaire included open-ended questions similar to the interview questions. Use of open-ended questions in questionnaires is justified because it gives the respondents an opportunity to express their own opinions, while multiple-choice answers restrict them. (Hirsjärvi, Remes, 2010). In the questionnaire designed for the students, they were asked to assess the level of their work skills, i.e. whether they can manage in future with the work skills they have acquired.

Results and discussion

Nature of household chores. Work skills are acquired within the family when doing household chores. Household chores are tasks that the family members have to do every day. There are tasks that need to be done once a week or less frequently. The amount and division of labour depends on the number of household members, more precisely how many of them are adults able to work and how many children there are in the family and how old they are (Soolise võrdõiguslikkuse..., 2011).

During the interview, the first step was to identify what the family considers a household chore or what it means to do household work. The families listed various household chores, but the interviewees also said that these are simple tasks that need to be done at home. Helping parents, cleaning the house are examples of tasks that children gave as examples of household work. Many answers included an idea that it is good to be in a clean home; however, it requires participation of the entire family. According to the interviewees, there are domestic tasks that have to be done daily and those that need to be done once a week or even less frequently.

F2 father: *“Household work means tasks that are done in a household. Tasks are different depending on whether you live in an apartment building or a detached house. The amount of housework is*

significantly smaller if you lived in an apartment compared to your own house. There is a set of tasks that have to be done once a week and not every day. Cooking and washing dishes is a daily chore. Doing laundry, cleaning the rooms are tasks undertaken once a week. Buying food is also an everyday task."

Children think that homework is also schoolwork that they have to do at home. A daughter of one family notes that besides schoolwork she does not do very often other household tasks, because mother does them.

F4 daughter 17: *"Homework is two things: schoolwork or household chores that I do not too that much, because mother does most of them."*

The answers to the questionnaire provided by students reveal that they see household work as helping family members and relatives, fulfilling tasks that are necessary for home, but also schoolwork. One boy that studies in a rural school mentioned also taking care of domestic animals: "I have to help parents to cook, take care of domestic animals, clean." Another boy that lives in the country adds: "... help parents, chop wood or shovel snow. You have to do household chores sometimes."

Division of labour in the family. Division of labour between family members depends on whether they live together or some of them are away for some time, e.g. a family member that works far away from home or abroad. Division of labour changes also when the parents are divorced. There are many different factors that influence division of labour in a family additionally: prevalent cultural norms in society, home culture, traditions, understanding of female and male gender roles, attitudes towards these roles, the media (Soolise..., 2011). Usually family members help each other to do household work within the interviewed families and, if necessary, all family members fulfil the required tasks.

F3 daughter: *"We all do everything. Father may be has not cooked that much, but he helps to cook and wash dishes. He also cleans the house. Ironing and doing laundry are jobs that mother does more. We go shopping together, it has been so from childhood."*

However, this division of labour cannot be considered a rule. In one family (F4) household chores are mainly the responsibility of the mother that has taken them on her shoulders at some time. Grandmother also visits often and helps.

F4 daughter 17: *"Setting a table? We do not gather around the table to eat together. Everyone eats wherever he or she likes. Sometimes when I am behind my computer, I put my meal on the computer table, or I lay on the bed and eat or whatever. We do not have a dedicated place where we eat. Grandmother sews and repairs clothes. I sew small things, if I want; however, I do not sew clothes, because I do not know how. Everybody cleans his or her room, but mother vacuums everywhere. We do not use an iron; we have clothes that do not need ironing. I take dishes to be washed and mother usually washes dishes (she is used to it), because I have bacteria phobia and I do not want to touch these things much. Grandmother is usually the one that washes windows outside because she is the only one of us that is not afraid to do it. Mother changes the litter box, because she wanted to have the cats. Mother loads up the washing machine and then puts them out to dry, she knows how, I just leave my clothes in the bathroom."*

The younger daughter (F4 daughter 13) says: *"My sister does not do almost anything. Mother cleans the house, I usually help her."* Mother adds (F4 mother): *"Basically I do everything."* The words used by the older daughter show her attitude - the child does not value her part in household chores and, therefore, does not value the work done by her parent. In this family, though, the younger daughter helps to clean and take care of pets. The family (F4) is an example of a situation where the mother has done everything for her children to give them a good life and the children now think that this situation is normal because "mother is used to it and she knows how things are done." Arendi (2011) is convinced that if a child has acquired work habits, he or she gladly fulfils different tasks and it does not require a special effort from his or her part. Today young people live a lot in the virtual world and in the opinion of Leppik (2010) this deepens laziness and indolence in young people.

