

Female Factory Inspectorate

Protection for Women in Swedish Working Life 1913-1948¹

Annika Åkerblom

In a Swedish overview about working women's health *Women's Health at Work*, published at the end of the twentieth century, it was pointed out that the information about female employees is very insufficient. The risks that affect women have been systematically underestimated, and occupational health research has dealt primarily with visible dangers such as injuries caused by machines, which mostly affect men. The dangers which women mostly are exposed to are mainly of two kinds: firstly dangers at work – physical injuries of different kinds and psychosocial stress – and secondly the stress caused by the combination of professional and home work. Thus, knowledge about the effects of the combination of paid and unpaid work is crucial for the ability to estimate the risks for women in working life. It is absolutely necessary to regard all aspects of life, including the role of women within the family, to be able to estimate the real health risks for women.²

Knowledge about the necessity of considering all aspects of life, especially for women, existed already at the beginning of the twentieth century in Sweden and was manifested by the establishment of the Female Factory Inspectorate, which existed 1913-1948. The task of the Female Factory Inspectorate was in part different from that of the general factory inspectorate. Through its special instructions, the Female Factory Inspectorate partly focused on other and different questions than traditional occupational safety and partly treated traditional questions and problems in a new way. The special focus of this inspectorate was women's paid labour as well as how it related to other areas of their lives. The aim of the Female Factory Inspectorate was to improve the social conditions of female employees in general, including women workers as mothers and housekeepers.

In almost all historical studies about occupational safety and health and the Factory Inspectorate in Sweden, occupational health for women and the Female

¹ This article is, if nothing else is stated, based on my dissertation *Arbetarskydd för kvinnor. Kvinnlig yrkes inspektion i Sverige 1913-1948*. (1998). (Industrial welfare for women. The Female Factory Inspectorate in Sweden 1913-1948.) I would also like to express my gratitude to Helene Carlbäck, Anders Håkansson, Lynn Karlsson, Teresa Kulawik and Ylva Waldemarson for constructive and helpful comments and to Viveka Åkerblom for the translation into English.

² Kilbom, Messing and Bildt Thorbjörnsson eds (1999).

Factory Inspectorate have not received adequate attention.³ Hence, the research in this field has only just begun, and few studies have been carried out on this theme.

In this article, the main focus is on the activity directly related to the workplace. What did the Female Factory Inspectorate focus on when carrying out inspections? Which problems did the Female Factory Inspectorate find and how did it try to master the growing pressure in working life? Which strategies were worked out to reduce the stress for working women and how were these strategies motivated? These are problems that are of immediate interest also today, for women as well as men.

Separate Institutions for Women

Different theoretical approaches within feminist scholarship have as a common starting point that gender matters for the structuring of society. The modern gender order includes two major principles: segregation and hierarchy. Segregation implies that men and women should not do the same tasks and not be in the same places. Hierarchisation means that what men do and are is considered to be more valuable than that what women do and are.⁴ The labour market is a striking example of this. Typical female occupations e g in the health and service sectors have lower status and are less well paid than typical male occupations in the technical sector.⁵ The practice (and consequence) of segregation and hierarchisation is the subordination of women.

The regulations for and conditions of the activity of the Female Factory Inspectorate can also be characterised in terms of segregation and hierarchisation. Its task was the inspection of women and children in industrial work places with ten or more workers. Over time, other work places dominated by women, such as clerical work, were incorporated into its field, although never health care and social work. Supervision was to be carried out with a point of departure in the Worker Protection Act (*Arbetarskyddslag*), which included a special paragraph on women workers. The women employed at the Female Factory Inspectorate were to have other – social – qualifications than the men at the General Factory Inspectorate, who were engineers. The tasks of the Female Factory Inspectorate

³ See e g *Från yrkesfara till arbetsmiljö. Yrkesinspektionen 100 år 1990*. (1990). When women's working conditions are mentioned they only constitute a subordinate part in the publication and the conditions are not linked to the balance of power between the gender. See e g Sund (1991). Here he deals with the neck problems experienced by dressmakers and states that there is almost no research on this field. See also *Arbetsmiljön. En grundsten i välfärdsbygget* (1999) where repetitive strain injuries are describes as a new phenomenon for the 1980s.

⁴ Hirdman (1988).

⁵ See e g SOU 1998:6.

also indicate that women were expected to have other needs than men, which was a common view at the time.

The establishment of the Female Factory Inspectorate must be seen in the context of the systematic separation of the genders in the public sphere at the turn of the 20th century all over the western world. At the end of the 19th century a growing number of gender specific organisations and institutions, such as schools, trade unions and associations, were established. For example, women's labour unions and women's sections in parties and societies were founded. Many women also mobilized around different issues that interested no, or very few, men. Examples of such organisations were Bible societies, societies with the aim to defend women's rights in different areas and different kinds of philanthropic organisations.⁶

Gender segregation was inscribed into the Female Factory Inspectorate in two ways: firstly because it was restricted to the workplaces of women and children and secondly because only women could work there. Women could not work at the General Factory Inspectorate except as secretaries. The segregation was combined with hierarchisation. The Female Factory Inspectorate could not act fully independent of the male inspectors of the districts and had to announce when inspections were to be carried out. By establishing the Female Factory Inspectorate the working condition for a special group of workers, namely women, would be improved by decreasing their vulnerability and marginalisation. Thus, the Female Factory Inspectorate was established because women were/are subordinated, and it was held separate from the General Factory Inspectorate.⁷

The activity of the Female Factory Inspectorate was quite ambivalent: on the one hand, the Inspectorate's institutional setting confirmed the gender segregation at work. On the other hand, the Female Inspectorate also strongly took sides for women's rights in the labour market and in working life. In this sense it worked against the subordination of women.

