Social Inclusion
2026 • Volume 14 • Article 11105
https://doi.org/10.17645/si.11105

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Open Access Journal

Involved Fatherhood as Interpreted by Czech Men's Organizations

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Submitted: 5 August 2025 **Accepted:** 22 December 2025 **Published:** 28 January 2026

Issue: This article is part of the issue "Involved Fatherhood in European Post-Socialist Societies" edited by Hana Hašková (Institute of Sociology of the Czech Academy of Sciences), Alenka Švab (University of Ljubljana), Ivett Szalma (ELTE Centre for Social Sciences / Corvinus University of Budapest), and Judit Takács (ELTE Centre for Social Sciences), fully open access at https://doi.org/10.17645/si.i532

Abstract

Drawing on the discourse on masculinities, this article explores the positions of Czech men's organizations related to childcare. Recently, there has been growing attention to the idea of involved fatherhood; we show that one Czech men's organization has indeed developed a caring masculinity that aligns well with the notion of involved fatherhood. The other organizations, by contrast, have expressed strong anti-feminist sentiments, blaming women and female-dominated professions for their losses in divorce cases. While these groups initially emerged to demand equal custody post-divorce—appearing to endorse gender equality—they claim to support the "traditional family," where the man is the head of the household. Although these views seem to be contradictory, we argue they are in line with the pre-modern view of masculinity in which the family (wife and children) was the property of the man; therefore, it was no contradiction for the father to expect the mother to be the main carer before a divorce, while demanding custody rights after a divorce.

Keywords

caring masculinity; childcare; involved fatherhood; paternal care; pre-modern masculinity; shared custody

1. Introduction

In this article, we analyze the types of masculinities we find among Czech men's organizations. The Czech case is interesting because it allows us to explore how men's organizations promote caring where the institutional, cultural, and historical contexts differ from the Western European and Anglo-Saxon cases that dominate the literature. In Central Europe, the policy regimes and cultural norms shape the possibilities for gender-egalitarian parenting differently than in the Western context. By integrating these perspectives, we

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aim to advance a more nuanced understanding of fatherhood as a social location where masculinities are not only renegotiated but also contested, exposing the ambivalent potential of care to both challenge and sustain existing gendered power relations.

Our starting point is the discourse on masculinities. We argue that in Czechia, one organization—the Liga otevřených mužů (League of Open Men; LOM)—has developed a rather mainstream type of "caring masculinity" (Elliott, 2016, 2020; Hanlon, 2012; Jordan, 2020). By contrast, other men's organizations have adopted a type of masculinity after losing their custody cases, which we label "pre-modern" (cf. Eisenbichler & Murray, 2024; Saxonberg, 2019). They have been aggressive and anti-feminist, and blame women for both their divorces and court decisions (given that judges, psychologists, psychiatrists, and social workers were often women). They see the man as the head of the household, although women should be responsible for the household chores. Yet, they also believe that after a divorce, the father should have the right to have at least joint custody of the child. It might seem like they hold contradictory views that combine a conservative type of masculinity with a caring masculinity, but we show their views are not contradictory if seen through the lens of pre-modern masculinity values, in which the family (including wife and children) is property of the man. This article contributes to the international discourse by showing how masculinities can develop differently in different settings. In addition, we introduce a new term—"pre-modern masculinity"—which we believe can be applied to other cases in other countries.

This article proceeds by discussing theories of masculinity and how they apply to the Czech case. Then, after introducing our methodology, we analyze the concrete cases of the different men's organizations in Czechia, including both the relatively pro-feminist LOM that portrays a rather caring masculinity and the more conservative men's organizations that promote a more pre-modern masculinity.

2. Involved Fatherhood and Caring Masculinities

We begin this section by discussing what previous studies have shown on the effects of involved fatherhood, which is closely related to caring masculinity. We claim that one of the men's organizations in Czechia displays a caring masculinity, while the others display more of what we label a "pre-modern" masculinity. Thus, we proceed by describing some of the positive effects of involved fatherhood according to the literature. Then we summarize the discourse on caring masculinities, after which we develop our notion of pre-modern marginal masculinity, which we argue is the dominating type of masculinity among Czech men's groups.

