

# Undermining the male breadwinner ideal? Understandings of women's paid work among second-generation immigrants in Norway

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## Abstract

The traditional male breadwinner model, where men are responsible for economic provision while women are responsible for the home, is in decline across the Western world as women are increasingly taking up paid employment. However, the meaning of breadwinning in the context of people's everyday family lives has received little academic attention. Based on qualitative interviews, this article analyses how the adult children of Pakistani immigrants in Norway understand and justify women's employment, with particular attention to how the economic aspect of women's work is conceptualised. The study finds that women's employment is accorded distinctively different meaning, and it is argued that the key distinctions are captured in two analytical dimensions: (1) the extent to which the economic contribution of women's work is recognised, and (2) the ideal gender division of participation in paid work. The male breadwinner ideal is more explicitly challenged along the second dimension, than the first.

## Keywords

Breadwinning, economic dimension of work, Norway, Pakistani, second generation, women's employment

## Introduction

Breadwinning models delineate the relationship between paid and unpaid labour in the family. In the traditional male breadwinner model, men are responsible for economic provision through employment while women are responsible for the home and family. This family model reached its peak in Europe in the years following World War II, but the second half of the twentieth century has seen enormous changes with increasing numbers of women entering the labour market and rising employment among mothers (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Lewis, 2001).

The concept of breadwinning is widely used in research literature, but there has been little debate about what breadwinning (or provision) is and few attempts to theorise the concept (Warren,

2007). It is often used to characterise state-level policies, national cultural models, or aggregated patterns of work–care practices in cross-national comparisons. However, few have studied breadwinning in the context of people’s everyday family lives. Although the (sole) male breadwinner as a model of *practice* has become rare, it can still be relevant as an *ideal*. There is a need for multidimensional analyses of breadwinning that study not only how families organise work and care, but also how breadwinning ideals shape the meaning attached to women’s and men’s employment (Potuchek, 1997; Warren, 2007).

Based on a qualitative study of second-generation<sup>1</sup> families of Pakistani descent living in Norway, this article analyses how breadwinning ideals can shape the way people understand and justify women’s work. This is an interesting empirical case for at least two reasons. First, the labour market participation of immigrant women is a topic of great concern throughout Europe, characterised by fear that the second generation will reproduce the so-called traditional family practices that typify some immigrant groups. Immigrants from Pakistan have migrated from a cultural context where the (sole) male breadwinner ideal is strong (e.g. Kandiyoti, 1988; Lefebvre, 1999), and the female employment rate among Pakistani immigrants is especially low (Dale et al., 2006; Østby, 2013). However, as the children of Pakistani immigrants have only recently reached adulthood, little is known about how they will organise and reflect on work and care once they have their own children.

Second, Norway is an interesting context for studying breadwinning models and ideals as it, together with the other Scandinavian countries, is seen as a forerunner in the declining prevalence of the male breadwinner model (e.g. Aboim, 2010; Ellingsæter, 1998). In comparative terms Norway stands out as a country with a strong gender equality ideology, a high female employment rate, and social policies that explicitly support a dual-earner model, even in families with young children (Ellingsæter, 2009). Families in Norway, both among the majority and the immigrant population, establish and make sense of their work and childcare practices in a context where the male breadwinner ideal is relatively weak. Thus, Norway represents a context where the potential tension between a male breadwinner ideal and more gender equal ideals and practices might become intensified, making it a theoretically relevant political and cultural context for studying the adaptations of the second generation.

This article analyses how second-generation women and their husbands in Norway interpret, justify, and make sense of women’s paid work as mothers of young children, and the interest is primarily in how the economic dimension of women’s work is understood. The analysis shows that the same practice – women’s paid work – is accorded distinctively different meaning, and I find that the key distinctions can be captured in two analytical dimensions: first, the extent to which the economic contributions of women’s work is recognised, and second, the perception of the ideal gender division of participation in paid work.