The Establishment of the Female Factory Inspectorate

After several years of struggle on the part of women's organisations, mostly bourgeois/liberal organisations such as the Fredrika Bremer Förbund, the Female Factory Inspectorate was established. In the view of these organisations, the General Factory Inspectorate did not properly satisfy the interests and needs of women. This situation could be explained by the fact that women were not really represented by the labour unions and therefore women were especially exposed to health risks. Women often had worse working conditions than men and were paid less than men. Women were also frequently responsible for the family and house-

⁶ See e g Taussi-Sjöberg & Vammen (1995).

⁷ Compare LO:s kvinnoråd (Women's Council) established in 1947. See Waldemarson (2000).

hold, and in the workforce they had a low status. The struggle for a Female Factory Inspectorate was an attempt to contend with the subordination of women in working life.

At the time of the introduction of the Female Factory Inspectorate in Sweden, such institutions already existed in several western countries. The Swedish debate referred to these countries, though the way of organising occupational health for women varied internationally. In Belgium, Norway, Denmark, France and Great Britain the Female Factory Inspectorate was a completely separate public authority. In Germany, Austria and Finland it represented a special branch of the general Inspectorate where welfare institutions and social questions for woman and men were emphasised.

The Swedish Female Factory Inspectorate combined these models. It was a semi-independent unit with the explicit task of focusing on the different social conditions of working women including living standard, nutrition, housing, health care, education and morality. However, it could not, as already mentioned, act completely independently from the general inspectors in their districts. A strong argument to create a Female Factory Inspectorate resulted from the debate about the immorality and roughness of the female factory workers. A woman inspector, it was suggested, would diminish the social and moral problems and uphold female workers' respectability. Another argument was that women needed special protection because of their reproductive functions. As a consequence of the perspective on women in need of special protection, the female factory inspector had partly other tasks than her male colleagues.⁸ These tasks had nothing to do with traditional Swedish protective labour legislation.⁹

Hence, there are obvious parallels between protective labour legislation in Sweden, Germany¹⁰ and Great Britain. Barbara Harrison considers the introduction of women factory inspectors in Great Britain as a symbolic confirmation of existing gender segregation at work.¹¹ This, I believe, is also the case in Sweden.

In the following, I will give an overview of the activity of the Female Factory Inspectorate and its development in chronological order.

⁸ Compare Wikander, Kessler-Harris and Lewis (1995).

⁹ Compare Schmitt (1995) p 129.

¹⁰ Sabine Schmitt shows in her study of worker protection for women in the German empire that it was used – by employers and authorities – to exercise governmental intervention in private homes. It was a very normative activity where the female workers and their families were to learn a “better” lifestyle. Elements of this could also be found in Swedish industrial welfare for women, which in itself is a very interesting aspect. This is dealt with in my dissertation. See also Schmitt (1995).

¹¹ Harrison (1996).

The Activity of the Female Factory Inspectorate – An Overview

The character of the activities at the Female Factory Inspectorate changed over time. To illustrate the overall changes the activities can be classified into three periods.

1) Philanthropy 1910s: The activities were closely related to co-operation with and co-ordination of philanthropic organisations, as the period was very much affected by the crises of World War One. Its early philanthropic features can be explained by the fact that many social reformers wanted a Female Factory Inspectorate and struggled for its establishment, combined with the social problems that occurred during the war. The society had no readiness to handle problems connected with unemployment such as famine, food riots and extreme poverty. In this situation, the Female Factory Inspectorate took several initiatives to help and co-ordinate relief actions. Obvious connections to the philanthropic roots of the Female Factory Inspectorate can be seen.

2) Exercise of public authority 1920-1930s: The Female Factory Inspectorate had found its mode of work as a traditional public authority¹²; after World War One a new phase begun and the work was fully oriented toward inspections at work places. Its character as a public authority can be seen in all its activities. During the inter-war period, it worked for increased actual equality between men and women for example concerning labour legislation.¹³

3) Decentralised exercise of public authority 1940s: Finally, during the last ten years of its existence the Female Factory Inspectorate was decentralised into four districts and its practical activities were partly integrated with those of the General Inspectorates on the local level.

As a large part of the activities moved out to the districts and became integrated with those of the General Inspectorate in the 1940s, the central part of the Female Factory Inspectorate became more politically oriented. The Female Factory Inspectorate openly took a standpoint for women's rights in the labour market and was an ardent advocate for efforts from society to make women's employment outside the home possible. This happened when women started to work in industrial areas, such as foundries, where almost exclusively men had been working up to that time.

