Social Choice Dilemma

A group of single parent working mothers in a community have children who attend a day care center. When a child is sick with a bad cold, each mother must choose between sending her child to the day care center and keeping her at home. If the child goes to day care, allowing the mother to go to work, the child puts the other children at risk. However, if a mother decides to keep her child at home, she will not be able to go to work.

The rational decision would be for each mother to send her child to day care even though it creates a risk for all the other children and their mothers. It is rationale because she needs to work and she assumes that every other mother would do the same. If all mothers are rationale, they will never cooperate. They will all send their children and none will gain anything. In fact, they will all lose something.

However, if each mother would “irrationally” cooperate and not send their sick child to day care, everyone in the group would benefit.

Is it rationale to cooperate? It is really a paradox. Each mother gains more in the long run by cooperating, but this is difficult to see when it is your work that is put at risk by cooperating and not sending your child to day care.