Women`s and men`s work. Division of labour in the family may be studied also from the following aspects: whether the tasks are divided into women`s and men`s work in the family and is it possible to highlight the difference in the division of labour when comparing families that live in an apartment building with families that live in a detached house in the country or in the city.

The tasks that are most often said to be women's work is washing windows and ironing (in four families out of six – city families F1, F2, F3; rural family F4).

F3 mother: *"May be washing windows is that others have not done. I do laundry, iron."*

Men's work include tasks that require physical strength, such as shovelling snow and maintaining the car (F2); nevertheless, a female member of the family may also help to do repair work (F3).

F2 mother: *"I and my husband both cook, he also likes to cook. My husband takes care of the cars, he also builds and does repair work. I can help, may be hold something and paint and do such things, but my husband does most of this work."*

F3 father: *"We wash dishes, which is not a special task. Preparing an omelette in the morning is my job, I also brew coffee. In the evening, we buy food together. Cleaning and washing cars is my job. We repair our home together, we put up wallpaper together, I do stonework or plumbing, or I call a handyman. When we tiled the bathroom, she grouted tiles. Lawn mowing at the mother-in-law's place is my job."*

In one family (F1), it is clear that the husband does not wash dishes or cook; however, in this particular family the father has a heavy workload: in addition to paid work he is also involved in forest processing and selling firewood. There are several females in this family – in addition to the wife and mother two daughters (7 years and 11 years) that help gladly to do housework. The wife believes that her husband can wash dishes, if necessary. F1 mother: *"Husband does not wash dishes voluntarily, but if it is really necessary he can do it, I believe."*

Of 27 students that filled out the questionnaire, 17 said that in their family work is not divided into women's and men's work, 10 thought that in principle, men do work that requires physical strength and women do work that is physically not that strenuous, such as cleaning and cooking. A girl that studies in the city: *"Men do usually repair and harder work, women usually cook, walk the dog. Everyone works in the garden and also cleans the house."*

In the Gender Equality Monitoring, a specific indicator characteristic to Estonia has been highlighted – a large gap in the average wages of women and men that is considered one of the reason why in families with two parents the male of the family is usually considered the breadwinner, which is why women often opt for a heavier load of household work. The initial socialisation of children occurs at home inside their family, which means that today's traditional division of roles within the family may cement the situation where the stereotypical role attitudes and acceptance of gender inequality are regenerated (Hansson, 2014). When the division of work in the families that have participated in this study were compared with the above statements, it is good to note that in four out of six interviewed families (F2, F3, F5, F6), the division of labour based on gender has become more fair and in these families children are involved in work regardless of their gender.

Definition of work education. When asked the definition of work education, the reply was that it means working together with parents and acquiring knowledge unconsciously. The interviewees also said that it is a natural part of life where parents are so smart at directing their children that the latter do not realise that they work. It was added that parents should pay more attention to and be involved intentionally in work education and direct their children.

F2 father: *"Parents should pay more attention to it so that children learn to work themselves and the parents should not do everything for them, even if it seems easier at times."*

The study shows that some parents direct their children intentionally to develop their work skills and find that at certain age children should already have some responsibilities.

F2 mother: *"You have to begin educating at early age. I try to involve children. Parents should explain what they do so as to spark an interest in children to do certain activities. When children are older, they should be given certain tasks. I believe that children that spend more time with parents are exposed to work education every day."* The students that responded to the questionnaire see work education as a process during which a child is primarily taught how to work correctly. This means obligations, habits and independence. In a family where work and the feeling of well-being from it are valued, children are prepared at early age to acquire work habits effortlessly. Involving children in domestic work at home improves their sense of responsibility that can be developed from early childhood.