The co-operation with the General Inspectorate, combined with the perceived increase of pressure in working life, led to the solution that also men needed social care. When the Female Factory Inspectorate was closed down, the women inspectors were to be reborn as social inspectors in each district of the General Inspectorate, with the same tasks but with the goal to include men into the work

¹² For a discussion of the concept "exercise of authority", see Söderlind & Petersson (1988).

¹³ Women suffrage was attained in Sweden 1919/21 and thus complete citizenship, but in reality women did not have the same rights as men, e g they could be dismissed from their employment if they married, even in 1939.

as well. Hence, the social inspectors were incorporated in the General Factory Inspectorate.

The Inspections

At the Female Factory Inspectorate three forms of inspections were carried out: regular inspections, night work inspections and investigations. The purpose of the night work inspections was to check that the prohibition against women's night work was upheld. The working conditions in the case of exemptions from the prohibition were also controlled. Investigations often concerned all work places in a certain branch in one city, with special consideration given to working hours. Normal inspections supervised the work environment in general with special regard to the concerns of women.

Observations and proposals for changes were mostly made concerning work-rooms, working-clothes, and the general work situation such as the possibilities to take pauses and staff rooms. These were the main themes of the inspections during the entire period, although the character of the problems changed in relation to general and technical developments. Remarks made by the Female Factory Inspectorate often concerned questions such as cleaning, ventilation, temperature, floor, lighting and draughts.

The workrooms are typical in this context, and the problems concerning these are characteristic of the period and can be found also today. Small work places are of course more exposed to these problems now and in the past. The general standard of the work place has undergone a positive development during this period. Big factory halls became a problem at several work places during the 1930s. In these premises it was hard to handle noise and draughts and to regulate temperature. They also caused stress, which is a problem today too. Working clothes are also a timeless problem in spite of the varying needs for working clothes in different branches. The Female Factory Inspectorate was permanently active concerning the actual work situation, i.e. physical surroundings such as the opportunity to sit down by the work place, sitting position, the construction of the chair, worktable etc, questions that we call ergonomic today.

Staff rooms were a question of dignity throughout the period. By staff rooms I mean for example toilets, wash rooms/lavatories, cloakrooms and dining rooms. Especially for small enterprises, these questions were a problem. In the beginning, the Female Factory Inspectorate concentrated on basic needs such as lavatories but later on raised the standards for what it felt employers should provide in the way of staff rooms. The existence of staff rooms and their standard depended on the size and character of the enterprise. The number of employed was normative for the requirements concerning staff rooms. Small enterprises often found it difficult to organise staff rooms, because of the cost and lack of space. Thus, problems for employees to heat food remained relevant at small enterprises

even in the 1940s, while larger enterprises at that time discussed smoking areas, terraces and gyms.

Investigations

The inspectress often carried out investigations on her own initiative, but investigations also came about as commissions from other authorities or after reports of bad conditions from workers or labour unions. Many investigations were done to control working conditions in general, and half of the investigations concerned working hours. Investigations concerning the prohibition against women's night work were often related to discussions about new ILO conventions to extend the night work prohibition, and whether Sweden should sign them or not. The result of all these investigations ended up with the Female Factory Inspectorate being negative to an extended prohibition. The Female Factory Inspectorate established that it would have negative consequences on the occupational health of the women. The reason for this was that the pace of work would be speeded up because the available hours of work would decrease. This was felt to be more dangerous for women than night work in a long-term perspective.

Most of the investigations were carried out in small enterprises (less than ten workers) with female workers.¹⁴ Many of these inspections concerned professions that were in the service sector, such as laundries and ironing firms, ladies hair-dressers, small bakeries, dressmakers and restaurants. All of these were occupations with connections to traditional female tasks within the household. Photography shops and furrier's shops can also be included in this category of workplaces. The women working at these enterprises were often marginalized and totally dependent on the goodwill of the owner. If their working conditions were poor, they had no opportunity to take action without the risk of losing their jobs. If they were ordered to work overtime, if there was no lavatory or somewhere to sit down during lunch they could not protest.

Problems and Measures

As argued, the subordination of women was related to both the reality of and the perception of women as being frail, mainly with reference to the reproductive functions of women. This argument could be used with different purposes: to improve the situation of women in the workplace and to keep women from work /workplaces that the male collective wanted to retain for itself. In the following, I will show how the Female Factory Inspectorate tried to handle and lessen the consequences of the problem caused by the subordination of women. In the written reports of the Female Factory Inspectorate three, empirically defined,

¹⁴ These small enterprises were legally the concern of the local government, which however requested the aid of the Female Factory Inspectorate for inspections.

themes dealing with this problem can be categorised. These themes are: 1) Women's work and women's role; 2) Stress and rationalisation; 3) Health and harmony. When no specific period of time is mentioned the theme is generally valid for the entire period studied.