## The Norwegian context

Both the social policies and the patterns of family practices found in Norway are predominantly in line with a 'dual breadwinner/state-carer model' (in the terminology of Pfau-Effinger, 1999), meaning that both parents are expected to work, and childcare is to a large extent considered the task of the welfare state. Norwegian family policies explicitly aim to support women's participation in the labour market, even when their children are young. To this end, state policies focus on generous paid parental leave, which gives parents the right to approximately one year of paid leave, and the guaranteed provision of childcare services from the age of one. The rates of female employment in Norway are high, even for mothers of small children (Ellingsæter, 2009), and the overwhelming majority of children, also in the youngest age groups, attend kindergarten (Kitterød et al., 2012). However, men earn more than women, and a large share of women work part-time (Skrede and Wiik, 2012).

The first substantial migration to Norway came in the late 1960s, consisting mainly of unskilled labour migrants from rural Pakistan who were later joined by their spouses and children (Brochmann and Kjeldstadli, 2008). While the Pakistani immigrants generally have low levels of education, their children are pursuing higher education to the same extent as the majority population (Østby, 2013). Pakistani immigrants in Norway report high levels of religiosity and are predominantly Muslim (Elgvin and Tronstad, 2013). This immigrant group has been characterised by low levels of female employment, and strong support for the male breadwinner ideal. While only 16 per cent of majority respondents agree that it is men's primary responsibility to provide for the family, 72 per cent of Pakistani immigrants agree to the statement. Among the second generation of Pakistani descent, the portion who agrees is 66 per cent (Kavli and Nadim, 2009: 91). Although they have grown up in families characterised by a male breadwinner model and express support for a male breadwinner ideal, the dual-earner family also appears to be the most common family model in the second generation, even if not to the same extent as in the majority population (Kavli and Nadim, 2009). Thus, there is a potential tension between a male breadwinner ideal and the work-care practices of many second-generation families of Pakistani background.

## Conceptualising economic provision

While there have been substantial theoretical debates about women's unpaid labour and the concept of caring, the economic dimension of women's work outside the home has not been sufficiently studied in research on work and family. The concept of breadwinning explicitly concerns the economic dimension of work as it refers to the economic provision of the family. Warren (2007) points to a deficit in the theoretical attention to the meaning of breadwinning, arguing that the concept seems to have 'an unproblematic taken-for-granted, everyday, common-sense meaning in current sociology' (Warren, 2007: 318).

The idea of the male breadwinner is usually traced back to the division of home and work into separate spheres that followed the industrial revolution, and the special male responsibility for providing for the family that grew out of this separation (e.g. Pfau-Effinger, 2004; Potuchek, 1997)<sup>2</sup>. A 'good provider' or breadwinner was historically defined as 'a man whose wife did not have to enter

the labour force' (Bernard, 1981: 2), and men's responsibility to provide was countered by women's responsibility to care for the home and family. However, the male breadwinner as the sole economic provider for his family has always been more of an ideal than a reality, and the husband's provision was often facilitated by the wife's personal property or earnings (Hood, 1986; Pfau-Effinger, 2004). I will briefly outline how the concept of breadwinning is commonly used in the research literature, before turning to the perspective that is employed in this article: analysing breadwinning in terms of the *meaning* attributed to paid work.

The concept of breadwinning is often used in cross-national studies that examine how different breadwinning models are manifest as normative models in social policies (e.g. Daly, 2011; Lewis, 2001) or studies that ask how different breadwinning ideals are reflected in the 'cultural value orientations' (Pfau-Effinger, 2012) or 'gender cultures' (Aboim, 2010) of various countries. Some scholars combine these approaches and analyse how welfare state policies interact with cultural and structural mechanisms in shaping gender relations in economic provision (e.g. Ellingsæter, 1998). These approaches study breadwinning models as *state-level, normative models* in order to explain cross-national differences in family attitudes and practices concerning the gender division of labour.

Breadwinning has also been examined as *models of practice*, where breadwinning is operationalised as gendered patterns in labour market participation (e.g. Dale et al., 2006), in work hours (e.g. Warren, 2000), or in the financial income contribution to the household (e.g. Skrede and Wiik, 2012). There is a growing interest in studying differences in breadwinning practices within, and not only across, societies. Quantitative studies find that practices of economic provision vary substantially according to class (Warren, 2000) and ethnic background (Dale et al., 2006). In addition, there have been a few attempts to analyse practices of breadwinning in terms of *how provision is done* in the micro-context of the family. For instance, Magnussen (2012) examines practices of provision and finds that 'economic provision work' involves not only bringing home an income, but also a responsibility to maximise income and to pay, plan, and manage the family's expenses.