F3 father: "A two year old child has to collect his or her things. If you do not explain it to a two-year-old, then may be when he or she is five, it is already too late." Right habits are very important for children and they are formed in certain conditions. Bad habits are hard to give up or change later on. (Tuulik, 2001; Kera, 2005)

How work skills are obtained. The answer to the question how skills of doing household work are acquired was mainly that they come from the parents. F1 grandmother: *"This has been so all along, always together with parents, following them and you do not even notice that you do something."*

The children of the family 6 mention that both parents are teaching the same task, which means that many things are done collectively in this family.

F6 daughter 12: "I have learned how to cook from my father, but when I cook now, then I ask also my mother."

F6 daughter 19: *"I learned how to cook from my mother. Father showed me specially how to clean car battery terminals."*

In addition, skills acquired in school and from colleagues were mentioned. The study also revealed that nowadays various tips on how to do some jobs could be found in the Internet.

F2 father: *"Mother taught how to cook, my uncle was one of my examples and then my step-father when I was a teenager. Also colleagues – you have to go around eyes open. I am very grateful that the Internet is there. A lot of building-related advice can be found there."* It was mentioned that in the relations of the family members, a healthy climate (F6 father) and quality time spent together (F3 daughter) are important.

F3 daughter 23: "Common activities must be valued. We spend time together, we sport together. We have always had breakfast and dinner together. When all family members are at home, we eat supper together. We spend a lot of time with relatives and it is nice."

One of the families (F4) is an example of a situation that when time together and common activities are not valued, children do not acquire habits and have no wish to participate in housework.

When the students aged 15-16 were asked to assess the work skills acquired at home from the perspective of managing in life, they mostly believed that they can manage quite well but there is room for development. One boy that lives in the city was self-critical and said that he *"is a bit lazy but things get done. Not immediately, later"*. He gave a score of 3 to his skills. It was also mentioned that when faced with problems, you could find help searching the Internet. Consequently, the young people are used to find solutions using the Internet.

Difference of household work in the country and in the city. This study did not find great differences between the amount of household work done in urban and rural families. The values that a person holds direct his or her choices in life and preferred activities. If a family that lives in the city or in the country values work and creating with your own hands and doing things together, opportunities can be found even if the family lives in an apartment. The family can help acquaintances or relatives (families F3 and F5 that live in an apartment building).

F3 father: *"Usually Estonians have some close relatives that have a house in the country. If there were not my mother-in-law's house, we surely would have a house and even a house in the country."* The interviews revealed that the nature and amount of work depends more on whether the family lives in an apartment building or a detached house. Only one girl among the students that filled out the questionnaire mentioned that her part in household work is extensive because they live in the country, there is a lot of work to do and she has to help. It is important to note that there may be more work to do when living in a rural region but work education is part of the family life both in the country and in the city.

Conclusions

The analysis of the results of this study confirmed the results of previous studies according to which nowadays there are no significant differences in household work that urban and rural families do. Also, work is not that much divided based on gender. As in households that live in the city, men in the country do also work that in earlier times were called women's work – they wash dishes and do laundry, cook. Differences mainly depend on whether the family lives in an apartment or a detached house.

Work education is involving a child in the family's common activities from an early age. The child learns how to work, initially through play, then through imitation. When the child grows older and becomes more independent, working becomes intentional and mandatory. Work education is based on the family's values and attitudes. If the family values the time spent together and joint activities, then working is a natural part of the family's life and the members of the family do not sense it as being hard; on the contrary, they think of this work as something nice. Parents can do a lot: they can direct their child at right time allowing him or her learn necessary skills for future life. The keyword here is good relations. If family members spend much time together, they contribute jointly and children are exposed to work education almost daily. However, educating children cannot be separated from teaching values, so work education is based on sharing values and attitudes, which begins in early childhood.

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