Women's Work and Women's Role

The theme women's work and women's role is about the disadvantages experienced by women through unhealthy work, with little influence on the work situation as such, as well as the construction of femininity.¹⁵ Hence, this theme concerns problems related to typical women's work and problems related to the fact that women were considered to be a different kind of work force.¹⁶

The prohibition against women's night work is an obvious example of the construction of women as frail, in need of protection, and women's different position on the labour market.¹⁷ A large part of the Female Factory Inspectorate's time was spent on the prohibition against women's night work. At the night work inspections, the main task concerning dispensations was to find measures to decrease the disadvantages in relation to night work and to make sure that the prohibition was not infringed upon. Dispensations were given to the canning industry, the armaments industry and to other war-related industries. Dispensations were issued under the condition that the factory had a minimum hygienic standard, which was assessed by the Female Factory Inspectorate. The Female Factory Inspectorate also estimated if there really was a need for a dispensation. Inspections to control adherence to the prohibition of night work for women took place above all in crisp-bread bakeries. Infringements were caused by the fact that certain work processes in crisp-bread bakeries started and ended half an hour before and after the regular workday.

Dispensations in the canning industry were used at the time of haul and harvest. Almost every year the Female Factory Inspectorate travelled along the Swedish west coast to control and inspect canning factories. Dispensations in war-related industries were of immediate interest during the two world wars. During the First World War, the Female Factory Inspectorate insisted on ventilation of the work rooms and the serving of warm porridge to the women working on the night shifts. When the results of the dispensations were summarised after the war, the Female Factory Inspectorate noted that some of the female workers had had some health problems doing night work, although these problems were not related to their sex but to age and the food shortage. When they were given a warm meal during the night and the hygienic circumstances were improved, the

¹⁵ See e.g. Johannisson (1994).

¹⁶ See e.g. Wikander (1992).

¹⁷ For a description of questions concerning the prohibition against women's night work see Wikander, Kessler-Harris and Lewis (1995), see also Schmitt (1995).

health of the female workers improved. Paradoxically the working conditions were improved through the night work; the workrooms became more spacious and were ventilated. During the Second World War, the Female Factory Inspectorate again emphasised that women did not have more health problems relating to night work than men. Very few women were excluded from night work because of their health. On the other hand, women were excluded from night work for social reasons, for example because their children disturbed them so that they could not sleep during the daytime.

Working clothes were a special kind of problem and opposition against different kinds of working clothes existed. This opposition can be categorised in two ways: the clothes could be perceived as uncomfortable and could make the work more complicated in different ways or make the work slower; or the clothes were considered ugly. The first kind of opposition can be found among women as well as men, while the second mainly could be found among women. This can be related to the fact that women are subordinated and the opinion that women should please and attract, a role that many women adopted. Some types of work, however, required different types of working clothes for various reasons, such as protection against moisture and dirt or to prevent hair from getting stuck in machines. Clothes were sometimes used in order to protect the products manufactured, e g in the food industry or the chemical industry. Different types of shoes could be a means to counteract cold or hard floors. Not wearing working clothes could be dangerous; for instance, several women every year were severely injured when their hair got stuck in machines and they were scalped. In order to remedy these problems much effort was put into finding working clothes, shoes and caps of different types that could be accepted by the women workers.

Many of the typical female occupations involved standing or were very sedentary and, furthermore, often required precision work of different types. In e g the restaurant business, bakeries, laundry and ironing establishments and in the match industry, the work was done mostly standing up all the time. Seamstresses sat still with precision work, and in the food industry the work was often stationary, with low temperatures in the workplace. Consequently, the floors were important. There were often problems with hard, cold and/or slippery floors. This applied above all to stone and concrete floors which were believed to cause rheumatism, thrombosis in the legs, "abdominal pains", back strains and straining of the inner organs as well as tired legs and feet, etc Such floors could also cause slipping accidents. One way to remedy the problem was to put out wooden pallets to stand on, but many employers were, however, not interested in doing so.

Working in standing positions also led to the discussion of the so-called chair question, i e that there should be a place to sit or the possibility to sit down and what type of chair would be suitable. The idea was that all work that could be carried out sitting down should be done whilst sitting down, and if it was necessary to stand up it should be possible to sit down temporarily. Work that could

not be carried out sitting down could sometimes be made easier by the introduction of standing support devices. But there were plenty of employers who thought, from a moral perspective, that work could not be carried out sitting down. Yet another difficulty was that female workers were not always eager to sit down, probably because they would have to change their work routines, which in some cases could lead to a financial loss for them because the working speed then could not be maintained. One way to accommodate these problems was to find /develop chairs appropriate for different kinds of work. For example, chairs on rails were developed so that a loom could be managed sitting down, and hanging chairs were introduced in order to prevent vibrations from the floor. Furthermore, the importance of sitting “correctly” was taken seriously. Three types of sitting positions were outlined: seating for work that could be carried out sitting as well as standing; seating for short breaks if the work was carried out standing; and seating for breaks and rest.

In the case of different types of precision work, e g sewing, lighting was very important in order to avoid damage to the eyes. Good general ceiling lights were required, as well as work lamps, which every worker could adjust individually. The light intensity had to be considered carefully; neither the lamp itself nor reflections from the lamp should cause glare, and the work rooms should have daylight, but direct sunlight was to be screened off. The importance of lightning was often ignored and planned lightning was unusual, despite the fact that poor lightning often caused fatigue and headaches.