Nevertheless, few scholars have studied breadwinning in terms the *meaning* attached to the employment of men and women in everyday family life. Breadwinning is more than just a behaviour – being in paid employment – it also concerns the meaning accorded to that behaviour. Breadwinning is defined by the *responsibility* to provide or the 'the day-to-day obligation to earn money for the financial support of a family' (Potuchek, 1997: 4). Zelizer's (1997) historical analysis demonstrates how money earned by married women in the labour market was traditionally seen as 'special money', categorised as a supplementary income and treated as less important than the husband's wages. Conceptualising women's work and income as supplementary diminishes the threat to a male breadwinner ideal because it does not challenge men's position as responsible for the family's economic provision (Potuchek, 1997; Zelizer, 1997).

The idea that men are responsible for the economic provision of the family is still relevant and has subtle impacts on men's and women's expectations and identities. Numerous studies show how breadwinning can offer a source of identity for many men (e.g. Christiansen and Palkovitz, 2001; Magnussen, 2012), and men feel a special obligation to provide even when their wives are employed (Potuchek, 1997). Furthermore, Tichenor's (1999) study of so-called status-reversal couples in the United States demonstrates how the interpretation of women's work is still coloured by a male

breadwinner ideal. Even in couples where the wife earns more than the husband or works in a higher status occupation, both spouses underplay the women's role as main providers and employ strategies to preserve (an illusion of) the husbands' economic responsibility in the relationship. Tichenor (1999) concludes that income and occupational status are gendered resources that, when involving the wife, take on different meaning and become less powerful. The meaning attached to men's and women's work and income can shape the relations of power in the household (Elizabeth, 2001; Tichenor, 1999; Vogler, 2005) as well as decisions related to the division of work and care.

This article contributes to answer Warren's call for 'more in-depth qualitative studies into what it means to bread win' (Warren, 2007: 330) by analysing how families with young children make sense of women's work, with particular attention to how the economic dimension of women's work is conceptualised. Previous research shows that class position is an important differentiating factor for how women's employment is understood (cf. Crompton, 2006; James, 2008). Individual's life situation and structures of possibility determines what cultural resources they are likely to use and what resources they have access to when making sense of women's employment (Lamont, 1992). Thus, people's conceptions of women's employment must be understood in light of their social position.

The existing studies that discuss the meaning dimension of breadwinning in the family predominantly stem from an American or British context, and several of the most relevant contributions are rather dated (e.g. Potuchek, 1997; Tichenor, 1999; Zelizer, 1997). Thus, there is a need for updated studies of breadwinning from other national contexts. The current study contributes with an empirical analysis of the second generation, whose work-care practices and ideals we have little knowledge about; in Norway, a context where the decline of the male breadwinner model has come further than most countries.

## About the study

This analysis is based on a small-scale qualitative study of how second-generation families in Norway organise and reflect on work and childcare. The study includes 19 in-depth interviews, 14 with Norwegian-born women whose parents emigrated from Pakistan, in addition to separate interviews with five of their husbands. Thus, the interviews with the women form the main empirical base in the study, and the analysis is predominantly based on the women's perspective. With the exception of two childless and slightly younger women, the interviewees were 29 to 35 years old. They have between one and four children, where at least one child is under school age, and all the children have attended kindergarten at some point. The children of Pakistani immigrants in Norway tend to marry a spouse from their parents' country of origin (Daugstad, 2008), and nine of the interviewed women have married a man from Pakistan. The rest are married to a man with the same background as themselves, i.e. Norwegian-born with Pakistani migrant parents. Of the husbands interviewed, two are marriage migrants and three have grown up in Norway. The study includes women both with and without a higher education. All the women have a formal attachment to the labour market. Half of

the women, and all of the men, work full-time. The rest work part-time, ranging from working freelance from home a few hours a week to working 80 per cent of fulltime.

