cogitatio

ARTICLE

Becoming a "Good" Father in the Context of Czech Social Work

Barbora Gřundělová and **Jiří Mertl**

Faculty of Social Studies, University of Ostrava, Czech Republic

Correspondence: Barbora Gřundělová (barbora.grundelova@osu.cz)

Abstract

This article explores how fatherhood is experienced by the clients of Czech family social workers, paying particular attention to how class, ethnic, and gender inequalities shape these experiences. Drawing on qualitative interviews with 11 fathers, the study employs a critical, intersectional, and structural social work perspective to analyse fathers' narratives about their paternal identities and everyday lives. The findings reveal that fatherhood is constructed and negotiated within systemic constraints, such as insecure housing, precarious labour, and institutionalised gender norms. Fathers strive to embody the ideals of the "good" father, typically defined through breadwinning, but their efforts are undermined by structural exclusion and stigma. The study argues that paternal identity in contexts of social exclusion must be understood not as an individual trait, but as a politically and institutionally shaped phenomenon.

Keywords

fatherhood; housing; poverty; social exclusion; social work

1. Introduction

Research in social work has increasingly focused on the intersectionality of social identities and categories that can create specific forms of disadvantage (Broskevičová, 2025). This perspective is also highly relevant for studies on father involvement, which is deeply shaped by class, racial, and gender inequalities. Despite the growing number of studies addressing fathers in diverse sociocultural contexts (Charles et al., 2021; Chuang & Fagan, 2021), scholars emphasise the need for more inclusive theories capable of addressing the complexities of fatherhood, particularly among non-hegemonic and marginalised groups of fathers (Strier & Perez-Vaisvidovsky, 2021).

In the Czech context, there are several quantitative studies (e.g., Klusáček & Kalenda, 2024; Prokop, 2022) that emphasise factors influencing the reproduction of socioeconomic inequality, but there is a significant lack of qualitative studies examining the life experiences of inequality and their impact on parenting. These marginalised group experiences should be recognised as one of the key sources of knowledge in social work, as they provide unique insights into power structures (Broskevičová, 2025). At the same time, these experiences, especially those of fathers, are still often under-researched, while the experiences of social workers are well known and documented.

Our study, therefore, focuses on the life experiences of fathers in the context of Czech social work, with the analytical objective of understanding how fatherhood is experienced by social service clients and how class, ethnic, and gender inequalities shape this experience. We ask ourselves the following research questions:

1. How do social services clients perceive their paternal identity?
2. How does the intersectionality of class, ethnicity, and gender inequalities shape fathers' involvement and engagement?

To achieve this goal, we first delineate the theoretical and conceptual framework of the study, with particular emphasis on the social construction of fatherhood and parental participation/involvement within the context of Czech social work, viewed through the lens of ambivalent sexism. The article then outlines the qualitative research design, based on interviews with fathers who are clients of family social services. The following section presents a detailed analysis of the findings, organised around three principal themes. The concluding section considers the implications of these findings for the theory and practice of social work and proposes avenues for future research.

2. The Social Construction of Fatherhood in the Context of Social Work

Parenting is a socially constructed role shaped by gender norms and expectations (Deutsch & Saxon, 1998; Pedersen, 2012). These expectations are embedded in broader gender regimes (Connell, 2000) that define acceptable forms of masculinity and femininity and legitimise specific family patterns. Within these regimes, fatherhood has historically been associated with the breadwinner role, while caregiving has been constructed as a feminine domain. Such understandings are not universal, but socially produced and maintained through institutions, including social work.

In the Czech context, studies show that parenthood continues to be framed by hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity (Hašková, 2022; Šmídová, 2008). Czech social work reflects this environment, relying on traditional gender divisions in the family, with mothers viewed as caregivers and fathers as breadwinners (Janebová & Černá, 2008; Lyócsa, 2011). Consequently, social work practice tends to focus more on mothers (Dominelli et al., 2011; Philip et al., 2019), a pattern reinforced by the feminisation of the profession. As a result, interventions and services are often mother-based (Ghate et al., 2000), which can lead both to the blaming of mothers (Caplan, 2007; Davies & Krane, 2006; Reimer & Sahagian, 2015) and to the marginalisation or demonisation of fathers (Baum, 2017; Clapton, 2009; Ewart-Boyle et al., 2015).

At the same time, neoliberal ideologies and patriarchal structures shape the way parenting is problematised. Structural inequalities, such as poverty or housing insecurity, are frequently individualised as "parenting

deficits" (Olszowy et al., 2020; Reimer & Sahagian, 2015). These discourses obscure the systemic conditions that constrain both mothers and fathers and sustain gendered inequalities in parenting.

Recent scholarship has underscored the need to expand understandings of fatherhood beyond the narrow model of the breadwinner (Randles, 2018; Scheibling, 2020). Although fatherhood is multidimensional and includes social and emotional care, the dominant ideals of "good" fatherhood often reflect the experiences of privileged middle-class heterosexual fathers (Strier & Perez-Vaisvidovsky, 2021). Recognising the diversity of fathering practices that exists beyond the dominant ideals is essential for social work, which must move towards more inclusive constructions of fatherhood and greater engagement of fathers across different social contexts.

3. Parental Involvement/Engagement in Social Work Through the Lens of Ambivalent Sexism

Parental involvement/engagement is a multifaceted concept that has been defined and applied in various ways (Day & Lamb, 2004). In the literature, the distinction between father involvement and father engagement is often blurred, and both terms are used to describe fathers' participation in their children's lives or in child welfare cases (e.g., Clapton, 2009; Ewart-Boyle et al., 2015; Y. Lee et al., 2018). In this study, we follow the view that father engagement/involvement is the full range of ways in which fathers can be included in their children's cases, or lives. This continuum captures different degrees and forms of fathers' participation in family support processes, from passive involvement (e.g., being available or maintaining contact) to active engagement (e.g., initiating, co-producing, and interacting within the care process; Lamb et al., 1987; McMunn et al., 2015). At the same time, differentiating between involvement and engagement is analytically useful, as cultural and gender expectations may influence whether fathers remain in more passive or more active positions.

With this conceptualisation in mind, we then employ ambivalent sexism as the main theoretical lens through which we will perceive involvement/engagement of fathers. The findings on power relations and gender constructions in family social work indicate that the concept of ambivalent sexism is one of the significant factors related to the level of involvement/engagement of fathers and mothers (Brewsaugh et al., 2018). In social work, parents are constructed as "good" or "bad, embodying the positive and negative aspects of sexist ambivalence (Gřundělová et al., 2023). The theory of ambivalent sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1996, 2001, 2011) describes how the justification of women's roles as caregivers and educators and men's roles as incompetent in family life serves to maintain the status quo. Based on this, social workers emphasise stereotypically positive traits of women that are consistent with their subordinate role (e.g., caring, responsible, open to help, communicative, submissive, emotional, helpless, etc.), while simultaneously allowing them to demonise or marginalise men without directly challenging male dominance (T. L. Lee et al., 2010).