In the case of sedentary work, the temperature of the premises was important. Heat as well as chilliness and drafts could cause physical problems. Heat was a less severe problem than chilliness and drafts, which were difficult to handle, as were temperature fluctuations. In some cases the problem with chilly work rooms could be compensated by physically hard work, e g in the brewery industry where women were tapping, rinsing and labelling, provided that heated dining-rooms and the possibility to dry ones clothes existed. The work women did was, however, often sedentary and consequently chilliness and draft were very troubling, e g in food factories.

Stress and Rationalisation

Certain basic problems and questions existed which constantly reoccurred in discussions about pressing situations in working life. These related to stress in a general sense, as well as more directly to for example breaks, being physically bound to the work place, doing dependent or independent work, etc Here, as in other connections, the conditions differed between large and small working places and between men and women. During the 1930s, the interest for these questions increased considerably in connection to the so-called rationalisation

movement¹⁸. “Industrial fatigue” or “unnecessary fatigue” were often mentioned. Measures taken to remedy this applied to widely differing questions: for example clearly stress related questions such as working hours and breaks, but also questions which at first sight are not related to stress, such as the possibility to sit down.

The attention paid to these questions increased with the rationalisation movement during the 1930s, and according to the Female Factory Inspectorate this meant both advantages and disadvantages for the female workers. On the one hand much heavy work disappeared e.g. in breweries and in the textile industry and places to sit became more common. On the other hand, the work became more intensified and stressful. The rationalisation movement also placed higher demands on protection and hygiene and improved working premises and working conditions in general. The Female Factory Inspectorate even believed that the rationalisation of production in fact meant that the employers took questions about the working environment more seriously and made sure that conditions were improved in all respects. If they did not do so, there was no real rationalisation. It is evident that a battle about definition occurred.

When physicians reported an increased number of neuroses among workers (male workers?), which was believed to be connected with the rationalisation of production, support was found for their view that it was necessary to follow up a rationalisation with specific improvements in the working environment. In order to counteract these problems the Female Factory Inspectorate co-operated with staff consultants in companies. They were often part of the companies’ protection or safety committees. The Female Factory Inspectorate imagined how “psycho-technical” departments would be set up in the companies so as to place the right person in the right place by means of “psychological observations”.

One problem that became more serious because of the rationalisation movement, but that was topical during the whole period, was the few and too short breaks. In the long run the Female Factory Inspectorate considered it dangerous to work an entire day without breaks. Shift work furthermore led to increased strain, poor air in the premises since it was not possible to ventilate properly during on-going work, longer hours with artificial lightning and changed sleeping and eating hours. Unbroken work periods, i.e. working without meal breaks, was considered to have become a more common phenomenon because of shift work and because the workers then ate while working. In certain industries this was possible, but for example in the textile industry, where many women worked, it was not viable because the pace of work was so intense. The Female Factory Inspectorate declared that ten per cent of the workday should consist of breaks, and that meals should be eaten in peace and quiet. This was a long-term health problem that affected the female workers in particular. For example, within the

¹⁸ See also De Geer (1978) especially chapter 11.

textile industry there was a tendency to work eight hours without a break. The female workers did this in order to be able to come later to morning shifts or to be able to go earlier when working evening shifts. The reason why they tried to decrease the total hours of work, according to the Female Factory Inspectorate, was to be found in their family situation and the reproductive work that was their responsibility. The female workers did not realise the long-term health hazards that were inherent in having too few breaks and too little rest, but tried instead first of all to handle their everyday problems by leaving work earlier.

A very concrete problem which was discovered by the end of the 1930s and which increased during the 1940s was so-called “writer’s cramp”. It was a clear symptom of a stressful and intensive pace of work. The development of this disease was caused by the rationalisation of the emerging administration and the desire to use the new office machines as effectively as possible. The knowledge of how machines affected people was poor, but the effects were evident. The problems with writer’s cramp were considered to be particularly difficult at work places with much overtime. The only remedy to this disease was, according to the Female Factory Inspectorate, to take breaks and to change one’s working environment.

Health and Harmony – a Healthy Soul in a Healthy Body

In order to prepare the female workers for the demands of work, the Female Factory Inspectorate wanted to create harmony and health for the body as well as the soul. Recreation, both spiritually and physically, was considered extremely important. In order to create the possibility of recreation during work breaks and after the working day for the female workers, the Female Factory Inspectorate took the initiative to and recommended the hiring of staff consultants (e g in the beginning factory sisters) in larger companies. The staff consultants, their organisation and the Female Factory Inspectorate worked closely together concerning questions of work environment and other closely related issues.

The creation of possibilities to relax properly during breaks was a key issue here. For example, taking rest breaks outdoors was recommended. The possibility to spend breaks outdoors through access to balconies and roof terraces in the workplaces was recommended for the first time in 1930. The inspectress believed that it would be possible to arrange outdoor breaks if only the management showed an interest. Fresh air and exercise were considered to be very valuable breaks in the work. During the 1930s even smoking became a question that interested the Female Factory Inspectorate. Many female workers were troubled by tobacco smoke and consequently special smoking rooms were recommended in order to avoid tobacco smoke in the other premises. Other measures that were recommended were to arrange exercise during work e g for a duration of 5 minutes. Exercise during breaks was recommended as early as the 1930s. The

interest for exercise increased, however, particularly during the 1940s after a slow start during the 1930s.