The interviews were semi-structured and lasted between one and two hours. The aim of the interviews was to capture the participants' education, work, and childcare choices, in addition to how they justify and explain these choices. The interviews started with the participants drawing a 'life line' where they plotted in important life events related to education, work and family. The life decisions and turning points that were marked in the life lines structured the course of the interview. Thus, the order of topics and the relative time given to each were determined by the dynamics of the conversation. Most of the interviews were conducted in the interviewee's home, while a few were done at their workplace or at a quiet café. In recruiting participants, I relied on snowball sampling and used several entry points, such as networks established through previous research, schools, and voluntary organisations.

The current analysis takes the work and care practices of the second-generation families as a point of departure and explores how the interviewees make sense of and explain these practices. I engaged in an interpretative analysis where I systematically searched the material for the meaning that is expressed and the meaning that is implied or taken for granted (cf. Haavind, 2000). The process of analysis began by tracing how the individual interviewees explain and justify their work and care practices, with special attention to the role of economic justifications. The main concern was to trace the links and contradictions within the individual accounts. Through careful 'within-case' analysis, I was able to identify the conceptions of women's work that were at play within each individual case, before comparing these conceptions across cases to look for patterns of similarities and differences.

In a small-scale qualitative study such as this, the empirical contribution comes from the richness of the cases more than the sample size. Although the number of interviews in this study is limited, the empirical material can provide the basis for understanding the conceptions of gender, work, and care in relation to the families' work and care practices in particular social contexts.

## **Making sense of women's employment**

The empirical cases described below demonstrate how the second-generation women and their husbands in the study attach different meaning to women's employment, and illustrate how different understandings of women's work can enable and constrain women's ambitions and work choices. Through the analysis I have identified four distinct understandings of women's work: work as leisure activity, work as an economic necessity, work as intrinsically rewarding, and work as co-provision.

### **Work as leisure activity**

Some couples in the study are characterised by an explicit gendered division of work and care and draw on gender-complementary ideals. For instance, Bashir works as a consultant and is the

breadwinner of the family, while his wife, Bushra, has been at home for the past seven years taking care of their three children. Both spouses grew up in Norway and have a higher education. Bushra and Bashir explicitly draw on a male breadwinner ideal. With reference to Islam Bashir explains that they believe: 'The man is obliged to have the chief responsibility for provision while the woman has the chief responsibility for the home.' The couple have received financial support from Bashir's father in order to buy their new house, and their ability to live on one income depends on this help.

Over the past few years, Bushra has been working freelance from home a few hours a week, but at the time of the interview they have decided to send their youngest child to kindergarten, and Bushra says she wants to start working properly. Her motivation to work seems to be driven mainly by a desire to do something other than full-time homemaking: 'I kind of want to do something else other than stay at home with the kids. That's what it is. I don't *have to work*.' For Bushra, paid work appears to be just one out of several strategies for doing 'something else'. She highlights that she could also do voluntary work and that she has started going to the gym.

Bashir seems to support the casual view of women's employment:

'The ideal situation for us would probably be, from my point of view, that you of course have a good economy. And the wife has all the freedom and lots of time for herself. It doesn't have to depend on her working or not working; that's completely irrelevant. But that she gets lots of time of her own. That she has fun with her girlfriends, goes to lunch meetings, does something there.'

The couple articulate gendered understandings of work, where Bashir's work is defined as breadwinning while Bushra's (potential) work is defined largely as a matter of having some time for herself and doing what she wants. Economic concerns are not a justification for her employment. On the contrary, Bushra explains that if their economic situation became difficult, it would be more pertinent that Bashir took on an extra job, as he at times has done, than for her to start working.

Fathia and Farid also express gendered understandings of work. Like Bushra and Bashir, they grew up in Norway and have a higher education. Both spouses portray his work largely in economic terms. When Fathia was pregnant with their first child, Farid quit his job in a managerial position and started his own business. Fathia explains that she was sceptical about this decision because it felt like taking on a large economic risk just as they were becoming parents. Farid argues that he would not risk quitting his job if he was not sure about the security of a decent income for the first few years: 'I had just had a child, so I couldn't gamble too much, if you know what I mean?'