All three components of ambivalent sexism (paternalism, gender differentiation, and heteronormativity) are distinctly manifested in the field of family social work. Paternalism is reflected in the perception of men as the ultimate authority within the family, expected to have the final say. Gender differentiation emerges from the widespread assumption that men are more rational and self-reliant than women (Gřundělová, 2018). In line with this, Eagly and Crowley (1986) demonstrated that women are more often perceived as in need of

help and, consequently, are more likely to receive it than men, which reinforces the notion of gender roles as functionally distinct. Finally, heteronormativity surfaces in the uncritical idealisation of the white, middle-class, nuclear family, where social workers often fail to adequately recognise the diversity of family structures or to question this model in terms of ethnicity or social class (Nedbálková, 2011). Social workers' attitudes towards fathers' involvement are to some extent shaped by their personal experiences (Cryer-Coupet et al., 2021). The social workers' unexamined projections of personal experiences, values, and norms (often rooted in white middle-class backgrounds) can be reflected in the assessment and categorisation of marginalised clients (e.g., "good/bad" mother, "good/bad" father). Based on these gender constructions, social workers tend to apply different normative measures to mothers and fathers.

Diverse findings suggest that fathers, like mothers, are not a monolithic group composed solely of risks or benefits to their children (e.g., Douglas, 2017). Centring interventions around mothers ignores the potential benefits, as well as the risks, that fathers can bring to social work with families (Brewsaugh et al., 2018). Therefore, it is necessary to avoid binary thinking in assessing fathers as "risks" or "resources" and instead move toward a more holistic assessment of family situations (Philip et al., 2019), taking into account the structural context that causes social problems for families with children. This is because poverty, ethnicity, and culture are just some of the factors that can prevent fathers from being involved in addressing the family's situation (Coakley et al., 2014). This means that, when working with families, social workers should consider the broader context of their functionality as a unit, and reflect on the risk that the norm of a "good father" will become a new pressure or standard that condemns or marginalises those who cannot fulfil it (e.g., for time, health, or economic reasons).

For this reason, we will place greater emphasis on the structural level in this study. The structural level of father involvement/engagement refers to systemic conditions (socio-political, economic, institutional) that not only reflect but also actively reproduce inequalities in social work practice (Thompson, 2020). These systemic inequalities are institutionally embedded disparities in access to resources, opportunities, and power that are produced and reproduced by policies, institutions, and social practices—not merely by individual actions (Braveman et al., 2022). In this study, we therefore draw on structural social work theory, which emphasises that the causes of clients' problems often lie not in individual deficits, but in macrostructural factors such as social policies, class relations, and institutionalised practices (Mullaly, 1993; Weinberg, 2008). This perspective directs attention to the ways in which social work practice responds to and reproduces social structures and inequalities. Complementarily, anti-oppressive practice seeks to challenge and transform those structures by addressing power imbalances and striving for social justice and institutional change (Dominelli, 2002). Finally, we integrate an intersectional perspective, which highlights how overlapping systems of oppression (such as gender, class, race, etc.) interact to shape individuals' experiences and opportunities (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1989). Together, these frameworks provide a critical lens for analysing how systemic and institutional conditions shape father involvement and engagement within social work practice.

4. Methodology

The data used in this article come from a larger research project titled Development of Tools to Support Fathers' Involvement in Social Activation Services for Families With Children and Their Pilot Verification in Practice. The project aimed to design and pilot instruments that improve fathers' involvement/engagement

in social activation services for families with children. It was funded by the Technology Agency of the Czech Republic (grant no. TJ04000152) and carried out between August 2020 and July 2022. The methodological design involved qualitative and quantitative methods. Data generation included maps of social worlds and arenas, focus groups, in-depth interviews with social workers and clients of family social services, a World Café discussion, and a questionnaire administered to social workers.

As previously stated, this article seeks to understand how social service clients experience fatherhood and how this experience is shaped by class, ethnic, and gender inequalities, asking the following research questions: How do social service clients perceive their paternal identity? And how does the intersectionality of class, ethnic, and gender inequalities play a role in fathers' engagement/involvement? We base our analysis on semi-structured interviews with fathers who are currently social service clients.

4.1. Sampling and Recruitment

A purposive sampling method was used to recruit parents through NGOs providing social services for families. Social workers from the selected services based in two Czech regions provided the research group with contact information of their clients who are fathers. Based on these contacts, the researcher made contact with the fathers and arranged meetings at their place of residence. In some cases, the social workers accompanied the researcher to the father's home, while in other cases the fathers came to the service organisation where the researcher was waiting. Field research was carried out between August 2020 and April 2021. Interviews with fathers were carried out by a researcher who identifies as a male, white, middle-class father. The average duration of the interview was 35 minutes. The informants were mainly middle-aged men, most often biological fathers or grandfathers, with primary education or vocational training, who predominantly identified themselves as Roma. All names and data that could lead to the identification of informants were anonymised, and pseudonyms were used. An overview of the participants is provided in the Table 1.

Table 1. Participants.

Pseudonym	Age	Ethnicity	Fatherhood	Education	Occupation	Number of children
Jáchym	34	Roma	biological father	primary	burner	4
Radovan	34	Roma	biological father	primary	temporary jobs	9
Kazimír	57	Roma	grandfather	vocational training	manual worker	3
Alex	62	Roma	grandfather	vocational training	painter, varnisher	3
Albert	33	Roma	biological father	primary	temporary jobs	5
Robert	41	Ethnic majority (Czech)	biological father	vocational training	locksmith, manual worker	3
František	55	Roma	grandfather	primary	digger	7
Martin	29	Roma	biological father	primary	self-employed	4
Hugo	37	Roma	biological father	primary	unemployed	4
Jonáš	34	Ethnic majority (Czech)	biological father	vocational training	self-employed	1
Otmar	37	Ethnic majority (Czech)	(non-) biological father	vocational training	security guard/ disability pensioner	2

4.2. Positionality and Reflexivity of the Researchers

To situate our analysis, it is important to acknowledge the structural and positional conditions under which this research was conducted. The study is informed by a critical social work perspective, which recognises that knowledge production is never neutral but is shaped by the social locations and institutional contexts of the researchers (Fook, 2002). The authors identify themselves as a white woman and a white man from middle-class backgrounds, both social workers and academics based in the Czech Republic. These positionalities inevitably influence how we perceive and interpret issues of fatherhood, gender, and inequality. Our social positions carry certain privileges. By making these pre-existing structural conditions explicit, we aim to enhance the transparency and reflexivity of the study and to situate our findings within the broader socio-political and institutional context in which we, and our participants, are embedded (Dominelli, 2002).