Staff premises of different types were fundamental for creating a good environment at the work places. In certain industries, this was indeed troublesome. Above all, this applied to small work places such as restaurants and bakeries. Often rooms in which the workers could wash themselves were completely lacking and there were too few toilets. In general, there were wardrobes, but women and men often had to share the same room. This was not considered satisfactory, as the women often had to change clothes there, which could create an exposed situation. In the premises used by hairdressers, the staff areas were often very narrow and not built for this purpose. The staff did not have many possibilities of being alone during breaks and could rarely heat the food they had brought with them.

The colour of the working premises is another example of a question that received attention during the 1930s in connection with the rationalisation movement. It was considered particularly important for the well being of workers. An appropriate choice of colour could create comfort, and workers would experience satisfaction in their work. The inspectress suggested a light yellow or green, which were considered comfortable and soothing for the eyes.

Food was considered by the Female Factory Inspectorate to be very important. Both the workers' ability to work and their health were involved. The rationing during World War One brought the question of work place dining-halls to the fore. The inspectress recommended that factories should make dining-room arrangements available for their employees. In order to facilitate this, a publication was put together in 1916/17 with practical information regarding how to set up and run canteens. It was underlined that there was no reason to have separate dining rooms for women and men. The management was advised to set up a committee, in which the workers were represented, dealing with running the canteen in order to channel dissatisfaction with e.g. the choice of dishes or the pricing. In her experience, this would benefit the case considerably. Instead of a canteen, a dining room where the workers could eat their own food could be established. It was felt that in this case it was important to make sure that the workers could not see each other's food. The content of the lunch box would reveal the employees' standard of living, and poverty is associated with shame.

During the 1920s the number of work places with dining rooms increased – which was felt to be related to the Eight-Hour Working Hours Act. The employers, however, complained that the rooms were not being used when the workers dined. The inspectress believed that this was the case because the dining rooms were located inconveniently in relation to the work premises and because the interior decoration of the dining rooms was dull and uncomfortable. For example, they often contained long benches and tables, which were considered uncomfortable, particularly for women. Instead the inspectress recommended small

tables, giving the workers a feeling of “privacy”. Dining rooms with walls decorated with art were praised – especially if the art was educational. The furniture should consist of small tables and chairs with backs so that the female workers could eat their dinners in small groups. Curtains, tablecloths and flowers were also recommended. At the small work places the Female Factory Inspectorate tried to find practical solutions to these problems, for example using existing rooms also as dining rooms or creating the possibility of heating food, etc. During the 1930s, in connection with the difficult economic situation, an increased interest in canteens arose. Small companies jointly built canteens. During World War Two, with the rationing of bread and fat, this became a burning question once again. The Female Factory Inspectorate recommended that porridge, gruel or alternatively hot soups should be served. This was considered to be particularly desirable for minor workers, and it was emphasised that the labour force would be more content, healthier and more efficient if a proper meal was served.

Strategies and Motive

Long-term strategies dealing with the problems affecting women in their work situation due to their subordinate position in the family as well as in their working lives can also be discerned in the Female Factory Inspectorate’s activities. We are mainly dealing with two strategies. The first strategy was about facilitating and reducing women’s reproductive work, thus decreasing the pressure on them. The second strategy dealt with preparing the women better, physically as well as mentally, for the pressure they were exposed to and thereby decreasing its negative consequences.

Concerning the first strategy, to facilitate and reduce the women workers’ reproductive work, the problems were related to e.g. how their working hours were arranged, for example whether they could work at night or not. It was stressed that women in this connection were neither physically nor mentally more vulnerable than men, but instead that they were exposed due to their subordinate position. This conclusion was drawn based on the experiences made during the inspections of female night work. The consequences were not at all as problematic as many perhaps had feared. Doing only night work during shorter periods was not considered fatiguing. Long-term 3-shift work was, however, considered very hard for both women and men. The women could not afford hiring domestic help because of their low wages – this contributed indeed to exhausting the women. Thus the female workers were burdened twofold, by a demanding 3-shift work plus their reproductive work at home, unlike most men who only worked, albeit in 3 shifts. As a consequence of this, the Female Factory Inspectorate argued, the women’s pay should be increased and be placed on a par with the

men's. This was a radical idea at this point – a hot and much discussed topic. The question in itself often divided women and men.¹⁹

The first strategy can also be related to the children's whereabouts when the mothers worked, which was something that many women worried about. To decrease the stress and consequently the increased risk of accidents caused by the women worrying about their children when they were at work, it was suggested that the companies should provide child day-care centres. Another proposal that was put forward by the Female Factory Inspectorate was that the companies could sell nourishing but inexpensive cooked meals, which the women could bring home to their families or alternatively that the families could eat subsidised meals at the women's work places. Despite the radical nature of these questions, the balance of power between the genders was basically not challenged because the division of labour between men and women in the household was not questioned.