Conversely, economic considerations are evidently absent in Fathia's work decisions. Contrary to what they had planned, Fathia did not return to her job as an engineer in the public sector after her paid maternal leave, but rather applied for two additional years of unpaid leave. Now she works part-time. Fathia explains that she eventually returned to work because she was unable to obtain additional leave and did not want to risk losing her job. Taking another engineering job is not an option; she would rather stay at home or follow her long-standing ambition to study medicine. Like Bushra, she portrays work as just one out of several options, and her work decisions are solely conceptualised as a matter of what she wants to do, without reflections on economic consequences.

These couples express highly gendered understandings of women's and men's work. Whereas *his* work is conceptualised in economic terms, economic considerations are absent in *her* work decisions. The casual attitude towards women's work is enabled by the families' favourable economic situations; they can afford living off one income without having to compromise too much on their housing situation and standard of living. The couples draw on gender-complementary ideals and portray paid work as something that provides women with an opportunity to get out of the house and follow their interests. Thus, women's work is defined as a leisure activity. While women's domestic role has traditionally functioned as a symbol of status (the family can afford to have a homemaker), in this case women's work seems to act as a symbol of class (the woman has the surplus capacity to work). At the same time, the husbands' position as breadwinners is not explicitly threatened, because the women's work is not conceptualised as provision.

### Work as an economic necessity

In other conceptions of women's work, gender-complementary ideals are combined with a strong focus on the family economy. Dara has completed only primary school, and has been a homemaker and caretaker for their four children while her husband, a marriage migrant from Pakistan, has provided for the family's economy. She articulates clear gender-complementary ideals and explains that she was raised to become a good homemaker. Dara has recently entered the labour market for the first time, working in a grocery store that she and her husband opened, together with other family members. Although Dara thinks her husband's prior income as a taxi driver was good, she portrays the decision to enter the business as shaped by economic concerns:

'We thought: "Okay, we'll join". Because you earn quite a lot more when you're running your own business than when you, for instance, drive a taxi. That's why we decided to enter the business.'

Joining the business meant that Dara would have to start working. Even though she implies that she was starting to get bored staying at home and wanted something to do, Dara justifies her work outside the home exclusively in economic terms.

The family economy is also a central justification for Yasmin's work. Her husband migrated from Pakistan when they got married and has not been able to find work in Norway. Yasmin has provided for the family through odd jobs cleaning and delivering the newspaper. She describes the family's economic situation as very difficult, portraying her attachment to work largely as a result of economic necessity.

Neither Yasmin nor her husband has a higher education, but she has always wanted to study further, something her husband and mother have been against. Her longstanding discussions with her husband and mother have revealed their divergent understandings of women's achievements outside the home:

'[...] he's always been like: "You don't need to get an education; we can do this. I can get a job. Worst case, we move back [to Pakistan]."' That's always been a plan B in his mind. But I



haven't accepted that. For me, you know what, that's not the way it's going to be and it's not the way it is! So luckily I've managed to persuade him again. I have to have that education.'

For a long time, Yasmin's husband insisted that she does not *need* to get an education. He sees education mainly as a means to earning a higher income, and holds that he will provide for the family, even if it means moving to Pakistan. Yasmin's husband understands her education and employment as an expression of economic necessity. Thus, Yasmin's participation outside of the home is reduced to a question of whether or not it is (financially) needed. Yasmin also stresses the economic dimension of her education and work, but in addition she insists that education and work can provide a sense of personal worth and meaning.

While Yasmin's husband appears to accept that she works, he is sceptical towards her taking a higher education. The fact that Yasmin is the main provider in the family does not in itself challenge his status as responsible for the family's economic provision. As long as she was working stray jobs, her employment could easily be conceptualised as a temporary arrangement until her husband could get a firm footing in the Norwegian labour market. If she were to take an education and secure employment in a relevant job, however, the meaning of her work could change and perhaps pose a greater threat to his position and identity in the family as main provider.

