

WHY GOOD CHILDCARE PROVISION IS IMPORTANT FOR GENDER EQUALITY

PROFESSOR INGELA NAUMANN

TO MAKE THE MOST OUT OF THIS SCRIPT, YOU COULD:

- Stick it in your book as a record of watching Ingela's animation
- Pause the animation and make notes as you go
- Add your own illustrations to the sheet
- Create your own animation to accompany it
- Add notes from classroom discussions
- Make notes of areas you will investigate further
- Make notes of key words and definitions
- Add questions you would like answered – you can message Ingela through the comments box at the bottom of her article: www.futurumcareers.com/why-good-childcare-provision-is-important-for-gender-equality

SCRIPT:

When she was seven, Professor Ingela Naumann's daughter came to her, distraught. "Mum, I don't know what to do. I really want to be a herpetologist when I grow up, but I also want to be a mum. I don't know which one to choose."

This encounter had a strong impact on Ingela, a professor of social policy at the University of Edinburgh. She is interested in how government policies promote or hinder gender equality.

In the UK, a mother is much more likely to give up work to care for children than a father is, as traditional gender roles are still ingrained in society. It was only in 2015 that shared parental leave was introduced, allowing both parents to share 12 months off work after a baby is born.

In contrast, in Sweden, shared parental leave has existed since the 1970s, and today is 18 months long. Then, from the age of one, Swedish children are entitled to full-time childcare, allowing both parents to pursue careers while sharing the responsibilities of raising a family.

In Scotland, all three- and four-year-olds are entitled to 30 hours of free nursery per week. But, if parents work full-time, who will care for the children for the remaining hours of the working week? And what happens between the ages of one, when parental leave ends, and three, when free nursery begins?

If working parents cannot involve their wider family, they are forced to pay for private childcare. With some of the highest childcare costs in the world, it is impossible for many families in the UK to balance the cost of childcare with their income. It is often more economical for one parent to reduce or give up their work than it is to pay for full-time childcare. This is usually the mother.

These gaps in childcare policy cause families to slip into traditional gender roles, where women care for the children and men provide for the family. This perpetuates gender inequalities, as women have fewer opportunities to succeed in their careers and men have fewer opportunities to spend time with their children.

Ingela works with policymakers in the Scottish Government as she investigates the gender inequalities resulting from a lack of affordable childcare. She compares social policies in different countries to understand how to best support equal parenting, then advises the government, so her research will contribute to national policy changes that hopefully lead to societal shifts in gender norms.

We need a society where fathers can be fully involved in the care of their children. And we need the next generation of young women to grow up knowing they can have a successful career while also being a mother, and that they can truly be whatever they want to be.

What could you achieve as a social policy researcher?