

Rethinking the UBI Debate: Exploring Care Beyond Gender

Tobias Dumschat*

In the midst of the Universal Basic Income (UBI) debate, a critical question emerges: How does a Basic Income impact family and professional caregiving? When we delve into discussions about care in the context of UBI, we uncover a plethora of arguments and perspectives. Historically, these conversations have been predominantly feminist in nature, focusing primarily on the gender division of labor and the quest for gender justice. But does a UBI truly resolve this division or inadvertently reinforce it? It's noteworthy that the arguments on this issue stand in stark opposition to each other, with pro and con arguments entwined in a never-ending tug of war. Furthermore, these discussions tend to lump all care activities with a feminine connotation together. The initial hypotheses put forward by UBI proponents Guy Standing and Philippe van Parijs regarding the potential impact on caregivers have remained relatively superficial, leaving the debate seemingly stagnant for years.

While addressing gender equity is undoubtedly central to the UBI debate, it raises the question: Must it be the sole focus? Is there room for a non-feminist perspective on caregiving? As a researcher, I'm compelled to ask: Can we envision a discussion that transcends gender?

Pioneering a New Path: A Deeper Dive into Care Activities

In October, during the FRIBIS Annual Conference 2023, themed "Care & Gender - Potentials & Risks of UBI," I introduced an alternative perspective that may breathe fresh life into this discussion. The idea is that caregiving is made up of many complex and diverse areas that can't be easily summed up, so we need to look at them carefully. This hypothesis arises from the observation that welfare states alone exhibit significant disparities in the structure of care sectors. Depending on one's interpretation of care,

the specifics within child care, elderly care, or care for individuals with disabilities differ significantly. What we need is a more detailed analysis to explore and speculate about the potential impacts of a Basic Income. We can achieve this by concentrating on three pivotal dimensions:

1. **Defining Care Activities:** By articulating care activities in specific terms, we can avoid vague generalizations. To accommodate the diversity within caregiving, we need a precise lens. Which specific aspect of care are we examining? Which vulnerable groups are affected?
2. **Welfare States & Cultural Variations:** Care exhibits distinct patterns within each welfare state, and cultural nuances also shape how care is approached. Even within nations, regional variations exist. Addressing this complexity necessitates a typological approach.
3. **Functional Levels:** Care operates at various functional levels, representing distinct systems that are nevertheless interconnected. Are we looking at informal care or professional care? What mechanisms underlie them, and how do they interact?

This fine-tuning across these three dimensions aims to facilitate more accurate analyses of caregiving within the UBI context. Importantly, this approach does not seek to overlook concerns related to gender justice. Gender can continue to be a subject of discussion at any point, but this approach also provides room for other facets to enter the debate.

Embarking on a New Journey

I'm not just suggesting this new research direction in the field of care and gender; I'm truly enthusiastic about exploring this unexplored route. My research seeks to address how a Basic Income impacts the choices available to caregivers who are not yet retired and provide care to elderly individuals. I'm delving deeply into a specific form of caregiving and examining a specific group of caregivers.

As I conduct qualitative interviews, it becomes evident that each caregiving situation is profoundly unique. The available options for action are contingent on various factors, including family dynamics, professional responsibilities, and the support system in place. What I aim to convey is this: Let's embrace the complexity inherent in caregiving, and let's engage in open and inclusive discussions that encompass a range of perspectives.

*Tobias Dumschat is a doctoral student in Caritas Science and a staff member at FRIBIS. He is the coordinator of the FRIBIS Team Care.