2.1. The Effects of Involved Fatherhood

Not only does involved fatherhood contribute to gender equality and the elimination of gender roles, paternal engagement also has positive effects on child development. Grau Grau et al. (2022) summarize evidence demonstrating that involved fathers significantly enhance children's cognitive development, emotional regulation, and educational attainment. Paternal involvement has been linked to improved academic performance, reduced behavioral problems, and heightened emotional intelligence (Yogman & Eppel, 2022), as well as increased partnership stability within families (Petts et al., 2020). Beyond early childhood, engaged fatherhood contributes to long-term psychosocial outcomes, with adolescents of actively involved fathers reporting higher self-esteem and stronger peer relationships (Grau Grau et al., 2022).

In the Nordic context, these practices are deeply intertwined with cultural narratives of gender equality. Bach (2017) illustrates how Danish fathers in dual-career households construct paternal identities through narratives of choice, involved fatherhood, and gender equality, simultaneously challenging yet subtly preserving traditional masculine ideals. This underscores the complexity of contemporary fathering roles, which are both culturally situated and individually negotiated. The developmental value of paternal engagement is particularly pronounced when caregiving responsibilities are equitably shared with mothers, providing children with diverse role models and caregiving approaches. Thus, fatherhood is increasingly framed not as supplementary but as integral to holistic child development.

Despite these documented benefits, significant barriers limit fathers' ability to participate fully in caregiving. Parental leave benefits are often too low to encourage fathers to share the leave time, because they often have higher salaries than mothers, so the family's loss of income would be great. Studies show that a combination of father quotas as well as generous benefits based on the income-replacement principle is needed to encourage fathers to share in parental leave time (e.g., Saxonberg, 2013). Atkinson (2025) identifies workplace culture and the persistence of the ideal worker norm—which equates professional success with long hours and uninterrupted availability—as further obstacles.

Cultural norms further constrain paternal engagement. Saxonberg (2014) describes the "norm of threeness" in Central Europe, which expects mothers to remain home full-time until their child turns three. While one-third of Czech and Slovak fathers expressed willingness to share leave, entrenched gender expectations and maternal distrust of paternal caregiving hindered this aspiration, as did a parental leave system in the Czech Republic that discouraged fathers from sharing in the leave time because the benefit levels are low and not based on the income replacement principle.

Father involvement is not only important when heterosexual parents are living together, raising their children, and going on parental leave; it is also important after divorces or separations. Studies of shared custody after divorce also usually conclude that children are better off under shared custody arrangements (for a summary of the many studies on the topic, see, for example, Fučík & Šolcová, 2022). Meta-analytic reviews have concluded, for example, that children living under joint custody were better adjusted than those living with one parent (e.g., Baude et al., 2016) and have higher levels of well-being (e.g., Steinbach, 2019). This is especially relevant for studying men's organizations because, at least in Czechia, most of these organizations were founded specifically to promote shared custody after divorces.

Even though involved fatherhood has positive influences on child well-being and gender equality, simply being more "involved" is not enough, and it still implies the idea that involvement is a choice that fathers have (while women cannot choose to be non-involved). As Bach (2017) argues, the invocation of "choice" and "involved fatherhood" serves as a discursive strategy for reconciling domestic labor participation with the maintenance of masculine identity, ultimately limiting the transformative potential of their caregiving roles. This shift toward involved fatherhood has also led to the development of the notion of caring masculinity as a manner in which fathers learn to incorporate caring into their masculine ideals.