4.3. Statement of Ethics

The study was reviewed and subsequently approved by the ethics committee of the authors' institution. We also took into account the power dynamics that may have influenced the participants' perception of the researchers. Through informed consent, we ensured that participants who may have felt vulnerable did not feel like they would be either advantaged or disadvantaged by participating in the research or refusing to do so (Littlechild, 2014). Participants were assured of anonymity and their right to withdraw from the study. They were also assured that this decision would not affect the services they received.

4.4. Data Analysis

We worked with verbatim transcripts that were coded using the MAXQDA software. Coding was methodologically guided by reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022), which puts an emphasis on inductive coding and creative construction of themes from the codes. We then employed inductive coding and coded the whole data corpus, creating numerous codes on the same level. In the next stage, Braun and Clarke (2022) recommend construing the initial themes from the list of codes, so as not to confuse themes with categories. Due to the number of codes, we did both, that is, we created initial themes that caught our attention and categorised related codes to get a better grasp. In this phase, we observed how father-informants relate to fatherhood and how they perceive their fatherhood in relation to systemic barriers. Thus, we started exploring these themes more thoroughly, selecting relevant codes, and incorporating them into the themes. At this stage, we also formulated research questions to better guide our analysis. In accordance with the recommendations of Braun and Clarke (2022), in the next phase, we started to specify, elaborate, and conceptualise the themes relevant to this study so that the themes would contain a story that could be told. At the same time, we gave the themes illustrative as well as attractive names. In the end, we came up with three themes related to the research questions, which are presented below.

4.5. Limitations

A major limitation of this study concerns the composition and scope of the sample. The research was conducted primarily with Romani fathers of marginalised families who were, to varying degrees, in contact with social services. Consequently, the data reflect the experiences and perspectives of fathers who have

already been engaged (willingly or out of necessity) in institutional systems of support and control. We did not include non-resident fathers and those who actively avoid contact with social workers. These groups of fathers could have given a broader range of insights, but they are difficult to reach.

Furthermore, the sample was relatively homogeneous in several respects (gender, ethnicity, socio-economic background, and geographical context), which may have shaped both the thematic focus and interpretive boundaries of our analysis. For example, there was minimal geographic variability, so it is possible that fathers from other parts of the Czech Republic experienced or perceived their role differently. The same applies to differences between mothers and fathers, resident and non-resident parents, or urban and rural contexts. Greater variability could have revealed additional dimensions and nuances of parental involvement/engagement, role perceptions, and structural inequality.

Despite these limits, we believe that the study provides important insight into how structural and cultural inequalities are perceived and negotiated in daily life. These voices remain under-represented in both research and social work discourses, and amplifying them may help inform more equitable and culturally responsive social work practices.

5. Findings

This section presents the main findings of our research on fatherhood in the context of social work. The analysis is structured around three interrelated themes: preparedness for fatherhood, housing as a prerequisite for parental recognition, and the tension between breadwinning and caregiving. The fathers' narratives reveal how structural barriers intersect with the cultural expectations of "good" fatherhood, thereby shaping their daily struggles and strategies. Together, these findings highlight how paternal identities are continuously negotiated at the intersection of personal responsibility, systemic exclusion, and institutional practices.

5.1. Preparedness for Fatherhood: Between the Personal and the Political in the Child Welfare System

The theme of preparedness for the paternal role was a recurring theme in the fathers' narratives. The informants reported that a key factor in managing the paternal role was the environment in which they grew up. Many pointed out that becoming a good father is not innate, but shaped by socialisation in the family or in institutional care. Many fathers came from children's homes, and the difference between family and institutional upbringing was frequently discussed. Alex's quote suggests that "good" fatherhood is related to "good" upbringing and leading to independence, which, according to him, institutional upbringing can, somewhat paradoxically, offer to future fathers:

> These are fathers who were raised by the state, it really comes down to upbringing and especially independence...fathers who were raised well, maybe lived in an institution...they went to secondary school, then served in the army, and learned independence. So, he already knew that if the woman failed, he would be able to take care of the child himself. (Alex, Roma, 62)

Interestingly, while institutional care is sometimes considered inadequate by social workers in preparing girls for motherhood (Kempe, 2025), Alex sees it as a form of "school of independence" that prepared them for fatherhood better than an upbringing in a dysfunctional family. This highlights how being a "good" parent can

be perceived in a gender-differentiated way in relation to past experiences. A certain level of independence is important for the father role, which men are expected to have already learnt as boys. For girls, the opportunity to learn the maternal role by mimicking their mothers in the family is considered important. Previous research (Gřundělová, 2018; Gřundělová et al., 2023) also shows that women are considered responsible at the time they become mothers, because in the constructs of many social workers, becoming a mother implies that a woman must assume full responsibility for the child.

Some of the interviewed fathers also considered family history and personal experience with caring in the family crucial in preparing for fatherhood. Albert argued that the environment in which he grew up provided the foundation for being able to care not only for himself but later for his own children. At the same time, he acknowledged that this was not a common practice and could also be related to the fact that he had only two siblings, unlike many other Roma families. His parents (meaning his mother) therefore had more time to spend with him and could pay more attention to him. However, his paternal engagement only began when his wife had become ill and was unable to take care of their children:

> Well, nobody chose that illness [the one my wife had]. And the kids are mine, so someone has to take care of them....I know it's not typical, but it's just the way I've always been. My parents taught me that...discipline. Three children, so there weren't too many of us, and we took care of each other....Our mum didn't have any problems with us. (Albert, Roma, 33)

However, at the same time, he also admits that he relies on his wife when it comes to household chores. In doing so, Albert reflects the persistent notion that housekeeping is "naturally feminine": "I just don't know how to do laundry—like, I can throw things in the washing machine, but I often stain them. A woman just has it in her, she knows what goes in there."

The experience of "upbringing" in fathers' narratives is not limited to childhood, but is related to the political and institutional production of parental subjectivity, which varies according to gender, class status, and life circumstances. The claim "the personal is political" is given a concrete meaning here: The ability to care for children is not just an individual skill, but the result of socio-economic conditions, the availability of care, and gender-related expectations. This preparedness was tested most intensely in situations where mothers were temporarily indisposed. In such moments, fathers became more visible to social workers, but this was not perceived as an offer of support, but rather as a form of control:

> Then we worked with another [social worker]....When my wife was in a hospital, I was left alone with the little one here for three days before she was discharged. That was like feeding, changing nappies, and so on...and I had never done that before....Mainly the checking if everything was okay, if the baby was okay. (Jonáš, ethnic majority, 34)

At the same time, fathers described situations in which, due to the need to provide for their families and the lack of support, they had resorted to the temporary removal of their children. Instead of receiving support from the system, they faced decisions that questioned their parenting skills and economic pressure that forced them to choose between childcare and earning a living: "It was just too much for me, like five [kids] on one. And one of them was a newborn....Like I agreed to it [the removal of the children] because it'd make my life easier...the social workers suggested it" (Albert, Roma, 33).