The accounts of Dara and Yasmin rest on a taken-for-granted understanding that men are responsible for economic provision, while women's responsibility is in the home. Both grew up in families where the emphasis was on women's domestic roles. They were not encouraged or expected to participate in the realms of education or work, and neither women were (initially) able to pursue their aspirations for a higher education. Because they lack formal qualifications, the women have limited access to the type of work they and others might consider meaningful and fulfilling, rendering care work a relatively more rewarding alternative (cf. Skeggs, 1997). The conception of women's work at play in these interviews sees women's work as unfortunate, and economic necessity serves as the main justification for women's employment. These women make sense of work in a situation that is characterised by economic hardship. The male breadwinner model was never accessible to all families, and women's employment has been a strategy for working-class households to deal with economic difficulties, also in the heyday of the male breadwinner model (Hartmann, 1981; Lewis, 2001). But the conception of women's work as merely reflecting economic necessity implies that women should not work unless they have to, and consequently men's position as the 'natural' breadwinner is not challenged.

### **Work as intrinsically rewarding**

In the families described above, the women are not strongly oriented towards paid work, as family and childcare are seen as women's main responsibilities. Other women in the study express a great dedication towards work; they take it more or less for granted that they should engage in work outside the home and see paid work as a source of meaning and an intrinsic reward. Although also these women believe that family comes first, they describe themselves as ambitious and career oriented. For instance, Jamila was unhappy in the clerical profession she had trained for at the upper secondary level, and she expected work to be more satisfying:

'[I] wanted to make something else of my life than to be in a boring job, since it [the old job] didn't give me anything.'

Jamila wanted an opportunity for more rewarding work, and the solution was to undertake a new education and train to become a teacher. She describes her present job as fulfilling:

'I love my job. I think it's really exciting. I don't think I could have worked with anything else than what I do now. I enjoy it and I get a lot back.'

Jamila, along with several other women in the study, emphasises her work as meaningful and rewarding, while economic justifications for work are completely absent. Although Jafar, Jamila's husband who is a marriage migrant from Pakistan, explains that he wants her to prioritise staying at home with their child, Jamila returned to work after the period of paid parental leave. She now works full-time while their son attends kindergarten. Jamila insists that work is a natural continuation of her education:

'I was very clear about that, very clear about that. That work is something I'm going to continue with [after having children]. I didn't take that education just to have an education and then sit at home. I couldn't imagine myself as a stay-at-home mom; that was very unnatural for me.'

In a similar manner, Adil, who is born in Norway and has a higher education, argues that it is 'natural' that his wife, Amina, works because she has a higher education. When I ask if they discussed whether Amina should work after they had children, Adil replies:

'No, not really. That she should work was a natural part of... the whole marriage or the whole relationship. She also has an education, you know. So that she should work was kind of completely natural.'

When Jamila and Adil emphasise work as a continuation of education, it is not related to a desire to capitalise economically on education, but rather to the idea that women, as well as men, should be able to use their qualifications in the labour market. Thus, education functions as a central, and not necessarily gendered, legitimation of work.

Although economic considerations appear to be more present in conceptions of the husbands' work, the economic dimension of both women's and men's work is largely left unthematized, and the understanding of women's work that is expressed here does not appear explicitly gendered. As is commonly described in studies of highly educated (or middle class) workers, work is emphasised as a source of meaning, development and self-fulfilment (cf. James, 2008). The focus on intrinsic rewards from work seems to overshadow more instrumental and economical justifications of women's work, and can be seen to reflect the families' advantageous economic

situation and the women's access to rewarding work. However, since the economic aspect of work is downplayed, there is not direct challenge to men's position as breadwinners.

### Work as co-provision

Some women in the study articulate a strong orientation towards work, at the same time as the family economy is highly present in their justifications for working. Sara works full-time and articulates a sense of economic responsibility for the family. When she married, Sara was on the verge of returning to her studies after a brief period of working, but soon realised that she had to provide for her husband who was about to immigrate from Pakistan:

'I realised when I came back [from the wedding in Pakistan] that I can't really start studying now. Because now I've kind of committed myself. And the man I married had his education and work in Pakistan, but he was starting from scratch in Norway. So I couldn't just ignore those facts. So I went back to my employer and asked if I could keep my job, and I could.'

Throughout the interview, Sara explains her work choices both in terms of economic considerations and more intrinsic motivations. She describes her work as an IT consultant as 'rewarding' and 'exciting'. She has 'tasks I am happy with', and feels that her work offers her a 'valuable development', but at times she feels that her job is too demanding and would like to have more time with her children. At the same time, Sara emphasises having an economic responsibility and sees her work and income as a contribution to the household economy, although she does not explicitly describe herself as a 'provider'.