2.2. Caring Masculinities

This growing concern with the issue of involved fathers coincides with the caring masculinity framework. Emerging at the intersection of critical studies on men and masculinities and feminist theory, this framework offers conceptual and practical tools for reimagining care within the context of gender relations. Building on Connell's (1995) theorization of hegemonic masculinity, scholars of caring masculinities argue that men's engagement in care work—whether in familial, professional, or community contexts—can unsettle patriarchal norms and foster gender equality (Elliott, 2016, 2020). This framework responds to a critical gap that Ruby and Scholz (2018) identified, as they note that "in contrast to feminist theory, theories of masculinity barely reflect on care and care work" (p. 73). Crucially, as Elliott (2016) emphasizes, caring masculinities must not be reduced to individual choice or framed as innate dispositions. By integrating care into masculinity studies, scholars such as Elliott (2020) define caring masculinities as identities that reject domination and patriarchal traits while incorporating ideals of interdependence, relationality, and positive emotion. This reconceptualization aligns with feminist theorists of caring (e.g., Tronto, 1993), who view care as a relational and ethical practice rather than a privatized, feminized duty. Importantly, caring masculinities are not presented as a homogenizing or idealized typology of the "new man" but as a diverse, context-dependent set of practices that can coexist with, contest, or transform dominant masculinities (Elliott, 2016). This body of work is inherently transnational, reflecting varied cultural, economic, and political conditions under which caring masculinities are enacted. Policy-driven interventions can encourage men's participation in care as part of broader gender equality strategies (Scambor et al., 2014).

A critical insight emerging from this literature is that caring masculinities require men to sacrifice privileges and power afforded by hegemonic masculinity, often at the cost of social status or facing stigmatization (Hanlon, 2012). As Hanlon argues, this rejection of domination constitutes a form of "heroic" resistance that itself requires emotional labor (p. 209).

Jordan (2020) shows in her study that even when men take on a more involved, caring role, they do not see caring as something feminine, but rather incorporate it into their view of masculinity. Similarly, Wojnicka and de Boise (2025, p. 351) state that what is frequently labeled as caring masculinity does not necessarily represent a fundamental overhaul of unequal distributions of labour but rather an incorporation of certain caring practices as a response to the crisis of legitimacy posed by demands for change.

Since most of the men's organizations in this study revolve around child custody issues, the issue arises as to how post-divorce/separation experiences influence caring masculinity. Even though little research exists on this issue, Graf and Wojnicka's (2023) study of shared custody cases in Germany and Sweden shows that when lone fathers take care of their children for extended periods, it increases their potential of developing a caring masculinity. Nonetheless, they caution that the experiences of these fathers do not necessarily lead to support for gender equality and instead can lead to a "protective masculinity" by which they see themselves as the protectors of women and children, who are forced to take care of children under certain circumstances.

In our study, we show that the men's groups that organize around child custody issues are strongly anti-feminist and do not espouse caring masculinities, while the one organization (LOM) that supports a caring masculinity does not engage in child custody issues.

2.3. Backlash and Pre-modern Masculinity in Czechia

While some men have taken on a more caring masculinity and in Czechia, one group actually promotes it, most men's groups in the country belong to the "backlash" category, in that they oppose what they perceive to be society's move toward greater gender equality. Jordan (2016, p. 21, 2019, p. 41) claims that backlash comes from people in power, who oppose these changes. Backlash adherents oppose feminism and either see gender equality as an undesirable goal or they believe that feminism works against gender equality by favoring women over men. However, the Czech men's movement is not very powerful and actually rather marginalized because of its generally misogynist views (Saxonberg, 2017). Thus, in contrast to LOM, it does not sit on any government committees, nor can it cooperate with women's groups.

Similar to the Ukrainian conservative parental movement (Strelnyk, 2017), it does at times try to cooperate with other conservative groups, but its cooperation is much more limited. Karzabi (2017) considers these Czech men's organizations to be "fathers' rights" groups who are openly antifeminist and claims that such groups do not exist in Ukraine, as the Ukrainian groups are more positive toward gender equality. While the Czech men's organizations generally share the anti-feminist views of their conservative Polish counterparts (i.e., the ones that Korolczuk & Hryciuk, 2017, label "angry fathers" and "fathers' advocates"), the Czech groups emphasize Christianity and religion more than the Polish groups, despite the fact that Czechia is a more secular country than Poland. Analogous to the fathers' rights groups that Jordan (2020) interviewed in the UK, the conservative Czech organizations do not see caring as something feminine. A difference between the Czech and British backlash organizations is that Jordan (2016, p. 22) claims that "backlash is, by definition, parasitic on feminism and only becomes necessary when feminism is strong, rather than declining," but in Czechia, the feminist movement has been rather weak (e.g., Saxonberg, 2014).