The second strategy, to better prepare the women, involved trying to change working women's lifestyles in the long run. This was – in contrast to the attempts described above to get employers interested in different kinds of exercise yards outdoors and exercise during breaks – a kind of public health project. To achieve this, consciousness and knowledge were indeed needed. Study circles with subjects such as "Health and lifestyle" and "You are what you eat" were suggested. These would enable the women to acquire tangible knowledge of how to improve their own and their families' health in the long run. The inspectress also encouraged the women to take folk high-school courses, etc to broaden their minds and thus enlarge their mental capacity to deal with a strained and stressed working life.

Concluding Remarks

The Female Factory Inspectorate was paradoxical; on the one hand it aimed at decreasing women's subordination in their work life, but on the other hand it reproduced this subordination. The Female Factory Inspectorate contributed to strengthening the segregation between women and men in working life and thus confirmed gender segregation, precisely as Barbara Harrison has shown took place in Great Britain. At the same time, however, the existing notion that women were especially defenceless was challenged, and the Female Factory Inspectorate's starting-point was always that women had a right to support themselves. The Female Factory Inspectorate formally confirmed the existing gender segregation, but the content of the Female Factory Inspectorate's work was partly challenging.

¹⁹ See also Karlsson L (1995), Carlsson C (1986) and Karlsson G (1996).

The subordination of women in working life and in the family was made visible. For example when the Female Factory Inspectorate compared women's and men's night work it concluded that the adverse affects for women was not greater than those for men in general. When women were exempted from night work during the two world wars, it was due to the women's social situation, i.e. that she had to take care of her children during the day. It was simply the gender segregation – in work and in family life – which caused women to be more exposed in the working life. The fundamental balance of power between men and women was, however, never questioned; instead attempts to remove the unequal conditions by creating welfare institutions such as child day-care centres were pursued.

The Female Factory Inspectorate itself is also a clear example of gender segregation and separation. In itself, the fact that a Female and a General Factory Inspectorate existed is proof of separation. Women could not be employed at the General Factory Inspectorate except as secretaries, and men could not be employed at the Female Factory Inspectorate. The two Inspectorates had essentially two different guidelines: the Female Factory Inspectorate concentrated upon “soft” issues whereas the General Factory Inspectorate concentrated on “hard” issues such as engine protection devices and technique.

In their working place inspections, the Female Factory Inspectorate focused on concrete questions such as the standard and appearance of the working premises, staff areas, working hours and the conditions of the work in general. These questions were related to the women workers' subordinate position in working life as well as their family lives. In the workplaces this involved not only the work situation as such and the availability of opportunities to take a break in e.g. staff premises, the possibility of catching a bit of fresh air, etc but also such matters such as toilets and dressing rooms. Many of the questions were of such a nature that they were topical during the entire period of the Female Factory Inspectorate, for example the question of chairs. The Female Factory Inspectorate believed that the rationalisation of production should also consist of improvements in working hygiene, working postures, lightening, places to sit, etc as well as dining rooms, toilets and dressing rooms. Rationalisation was often considered to be something basically positive, but its negative aspects were dealt with as well; there was a belief, however, that rationalisation would naturally lead to improvements in working conditions.²⁰ It was felt that employers would make a conscious effort to

²⁰ Hans De Geer believed that the rationalisation of production depended on a social policy and that these were two parts of the same development. The companies made production more efficient and society was to ease the social consequences; sharing the responsibilities was not considered desirable by either party. Judging from the material from the Female Factory Inspectorate, however, the picture is not so unambiguous. Here, if anything, we find that in fact a sharing of responsibility actually occurred in a number of companies and the Female Factory Inspectorate also aimed at, in my opinion, integrating social responsibility and a

improve the work environment so that employees would be able to handle the stress brought about by the increased work pace. This meant good and nutritious meals, as well as the possibility to rest in harmonious, warm and cosy environments during breaks.

The problems that the Female Factory Inspectorate dealt with during work place inspections concerned, above all, issues related to every day life at the work places, which in turn were related to women's subordination. This meant that, in reality, e.g. breaks, catering and different kinds of staff areas were linked to the actual life situation of the women who were responsible for homes and families. The two long-term strategies designed to improve the situation of women workers mainly dealt with facilitating and reducing the women's reproductive work, as well as better preparing the women, physically as well as mentally, for the stress of working life. Consequently, the Female Factory Inspectorate knew that the individual worker's social situation outside work, that is their family situation, played an important role for how the conditions of working life affected the individual. They were indeed aware of women's subordination both within and outside working life and the concrete meaning of the female role for the individual women's actions in different situations.

During the existence of the Female Factory Inspectorate, the work pace increased and a generally increased pressure and stress was felt in working life. That this was related to the introduction of the eight-hour workday in 1919/20 and the rationalisation movement during the 1920s and 1930s is clear.²¹ In fact the increasing pressure in working life seems to be recognised as constantly rising with some periods of acceleration. The phenomenon as such can be observed today too, when many people feel a constantly rising pressure in working life, and a new term, "burned out", has been invented.