The stereotypical presumption that women are the ones who should ask for help and arrange social benefits for the family is embedded in both families and systemic settings, leading to absurd situations in practice. Albert aptly described how this can complicate the life of the entire family:

> My wife was in the hospital for about a year, and before that, all the benefits were in her name. I didn't have access to that money, so I couldn't pay the rent for our flat at the time, so I had to leave.

Living in an environment of social exclusion, which creates both practical barriers (e.g., poor-quality housing, poverty) and symbolic stigma that questions fathers' parenthood based on their social status, plays a crucial role in preparation for fatherhood. Fathers point out that the conditions in their localities are so disadvantageous that the possibility of engaged parenting is structurally limited:

> But I can tell you that in another region...it'd be easier and maybe even quicker to solve the problem...here it's quite complicated. (Alex, Roma, 62)

> It's hard for these people...the kids go to school unprepared, there's no electricity and light in their homes. (Martin, Roma, 29)

The theme of preparedness for fatherhood and parenting in general cannot be separated from the broader context of the social exclusion cycle (Wacquant, 2009). The accounts of the fathers reveal that exclusion is not simply a matter of the present moment, but a long-term structural condition that is passed down from generation to generation (Broskevičová, 2025). A lack of opportunities, recurrent institutional failure, and stigmatisation by society create an environment in which the pursuit of a "better life" is often limited:

> This is how these kids grow up—if only someone supported them. I don't know if it's them or if the state is forcing them to live like this. I don't know....Every father and every mother wants the best for their child, but it's not possible because they don't have that chance. (Martin, Roma, 29)

These accounts show that preparation for fatherhood cannot be understood as a solely individual matter. It is the result of a combination of personal experiences and institutional practices that determine who is perceived as a "good" parent. The issue of fatherhood thus becomes a political one. It is shaped by class, gender, and ethnic structures that affect not only fathers' capacity to care, but also whether the care they give is recognised and supported. The cycle of social exclusion is manifested not only materially, but also in a deeply rooted sense of powerlessness vis-à-vis a system that is perceived not as a source of support, but as a form of surveillance and control. Despite the institutional claims of commitment to supporting these fathers, no real progress has been made. Families remain trapped in an environment of structural discrimination, where even following the "rules of the system" is no guarantee of improving their life situation.

5.2. Housing as the Main Precondition for "Good" Fatherhood

Almost all informants identified housing as their main difficulty in life. Housing is not only a prerequisite for childcare, but is also often a condition for official recognition of that care, as its absence is often a reason for the removal of children from parental custody: "To get out of here....To leave this place, to find a nice flat, with a garden, but I know all the doors are closed to me" (Radovan, Roma, 34).

Fathers encounter numerous structural barriers when searching for housing: discrimination in the housing market (particularly based on ethnicity), extremely short-term rental agreements (one to three months), poor physical conditions of the flats, evictions, excessive rents, and the practices of landlords (or rather of slumlords; see also Kupka et al., 2021):

> And they say that the Roma have to go. And I'm white, but my wife is Roma. I have to hide her in the pantry. [Laughs] Well, the landlord….That's practically all owned by H. [a development company], but they renovated the settlement. There can only be whites and maybe one or two [Roma] who already had a contract. (Robert, ethnic majority, 41)

Although securing housing is often the main task of fathers in their collaboration with social workers, many of them encounter institutional barriers and the powerlessness of workers who do not have the mandate or the tools to realistically help with housing:

> She helps me fill out [forms] that I'm applying for that place on XY street, but nothing at all comes of it. She [the social worker]…it's not her fault. They [officials] are there for that, but still nothing happens. (Jáchym, Roma, 34)

The inability to find adequate housing triggered many negative feelings among informants. Some of them spoke out strongly the moment they started talking about their housing hardships. Their agitation and fears were evident in the interviews. Unfortunately, the threat of losing their home is not uncommon among families living in social exclusion. Martin described his feelings about concerns for his children as follows:

> We tried our best to find a house, so that we could somehow make it in time [before they throw us out of the flat], so that the kids wouldn't end up on the street. It's just such a strange feeling. I wouldn't wish it on anyone, because you don't know where to go. You basically become homeless from one day to the next. The kids too, because wherever you go, they go with you. It's an ugly feeling. (Martin, Roma, 29)

Fathers thematised housing primarily from the perspective of their children. They cited the need for security, privacy for their teenagers, a more suitable environment for schooling, and the desire to get away from an environment with negative influences. The provision of housing can be seen here as a concrete manifestation of paternal care and responsibility, which they cannot adequately fulfil due to systemic barriers. Martin mentions one of many such barriers (overcrowding in small apartments):

> Then in the morning she gets up for school, and she's not ready. It would be better to have a bigger flat where the child has her privacy. She won't study properly from a young age, and then she'll grow up, and what will become of her? (Martin, Roma, 29)

Paradoxically, apart from ethnicity, children are a common reason why landlords do not want to rent a property to families. Open discrimination is a common practice everyone knows about, but no one does anything because landlords are favoured by legislation, and any legal action is expensive and lengthy:

> We called the numbers of the landlords and their very first question was always: How many children do you have? Well, four. Well, we're sorry. And what kind of family are you? Roma. We don't want Roma,

and because you have so many children, we don't want you either. The next number was the same story (Martin, Roma, 29)

This effort goes against a profound sense of injustice. Our informants did not understand why they could not get better housing, even though they met all the socially required norms: They worked, had no debt, and behaved "properly." From their perspective, they met all the attributes of a "good" citizen and father. Instead of receiving support, however, they received rejection and silence from the institutions:

We have been paying properly for seven years…we have no debt. And they still won't let us change flats [raised voice]. (Hugo, Roma, 37).

I have a work contract, I have no debt…and still it's always "wait"…no answer, no message. (Jáchym, Roma, 34)

The frustration from this approach is further deepened by the individualisation of responsibility, with failure attributed to the individual rather than to systemic barriers. Although fathers strive to provide a better environment for their children, they remain stigmatised as irresponsible: "We take care of the place; we clean so that it's nice and tidy. And what do they do? 'Gypsies live here, so f…ck them.' That's how they deal with it…" (Hugo, Roma, 37).

In the context of Czech society, which has the least accessible housing in the EU and one of the highest wealth inequalities in Europe (Lux & Sunega, 2023), it comes as no surprise that housing is becoming a key intersection where parenthood, poverty, ethnicity, and structural violence intertwine. The housing issue is not merely a technical matter, but a deeply political space in which decisions are made about who has the right to be a "good" parent (father).