The family economy is a salient issue for many of the participants, in particular for those where the husband only immigrated to Norway after the marriage. Eight of the women have been primary providers for a shorter or longer period of time while their husbands, as newly arriving immigrants, became established in the labour market. The unstable economic situation following the migration of their husbands means that economic considerations have become intrusive even for some of those women who did not initially conceptualise their work in economic terms.

Nadia, for instance, describes her attachment to work as largely shaped by her husband's difficulties in finding stable and decently paid work after he migrated to Norway. Both spouses have a higher education and they expected him to find relevant work quickly. However, Nadia's husband has gone through a series of poorly paid, temporary, and unskilled jobs. Even after finding relevant work, his attachment to the labour market has been unstable. Nadia works full-time in the public sector and did not take additional maternity leave with either of her children. She portrays her work decisions largely as a result of her husband's work problems and their financial situation:

'The expectation was that when I had a child, I would prefer to be a bit more at home. That was the expectation, and my husband would earn enough so we could manage in that short period when the kids were that young and not ready for kindergarten. And when they were in kindergarten, I would rather work part-time than full-time.'

Nadia had expected her husband to bring in an income so she could prioritise staying at home more when the children were young. Nevertheless, the work decisions that are shaped by economic necessity are related to the amount of hours she works and how soon she should return to work after maternity leave. Indeed, the question of whether or not to work does not seem to be a topic of discussion. And while Nadia appears strongly oriented towards work and portrays her job as a source of meaning and personal development, her understanding of work as justified by intrinsic rewards seems to be threatened by the intrusion of economic concerns.

Although the women described here highlight the economic aspects of their employment, economic considerations are not presented as the *primary* reason for working. The focus on the economic aspect of work might reflect a situation where the family's economy is a salient issue and where the family more clearly depends on the women's economic contributions compared to the other families in the study, as is the case for most of the women who have married transnationally. At the same time, the women insist on their paid work being something more than an economic strategy, and they largely take it for granted that they should have an attachment to the labour market. These women make sense of work from a position where they are qualified for skilled work and experience having access to work they find meaningful, although not all have a higher education. This understanding of women's work does not appear as inherently gendered. By insisting on participating in paid work and highlighting the economic contributions from their employment, the women present themselves as co-providers and thus in important ways challenge the male breadwinner ideal.

## Discussion and conclusion

This article is concerned with the economic dimension of women's employment and examines people's conceptions of women's work in light of the male breadwinner ideal. The analysed empirical case is second-generation women of Pakistani descent, and some of their spouses, in Norway. The analysis shows that the same practice – women's work – is accorded distinctively different meaning. I would argue that two analytical dimensions capture the key distinctions in the empirical material: First, the extent to which the economic contributions of women's employment is recognised; and second, the perception of the ideal gender division of participation in paid work.

If we combine the two analytical dimensions, we can identify four ideal-type understandings of women's work (see Figure 1). The lack of economic recognition of women's employment, combined with gender complementary ideals, can imply an understanding of women's paid work as a *leisure activity*. Here, women's employment is seen as second to motherhood, and it is primarily conceptualised as a way of 'getting out of the house'. However, the lack of recognition of the economic dimension of women's work can be interpreted differently when it is coupled with an ideal that women also should participate in the labour market. Here, work, for women as well as for men, is taken for granted and seen primarily as *intrinsically rewarding*, perhaps leaving economic justifications redundant and irrelevant. Also, there may be different understandings of women's work in the cases where economic justifications are present. Within a gender complementary ideal,

women's work can be conceptualised as an unfortunate *economic necessity*, making economic concerns the sole motivation for work. But when women are seen as having an equal right to participate in paid work, an emphasis on the economic dimension of work can reflect an understanding of women as *co-providers*, where both the economic and personally rewarding aspects of women's work are emphasised.

[Figure 1]

Importantly, the interviewees do not adhere to fixed understandings of women's work. Rather, the conceptions of women's work can be overlapping or conflicting, also within individual accounts, and altered circumstances can lead to changes in how work is conceptualised.