The work of the Female Factory Inspectorate is still very topical for women as well as men, but in particular for women. I believe that the Female Factory Inspectorate in many respects was ahead of its time and could predict the problems to come. One concrete example of this is what we today denote as musculo-skeletal disorders, which was then called writer's cramp, which they clearly realised the importance of. Moreover, their foresight not only applied to specific questions and problems, but also to attitudes relating to environmental issues and people in general. The Female Factory Inspectorate was aware of the individual's situation. This meant that in reality the more traditional questions regarding the work environment were linked with the women workers' unpaid reproductive work, i.e. their responsibilities for housekeeping. This perspective not only

more efficient production. Apparently a battle about the content and meaning of rationalisation occurred at this time. De Geer (1978), see especially chapter 11.

²¹ See e.g. Johansson (1977) and De Geer (1978).

involves a possibility for women but could also be essential in analysing men's working conditions as well.

Today, as well as historically, increased pressure in working life has different consequences for women and men. This was something the Female Factory Inspectorate was very much aware of. Despite technological progress and different types of welfare reforms today, we have much to learn from the work and attitude to life and working life of the Female Factory Inspectorate.

References

- Arbetsmiljön. En grundsten i välfärdsbygget* (1999) Stockholm: Arbetarskyddsstyrelsen.
- Carlsson C (1986) *Kvinnosyn och kvinnopolitik: en studie av svensk socialdemokrati 1880-1910*. Lund: Arkiv.
- De Geer H (1978) *Rationaliseringsrörelsen i Sverige: effektivitetssidéer och socialt ansvar under mellankrigstiden*. Stockholm: Studieförbundet Näringsliv och Samhälle.
- Från yrkesfara till arbetsmiljö: Yrkesinspektionen 100 år* (1990). Solna: Arbetarskyddsstyrelsen.
- Harrison B (1996) *Not only the 'Dangerous Trades'. Women's Work and Health in Britain 1880-1914*. London: Taylor & Francis.
- Hirdman Y (1988) Genussystemet – reflexioner kring kvinnors sociala underordning. *Kvinnovetenskaplig tidskrift* 1988:3 pp 49-63.
- Johannisson K (1994) *Den mörka kontinenten*. Stockholm: Norstedts.
- Johansson A (1977) *Den effektiva arbetstiden: verkstäderna och arbetsintensitetens problem 1900-1920*. Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis. Uppsala Studies in Economic History no. 17.
- Karlsson G (1996) *Från broderskap till systerskap: det socialdemokratiska kvinnoförbundets kamp för inflytande och makt i SAP*. Lund: Arkiv.
- Karlsson L (1995) The Beginning of a 'Masculine Renaissance': The debate on the 1909 Prohibition against Women's Night Work in Sweden. In: Wikander U, Kessler-Harris A and Lewis J *Protecting women. Labor Legislation in Europe, the United States, and Australia, 1880-1920*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Kilbom Å, Messing K, and Bildt Thorbjörnsson C eds (1999) *Yrkesarbetande kvinnors hälsa*. Stockholm: Arbetslivsinstitutet.
- Nordh S (2000) Stress bakom minskat barnafödande. *Dagens Nyheter* 001212.
- Schmitt S (1995) *Der Arbeiterinnenschutz im deutschen Kaiserreich. Zur Konstruktion der schutzbedürftigen Arbeiterin*. Stuttgart/Weimar: Verlag J.B. Metzler.
- SOU 1998:6 *Ty makten är din... Myten om det rationella arbetslivet och det jämställda Sverige*. Stockholm: Fritzes.
- Sund B (1991) Kvinnolön och arbetarskydd. In: Sund, B & Thörnquist A *Kvinnolön, arbetsmiljö, jobb. Beklädnadsfackförbundets kamp 1940-1990*. Stockholm: Tidens Förlag.
- Söderlind D & Petersson O (1988), *Svensk förvaltningspolitik*. Uppsala: Diskurs.

- Taussi-Sjöberg M & Vammen T eds (1995) *På tröskeln till välfärden. Völgörensreformer och arenor i Norden 1800-1930*. Stockholm: Carlssons förlag.
- Waldemarson Y (2000) *Kvinnor och klass – en paradoxal skapelseberättelse. LO:s Kvinnoråd och makten att benämna 1898-1967*. Stockholm: Arbetslivsinstitutet.
- Wikander U (1992) Delat arbete, delad makt – om kvinnors underordning i och genom arbetet. In: Åström G & Hirdman Y eds *Kontrakt i kris*. Stockholm: Carlsson förlag.
- Wikander U, Kessler-Harris A and Lewis J (1995) *Protecting women. Labor Legislation in Europe, the United States, and Australia, 1880-1920*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Åkerblom A (1998) *Arbetarskydd för kvinnor. Kvinnlig yrkesinspektion i Sverige 1913-1948*. Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis. Uppsala Studies in Economic History no. 43.



Increased demands for timely adaptation and regularity, increased control and discipline meant further exclusion of workers with reduced working capacity. Source: Morgontidningens arkiv, Arbetarrörelsens Arkiv, Stockholm.