Insecure housing leads to frequent relocations. This has negative effects on children's education and disrupts local neighbourhood ties and the loss of social capital, which again contributes to a further cycle of social exclusion. This destabilisation of relationships and ties is often associated with school absenteeism among children. The consequences fall then mainly on parents, who are perceived as irresponsible and neglectful. As a result, they may face fines, cuts to part of their welfare benefits, or even imprisonment (Mertl et al., 2025):

But it's crazy. I've made some acquaintances here, and now again we need to move into something else [a different flat]?…And I'll end up somewhere completely different, where nobody knows me. Here I know them all. (Robert, ethnic majority, 41)

From the perspective of our informants, it appears that housing is not only a material condition, but also a key symbol of "good fatherhood." Fathers describe their efforts to provide their children with a safe and stable home as a fundamental expression of care, responsibility, and parental competence. At the same time, however, they face structural barriers (discrimination, short-term contracts, insufficient institutional support) that fundamentally limit and often delegitimise their fatherhood. In the context of Czech social work, being a "good father" paradoxically does not only mean fulfilling parental norms, but above all, overcoming systemic obstacles that prevent them from exercising their fatherhood at all. Housing, therefore, becomes not only

a basic prerequisite for parenthood, but also a political field where decisions are made about who can be recognised as a good father and who will remain stigmatised as a failure.

5.3. "Good" Fatherhood: Between Breadwinning and Care

The theme of work emerges in fathers' narratives as a key element of paternal identity (the father as a provider), but also as a source of deep tension and failure. Earning is closely related to the issues of housing, dignity, and the ability to provide for children, and is thus integral to the idea of a "good father." However, in conditions of structural exclusion, this effort often clashes with the reality of the grey economy and precarious working conditions, which at times make it impossible to fulfil the breadwinner role without difficulties: "It wouldn't be about the rent….The worst part would be if I got a regular job with a contract, then the debt collectors would come after me." (Jonáš, ethnic majority, 34).

Illegal or seasonal work is a necessity, not a choice, in these conditions. Fathers work in unstable, physically demanding occupations with 12-hour shifts, often six days a week. The long commute times and the irregular nature of work contribute to their prolonged absence from home. They are often "invisible" to social workers.

Testimonies from fathers suggest that illegal work is an "open secret," perceived as a way to provide for the family. Social workers know about it, but tolerate and accept it because they understand the insustainability of a system in which legal work and employment mean falling into foreclosure or losing welfare benefits. The welfare system is no longer seen as a tool of social protection or inclusion in the labour market, but has become a tool of ethnic hierarchisation (see also Trlifajová & Pospíšil, 2023):

> That kind of thing, you don't say out loud that you work under the table, because you'd lose your benefits. But everybody knows. The only ones who don't know are the ones who pay me [the benefits]….They don't know, but the probation officer for the kids, the social worker, they all know I work. I'm not going to hide it. I need the money, I can't make ends meet with what they [the state] give me. (Albert, Roma, 33)

Poverty is a permanent reality in these families, putting the father in the position of constantly balancing income and care. Expenses for rent, school supplies, and the normal costs of living exceed their income, forcing them to continue working at the expense of time with their children:

> Mostly from the benefits that we get, but….I pay the rent, right, and then what? I go do odd jobs, I bring in some money…for school, something for the kids, things, clothes for them to have what they need, and such. Sometimes it's still not enough, you know. (Radovan, Roma, 34)

Specific working hours (12-hour shifts, weekend work) make it difficult for fathers to be involved in family life. In addition, they are not home even when social workers visit, which is one of the main stated reasons why services are mainly focused on mothers: "I'm on sick leave now, so I've got more time for the kids, but usually not, because I work twelve-hour shifts" (Jáchym, Roma, 34).

This time, the mismatch between clients and social workers is further reinforced by the feminisation of the social work profession. Social workers often care for their own children and visit families only during the

morning hours. As a result, fathers remain out of reach of services that adapt their working hours to the lives of caring women rather than those of working men:

> So, when I have time, I go there with her, it's just that their meeting is around ten or eleven o'clock in the morning, and I'm at work then, so I can't just tell work that I'm leaving to go there. (Jonáš, ethnic majority, 34)

This situation creates a vicious cycle of structural exclusion, where fathers who strive to fulfil their parental responsibilities through work lose access to other forms of support because they are not available during working hours. They are excluded from the institutionalised notion of active parenthood because they are not visible, do not cooperate "on time," and do not fit existing social work time regimes.

Through this lens, the fatherhood of marginalised men is construed as failing. Not because fathers fail to care or have interest, but because the system does not allow them to be present in ways that are considered legitimate. Work, which should be a means of responsible parenthood, becomes an obstacle to cooperation with a system that, moreover, views working poverty not as a structural problem but as an individual failure.

The breadwinner model can be very hurtful for marginalised men, as precarious work, poverty, or job loss means that the role of breadwinner cannot be fulfilled in a stable and secure way, ultimately impacting their children. The following quote illustrates that fathers are confronted with a dilemma that is not usually addressed in mainstream discourse—economic necessity vs emotional commitment:

> I was with the kids, and I didn't know what to do mentally...whether I should go to work or stay at home with them, so I chose one....I took care of the kids; they're my kids. I cooked, cleaned, did the laundry, and even prepared milk for my baby girl, changed nappies, and bathed the kids. I got them ready for school, took them there in the morning, and picked them up after lunch. (Martin, Roma, 29)

The narratives of the fathers further show that their parental identity is firmly rooted in a traditional gender division of family roles, which defines men as breadwinners and women as caregivers. This model corresponds to the hegemonic notion of masculinity as described by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), where the "proper" man contributes economically to the family, while emotional and everyday childcare remains the "natural" responsibility of the woman: "I take care of the work and money, and my partner takes care of our children" (Radovan, Roma, 34).

However, this normative framework is simultaneously disrupted by everyday reality that challenges the traditional model. Fathers acknowledge that maternal care is not always automatic or unconditional and that the mother's role itself is not naturally fulfilled, but, just like fatherhood, it is shaped by education, motivation, and structural context: "It's usually up to the mother, but some mothers are backward, some are illiterate....They don't do it out of love, but because they must" (Alex, Roma, 62).

Despite the prevailing norms, stereotypical gender role divisions within the family are increasingly disrupted, particularly in situations where the family's economic situation requires a second income:

> Now, thanks to L. [wife] working morning shifts, I've started to get more involved, so I take kids to kindergarten...and I try to help around with household chores, but after all, the woman should be the

one who is cleaning and all that, while the man should be earning, but....I'm trying. (Otmar, ethnic majority, 37)

However, a caregiving father is perceived differently from a mother in the context of social work. The care provided by women is taken for granted, while the care provided by men is valued and exceptional. Also, fathers themselves often talk about household activities as a hobby or a voluntary activity rather than an expected responsibility: "I can do everything. Cook, clean, do the laundry, everything. There's no problem with me in this respect [laughs]....I enjoy it. If I didn't enjoy it, I wouldn't do it. But it's my hobby" (Hugo, Roma, 37).

Thus, work–family balance concerns not only women but also men. Although in conditions of precarious work, low wages, and poverty, parents' choices are quite limited: "She would need to find a four-hour job....To get my wife somewhere to work for four hours starting in November" (Robert, ethnic majority, 41).