The pluralism in conceptions of women's work that I find in this study can reflect the second generation's position between a variety of different, and potentially competing, cultural repertoires, where the meaning attributed to women's employment might still be unsettled and contested. The participants' different conceptions of women's work can reflect their position relative to cultural repertoires related to Islam, the Pakistani immigrant community, and/or non-migrant Pakistani communities. At the same time, there are also diverse conceptions of women's work and care responsibilities among the majority in Western countries, with substantial variations according to class background (e.g. Crompton, 2006; James, 2008). The different conceptions of women's work must be understood in light of the families' resources, as what cultural resources people are most likely to mobilise is shaped by their position in the field of structural opportunities and constraints (Lamont, 1992: 135). For instance, educational qualifications shape individuals' access to both work in itself, and to work that is likely to be considered as rewarding by themselves and others. By extension, level of education also affects individuals' access to using a conception of work as rewarding and meaningful. Although it has been documented that Norwegian employers discriminate against the second generation (Midtbøen, 2013), discrimination did not appear as a theme among the participants in this study, and the second generation are found to largely have access to work that matches their qualifications (Hermansen, 2013). In addition to education, the family's economic situation represents an important premise, both for work–care practices and for how women's work is understood. Not all families can afford to focus solely on intrinsic rewards from work. Although level of education can structure the family's economic opportunities, the economic situation can also be shaped by the economic vulnerability that often accompanies transnational marriages and the financial support the extended family provides or requires.

I argue that participation in paid work is not necessarily the same as breadwinning. As some of the empirical examples aptly illustrate, even dual-income families can be characterised by a male breadwinner ideal where women's and men's work are understood differently. The ideal-type understandings of women's work that are described here need not be exclusive to second-generation families. The degree to which the economic aspect of women's work is recognised and ideals concerning the gender division of participation in paid work constitute two analytical dimensions that can be fruitful also for studying the different meaning attributed to majority women's work. Still, there is reason to believe that second-generation families can experience a

particular tension between a male breadwinner ideal and women's participation in work because many have grown up with clear gender complementary practices and ideals. When the second-generation women do participate in the labour market (albeit to varying degrees), is their work understood in a way that challenges the male breadwinner?

The traditional male breadwinner ideal builds on an idea of gender complementarity where men and women have their main responsibilities in the domains of work and home respectively. Despite the diverse conceptions of women's work, the second-generation women and men in this study share that they to some extent challenge a strict gender complementary ideal. Even the participants who articulate gender complementary ideals endorse women's right to aspirations and participation in the realm of work, at least when the children are 'old enough'. However, women's participation in work does not in itself challenge a male breadwinner ideal if their work is conceptualised differently than men's (Potuchek, 1997; Tichenor, 1999). There seems to be more explicit challenge of the idea that women's main responsibility is in the home, than of the idea that (only) men's employment represents economic provision of the family, and the economic aspect of women's employment tends to be unrecognised unless the family economy is a salient issue. This might in part reflect what Rose (1990) calls the new worker subjectivity, where work is increasingly seen as a source of self-fulfilment and personal achievement. At the same time, downplaying the economic dimension of women's work helps reconcile the tension between women's employment and the male breadwinner ideal because it implies that women's employment is something different than breadwinning. Although the second-generation participants in important ways challenge the male breadwinner model they grew up with through endorsing women's right to participate in paid work, the male breadwinner ideal is only properly undermined and challenged once the economic contribution of women's work is recognised in the same way as men's.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> I use the term second generation to refer to children of immigrants who have grown up in their parents' destination country.

<sup>2</sup> This article builds on literature about the male breadwinner in an industrialised, Western context, but the male breadwinner model can have cultural specificities across cultural contexts. For instance, in classical Islamic law men have a one-sided duty to provide for the family and any income that the wife might earn is considered hers alone. In contrast, in Norway, and most European countries, the matrimonial laws decree that both spouses are obliged to contribute to the household, but this can be done either through paid or unpaid work (Fredriksen, 2011). The present analysis does not examine potential cultural specificities of the male breadwinner model, but analyses the male breadwinner model in a broader sense.

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Figure 1. Map of different understandings of women's work