Time spent together with children is an important element of paternal identity, even if it is mainly spent after work or at weekends. Here, caregiving is associated with play and closeness, dimensions that are neither systemically supported nor measured as "parental competence" yet are central to the father-child relationship and are generally very important for the child's development (see also Maté & Maté, 2022):

> When I come home from work, the kids come to me all the time. They lie down with me, want me to put on a cartoon, and they watch it with me. (František, Roma, 55)

> So, we bought him some plastic building blocks too, and I was building it with them. We made a garage, blocks, houses. (Otmar, ethnic majority, 37)

In terms of intersectionality (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1989), it is important to understand that the gender division of roles in the family is not universal. In structurally excluded communities, it is shaped by class, ethnicity, and access to resources. Fathers of marginalised families often strive to fill the role of "breadwinner," but their economic reality does not fully allow them to do so. For them, fatherhood means balancing between normative expectations and the structural impossibility of fulfilling them. In doing so, they experience the phenomenon that Young (1999) metaphorised as a bulimic society characterised by cultural inclusion (fathers know what is expected of them and have internalised it) and structural exclusion (they are unable to fulfil this expectation). Fathers are thus constantly culturally consumed but structurally rejected, creating tension and frustration. In this light, the traditional division of labour is not a result of personal choice but rather a survival strategy under conditions of uncertainty, where families flexibly rearrange roles depending on who can work at a given time, who has a work contract, or who is sick at the time. Parenting roles are thus becoming hybrid, but the social service system has been slow to respond to this dynamic, still favouring mothers as primary caregivers (Perez-Vaisvidovsky et al., 2023).

6. Concluding Discussion

In this study, we set ourselves the goal of understanding how fatherhood is experienced by social service clients and how class, ethnic, and gender inequalities shape this experience. We specifically focused on two research questions:

1. How do social services clients perceive their paternal identity?
2. How does the intersectionality of class, ethnicity, and gender inequalities shape fathers' involvement and engagement?

Our findings demonstrate that fatherhood in the contexts of social work is not only a personal matter but also an inherently political one. Paternal identity emerges in narratives as a negotiation between the normative ideals of the "good father" and the structural barriers that limit the ability of fathers to enact these ideals.

As we have shown, fathers perceive themselves primarily through the lens of responsibility, most often tied to the breadwinner role. For many, recognition as a "good father" is equated with financial support for the family, while care and household responsibilities remain framed as secondary or situational activity, often only when the mother is absent due to illness or other reasons. This resonates with previous research showing that men's path to "responsible fatherhood" is linked to independence and external socialisation (Hong et al., 2021), while women are assumed to become responsible by virtue of childbirth itself (Gřundělová, 2018). Yet, the structural realities of precarious labour, insecure housing, and ethnic discrimination make the breadwinner role extremely fragile and often unattainable, resulting in stigma and feelings of failure (Broskevičová, 2025; Janebová, 2020).

The intersections of class, gender, and ethnicity are central to understanding these dynamics. Fathers in marginalised communities face systemic housing discrimination, unstable employment, and welfare regimes that privilege mothers as primary clients (Perez-Vaisvidovsky et al., 2023). These conditions render their fatherhood invisible or undervalued within institutional frameworks, despite their efforts to provide for and engage with their children. As we have presented, fatherly involvement is frequently situational and emerges in response to crises, while routine engagement is constrained by systemic conditions. Consequently, social services interpret this situational engagement through a lens of control rather than support.

The narratives also reveal that the hegemonic models of masculinity and family continue to shape expectations. Fathers strive to fulfil provider roles, yet their realities place them at the margins of legitimacy. Ambivalent sexism (Glick & Fiske, 2011) operates here in two ways: Fathers' failure to provide is stigmatised, while their involvement in care is considered exceptional, valued only when it occurs in extraordinary circumstances. Feminised social services, organised around the schedules and needs of mothers, further contribute to the invisibility of fathers (Ewart-Boyle et al., 2015; Strega et al., 2009). This creates a vicious cycle where fathers' structural exclusion is reproduced through institutional practice.

Following our analytical objective, we can conclude that fatherhood among social service clients is experienced as a constant negotiation between the ideal of the "responsible breadwinner" and the intersecting class, ethnic, and gender inequalities that constrain recognition and practice of paternal care. Class, ethnic, and gender inequalities intersect to shape this experience: Poverty and housing exclusion restrict stability, ethnic stigmatisation further marginalises Roma fathers, and gendered institutional norms privilege mothers as primary caregivers. This demonstrates that paternal identity in contexts of exclusion cannot be explained at the individual level alone but must be understood as a political and structural phenomenon produced at the intersection of socio-economic conditions, ethnic hierarchies, and gendered expectations.

Since these problems can only be addressed at a structural level, the politicisation and mobilisation of social workers appears to be a key and urgent need for social work (Toft et al., 2023). Without structural measures,

social workers are doomed to experience feelings of powerlessness similar to those of their clients (Gojová & Glumbíková, 2015). It is essential to work with the concept of fatherhood as a fluid and socially constructed phenomenon that needs to be understood at the intersection of class, gender, and ethnicity (Halpern et al., 2025; Strier & Perez-Vaisvidovsky, 2021). If these changes are not made, social work risks inadvertently reproducing practices that continue to exclude marginalised fathers and delegitimise their parental role. Future research should therefore develop more inclusive theories of fatherhood that account for poverty, insecure housing, and precarious labour; social policy must also adapt to recognise fathers as legitimate partners in care.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Data Availability

The data are not publicly available due to their containing information that could compromise the privacy of research participants.

LLMs Disclosure

This article was proofread using Writefull and ChatGPT as assistive AI tools to enhance language and grammar. All outputs generated by these tools underwent thorough human review to correct any errors and biases.

References

Baum, N. (2017). Gender-sensitive intervention to improve work with fathers in child welfare services. *Child and Family Social Work*, *22*(1), 419–427. https://doi.org/10.1111/cfs.12259

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. Sage.

Braveman, P. A., Arkin, E., Proctor, D., Kauh, T., & Holm, N. (2022). Systemic and structural racism: Definitions, examples, health damages, and approaches to dismantling. *Health Affairs*, *41*(2), 171–178. https://doi.org/10.1377/hlthaff.2021.01489

Brewsaugh, K., Masyn, K. E., & Salloum, A. (2018). Child welfare workers' sexism and beliefs about father involvement. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *89*, 132–144. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2018.04.029

Broskevičová, Z. (2025). Living without privilege in Czech society: Building social work knowledge from lived experiences of inequalities. *The British Journal of Social Work*, *55*(4), 1753–1769. https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcaf013

Caplan, P. J. (2007). Don't blame mother: Then and now. In A. O'Reilly (Ed.), *Maternal theory: Essential readings* (pp. 592–600). Demeter Press.

Charles, P., Frankham, E., Garthe, R. C., Visher, C. A., & Kay, A. L. (2021). Father involvement in the first year after prison: Considerations for social work. *Research on Social Work Practice, 31*(8), 797–813. https://doi.org/10.1177/10497315211022806

Chuang, S. S., & Fagan, J. (2021). Ethnic and diverse fathering: Moving research forward. *Journal of Family Theory & Review, 13*(3), 261–265. https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.12424

Clapton, G. (2009). How and why social work fails fathers: Redressing an imbalance, social work's role and responsibility. *Practice: Social Work in Action, 21*(1), 17–34. https://doi.org/10.1080/09503150902745989

Coakley, T. M., Shears, J. K., & Randolph, S. D. (2014). Understanding key barriers to fathers' involvement in their children's lives. *Child & Youth Services, 35*(4), 343–364. https://doi.org/10.1080/0145935X.2014.972550

Collins, P. H. (2000). Gender, black feminism, and black political economy. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 568*, 41–53. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1049471

Connell, R. W. (2000). *The men and the boys*. University of California Press.

Connell, R. W., & Messerschmidt, J. W. (2005). Hegemonic masculinity: Rethinking the concept. *Gender & Society, 19*(6), 829–859. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243205278639

Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum, 8*, 139–167. https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8

Cryer-Coupet, Q. R., Stokes, M. N., Lemmons, B. P., & Dorsey, M. (2021). Engaging nonresident fathers: Exploring collaborative competencies in support of family-centered practice. *Research on Social Work Practice, 31*(8), 880–892. https://doi.org/10.1177/10497315211022830

Davies, L., & Krane, J. (2006). Collaborate with caution: Protecting children, helping mothers. *Critical Social Policy, 26*(2), 412–425. https://doi.org/10.1177/0261018306062592

Day, R. D., & Lamb, M. E. (2004). Conceptualizing and measuring father involvement: Pathways, problems and progress. In R. D. Day & M. E. Lamb (Eds.), *Conceptualizing and measuring father involvement* (pp. 1–15). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.

Deutsch, F. M., & Saxon, S. E. (1998). The double standard of praise and criticism for mothers and fathers. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 22*(4), 665–683. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.1998.tb00184.x

Dominelli, L. (2002). *Anti-oppressive social work theory and practice*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Dominelli, L., Strega, S., Walmsley, C., Callahan, M., & Brown, L. (2011). Here's my story: Fathers of 'looked after' children recount their experiences in the Canadian child welfare system. *British Journal of Social Work, 41*(2), 351–367. https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcq099

Douglas, E. M. (2017). Risk factors for fatal maltreatment victimization and perpetration. In E. M. Douglas (Ed.), *Child maltreatment fatalities in the United States: Four decades of policy, program, and professional responses* (pp. 27–46). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-7583-0_3

Eagly, A. H., & Crowley, M. (1986). Gender and helping behavior: A meta-analytic review of the social psychological literature. *Psychological Bulletin, 100*(3), 283–308. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.100.3.283

Ewart-Boyle, S., Manktelow, R., & McColgan, M. (2015). Social work and the shadow father: Lessons for engaging fathers in Northern Ireland. *Child and Family Social Work, 20*(4), 470–479. https://doi.org/10.1111/cfs.12096

Fook, J. (2002). *Social work. Critical theory and practice.* Sage.

Ghate, D., Shaw, C., & Hazel, N. (2000). *Fathers and family centres: Engaging fathers in preventative services.* Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Glick, P., & Fiske, S. T. (1996). The ambivalent sexism inventory: Differentiating hostile and benevolent sexism. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 70*(3), 491–512. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.70.3. 491

Glick, P., & Fiske, S. T. (2001). An ambivalent alliance: Hostile and benevolent sexism as complementary justifications for gender inequality. *American Psychologist, 56*(2), 109–118. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.56.2.109

Glick, P., & Fiske, S. T. (2011). Ambivalent sexism revisited. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 35*(3), 530–535. https://doi.org/10.1177/0361684311414832

Gojová, A., & Glumbíková, K. (2015). (Bezmocná) sociální práce jako zdroj zplnomocnění? *Sociální práce/ Sociálna práca/Czech and Slovak Social Work, 15*(6), 52–63. https://socialniprace.cz/article/bezmocna-socialni-prace-jako-zdroj-zplnomocneni

Gřundělová, B. (2018). Kritická reflexe konstrukce mateřství a otcovství v sociální práci s rodinou. *Sociální práce/Sociálna práca/Czech and Slovak Social Work, 18*(3), 40–53. https://socialniprace.cz/article/kriticka-reflexe-konstrukce-materstvi-a-otcovstvi-v-socialni-praci-s-rodinou

Gřundělová, B., Černý, J., Gojová, A., Stanková, Z., & Lisník, J. (2023). The shadow fathers: Barriers to whole family approach in social work? *Journal of Family Research, 35*, 85–102. https://doi.org/10.20377/jfr-796

Halpern, A., Urban-Stahl, U., Perez-Vaisvidovsky, N., & Mizrahi, R. (2025). Fathers in the eyes of family welfare services social workers in Germany and Israel: Feminism, ideals and disappointments. *International Social Work, 68*(3), 461–475. https://doi.org/10.1177/00208728241309480

Hašková, H. (2022). Rodičovské plány a cesty k rodičovství gayů a leseb. *Sociální studia/Social Studies, 19*(2), 93–110. https://doi.org/10.5817/SOC2022-30890

Hong, P. Y. P., Lewis, D., Park, J. H., Hong, R., & Davies, E. (2021). Transforming impossible into possible (TIP) for fatherhood: An empowerment-based social work intervention. *Research on Social Work Practice, 31*(8), 826–835. https://doi.org/10.1177/10497315211004743

Janebová, R. (2020). Loïc Wacquant, the concept of the 'centaur state' and social work: The case of the Czech Republic. *European Journal of Social Work, 25*(1), 4–14. https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2020.1819206

Janebová, R., & Černá, L. (2008). Konstrukce žen-klientek a mužů-klientů v praxi sociální práce. *Gender, rovné příležitosti, výzkum, 9*(2), 37–45. https://www.genderonline.cz/pdfs/gav/2008/02/05.pdf

Kempe, T. (2025). *Pojetí mateřství v sociální práci s rodinou* [unpublished master's thesis]. University of Ostrava, Faculty of Social Studies.

Klusáček, J., & Kalenda, S. (2024). *Česko na křižovatce—Zpráva o vyloučení z bydlení 2024: Vydáme se na cestu k ukončení bytové nouze a obchodu s chudobou?* Platforma pro sociální bydlení. https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/5ef4ac1cc5dd69384a10c66e/67051b21b2774f44ad64218a_zprava2024_compr.pdf

Kupka, P., Walach, V., & Tvrdá, K. (2021). Profit, or power? Towards a construction of organized crime in Czech policy. *International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice, 66,* Article 100489. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijlcj.2021.100489

Lamb, M. E., Pleck, J. H., Charnov, E. L., & Levine, J. A. (1987). A biosocial perspective on paternal behavior and involvement. In J. B. Lancaster, J. Altmann, A. S. Rossi, & L. R. Sherrod (Eds.), *Parenting across the lifespan: Biosocial perspectives* (pp. 111–142). Aldine Publishing.

Lee, T. L., Fiske, S. T., Glick, P., & Chen, Z. (2010). Ambivalent sexism in close relationships: (Hostile) power and (benevolent) romance shape relationship ideals. *Sex Roles, 62*(7/8), 583–601. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-010-9770-x

Lee, Y., Fagan, J. S., & Icard, L. D. (2018). Nonresidential fathers with children in foster care: A descriptive study in the United States. *Child & Family Social Work*, *23*(2), 146–154. https://doi.org/10.1111/cfs.12393

Littlechild, B. (2014). Etika v kvalitativním výzkumu v sociální práci. In D. Baum & A. Gojová. (Eds.), *Výzkumné metody v sociální práci* (pp. 121–138). University of Ostrava. https://projekty.osu.cz/vedtym/dok/publikace/vyzkumne-metody-v-soc-praci.pdf

Lux, M., & Sunega, P. (2023). Housing wealth inequality, intergenerational transfers and young households in the super-homeownership system. *International Journal of Housing Policy*, *25*(2), 349–371. https://doi.org/10.1080/19491247.2023.2269618

Lyócsa, I. (2011). Príčiny a dopady konštruktov rodičovstva (materstva a otcovstva) u pracovníčok a pracovníkov sociálnoprávnej ochrany detí: Príklad Veľkej Británie, Kanady a Izraela. *Sociální práce/Sociálna práca/Czech and Slovak Social Work*, *11*(2), 96–104. https://socialniprace.cz/article/priciny-a-dopady-konstruktov-rodicovstva-materstva-a-otcovstva-u-pracovnicok-a-pracovnikov-socialnopravnej-ochrany-deti-priklad-velkej-britanie-kanady-a-izraela

Maté, G., & Maté, D. (2022). *The myth of normal: Trauma, illness, and healing in a toxic culture.* Ebury Publishing.

McMunn, A., Martin, P., Kelly, Y., & Sacker, A. (2015). Fathers' involvement: Correlates and consequences for child socioemotional behavior in the United Kingdom. *Journal of Family Issues*, *38*(8), 1109–1131. https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X15622415

Mertl, J., Gřundělová, B., & Gojová, A. (2025). Criminalisation of truancy as a manifestation of advanced marginality that mothers should be blamed for: Media framing in the Czech Republic. *Crime, Media, Culture*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1177/17416590251405761

Mullaly, R. P. (1993). *Structural social work: Ideology, theory, and practice.* McClelland & Stewart.

Nedbálková, K. (2011). *Matky kuráže. Lesbické rodiny v pozdně moderní společnosti*. SLON.

Olszowy, L., Jaffe, P. G., Dawson, M., Straatman, A. L., & Saxton, M. D. (2020). Voices from the frontline: Child protection workers' perspectives on barriers to assessing risk in domestic violence cases. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *116*, Article 105208. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105208

Pedersen, D. E. (2012). The good mother, the good father, and the good parent: Gendered definitions of parenting. *Journal of Feminist Family Therapy*, *24*(3), 230–246. https://doi.org/10.1080/08952833.2012.648141

Perez-Vaisvidovsky, N., Halpern, A., Mizrahi, R., & Atalla, Z. (2023). "Fathers are very important, but they aren't our contact persons": The primary contact person assumption and the absence of fathers in social work interventions. *Families in Society*, *104*(3), 292–305. https://doi.org/10.1177/10443894221145751

Philip, G., Clifton, J., & Brandon, M. (2019). The trouble with fathers: The impact of time and gendered-thinking on working relationships between fathers and social workers in child protection practice in England. *Journal of Family Issues*, *40*(16), 2288–2309. https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X18792682

Prokop, D. (2022). *Slepé skvrny: O chudobě, vzdělávání, populismu a dalších výzvách české společnosti* (3rd ed.). Host.

Randles, J. (2018). Making men into "responsible" fathers. *Contexts*, *17*(2), 34–39. https://doi.org/10.1177/1536504218776962

Reimer, V., & Sahagian, S. (2015). Introduction. In V. Reimer & S. Sahagian (Eds.), *The mother-blame game* (pp. 1–16). Demeter Press.

Scheibling, C. (2020). Doing fatherhood online: Men's parental identities, experiences, and ideologies on social media. *Symbolic Interaction*, *43*(3), 472–492. https://doi.org/10.1002/symb.459

Šmídová, I. (2008). Otcovství u porodu. Re-konstrukce genderových vztahů v rodině. *Sociální studia/Social Studies*, *5*(1), 11–34. https://doi.org/10.5817/SOC2008-1-11

Strega, S., Brown, L., Callahan, M., Dominelli, L., & Walmsley, C. (2009). Working with me, working at me: Fathers' narratives of child welfare. *Journal of Progressive Human Services*, *20*(1), 72–91. https://doi.org/10.1080/10428230902871207

Strier, R., & Perez-Vaisvidovsky, N. (2021). Intersectionality and fatherhood: Theorizing non-hegemonic fatherhoods. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, *13*(3), 334–346. https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.12412

Thompson, N. (2020). *Anti-discriminatory practice: Equality, diversity and social justice.* Bloomsbury Publishing.

Toft, J., Lightfoot, E. B., Calhoun, M., Choy-Brown, M., Merighi, J. R., Renner, L. M., Soffer-Elnekave, R., Mendel, J., & Marsalis, S. (2023). Effects of neoliberalism on social work practice in the United States: A scoping review. *Social Work Research*, *47*(2), 99–110. https://doi.org/10.1093/swr/svad003

Trlifajová, L., & Pospíšil, F. (2023). From neoliberal restriction to control of the Roma—Towards post-neoliberal ethnic welfare. *Sociologický časopis/Czech Sociological Review*, *59*(6), 665–692. https://doi.org/10.13060/csr.2023.053

Wacquant, L. (2009). *Punishing the poor: The neoliberal government of social insecurity.* Duke University Press.

Weinberg, M. (2008). Structural social work: A moral compass for ethics in practice. *Critical Social Work*, *9*(1). https://doi.org/10.22329/csw.v9i1.5761

Young, J. (1999). Cannibalism and bulimia: Patterns of social control in late modernity. *Theoretical Criminology*, *3*(4), 387–407. https://doi.org/10.1177/1362480699003004001

About the Authors

Barbora Gřundělová is an associate professor at the Department of Social Work, University of Ostrava. Her research focuses on family social work. In her publications, she focuses on stereotypes in social work practices, the gendered constructions of women and men as clients, and the gender competence of social workers.

Jiří Mertl is an associate professor at the Department of Social Work, University of Ostrava. He specialises in criminology, social justice, critical social work, social deviance, and marginalisation. He is currently interested in social work and counselling with prisoners and released persons, from the perspective of critical social work.