Even though the men's groups—with the exception of LOM—are conservative, their views differ from the norm of threeness (Saxonberg, 2014) that is hegemonic in Czechia, in which the mother should work full-time until having children and then stay at home with the children until they reach the age of three and then go back to work full-time. Similar to the male-breadwinner model, these conservative men activists generally think that the man should be the main breadwinner and should be the head of the household. They also think that when the couple is still married, the mother should be the one responsible for the household. However, they also believe that when they get divorced, they should at least get joint custody of the children (known as "alternating custody" in Czechia; see Saxonberg, 2017).

While some scholars have considered this to be a contradictory view that combines a patriarchal masculinity with a caring masculinity (e.g., Korolczuk & Hryciuk, 2017), we see it as actually being consistent with a type of masculinity that existed in pre-modern times, before women got the right to vote. Similar to Saxonberg (2019), we consider the "pre-modern" period to be roughly similar to the period of the Spanish Inquisition, which lasted from the late 15th century to the mid-19th century. As Murray (2024) notes, it is difficult to draw the line between medieval and early modern, which is why historians often use the term "pre-modern."

Even though Eisenbichler and Murray (2024) also use the term "pre-modern masculinity," they do not define it, and instead, their anthology simply collects essays about various aspects of pre-modern masculinity, such as whether or not men should wear beards. Thus, their anthology does not provide a framework for us; instead, we must develop our own, which we do below. We prefer the term pre-modern masculinity over, for example,

Wojnicka's (2016) notion of "masculist groups," as our term shows a certain historical continuity of a particular type of belief system, and "masculist" is vaguer and could even cover fathers who are not interested in child custody after divorces.

Of course, any category must be a simplification, and there were differences over time and between countries, but a general principle from this period is the idea that men should have power over women and children and that the family was the property of the man (Chojnacki, 1994). Thus, women were subjugated to men (Newman, 2024). As de Beauvoir (1949/1956, p. 173) writes, under the Napoleonic codes, the man had "many more rights over the children than the mother," and "the wife is the property of the man to whom she provides children" (p. 155). Given this view, then it is no contradiction for men to believe that they should be the head of the household and the main breadwinner, while also advocating custody—or at least shared custody—of their children after getting divorced. Therefore, they could be responsible for their children after divorce without developing a caring masculinity.

Writing about the role that men were expected to play in England in the 18th century, Bailey (2007, pp. 219–220) comments:

> In order to be fully rounded examples of manhood, early-modern men needed to be married and, importantly, to be "good" husbands and fathers. While respect and affection for wives was advocated in advice literature, much emphasis was placed on discipline and material provision. The primary role of the father in a patriarchal society was as the centre of authority, organising the education, training and discipline of children over the age of seven. Society and the law also demanded that men adequately maintain their wives and children.

Our study shows that the Czech men activists seem to have believed that they basically fulfilled this role until their wives filed for divorce and deprived them of their status. Note that we are not claiming that it was always the wives who actually filed for divorce, but the activists almost always put the full blame on their former wives.

In a situation in which the family was the property of the father, it was common in Europe for fathers to receive custody after a divorce. Folberg and Graham (1979, p. 530) note that in pre-industrial England, "the common law regarded children as their father's property. The presumption that the father was "the person entitled by law to the custody of his child was irrefutable." Some fathers even saw this as a burden. Thus, one father in England complained to his wife during a divorce hearing: "You have nobody to maintain or provide for, but your self; I must maintain & give portions to my Son & Daughter" (Tague, 2007, p. 200).

Guilt also mattered: If the court decided it was one parent's fault that the couple was getting a divorce, then the other parent would get custody (Griesebner & Hehenberger, 2023). But even in this case, as already noted, the Czech men's activists almost always claim it was the wife's fault. Connecting guilt to custody was also common in such countries as Spain (Jauregi, 2023), the German lands (Fleßenkämper, 2023), and the Hungarian part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Lanczová, 2017).

Even if it was more usual to give fathers custody, they had to be able to show they were able to provide for their children as part of their breadwinner role. Thus, in one case in Prague, the mother gained custody

because she successfully argued that her ex-husband was an alcoholic, who was unable to provide for the upbringing of their children (Čevelová & Reich, 2023, p. 121).

Seen from this perspective, even if the men's activists were requesting shared/alternating custody rather than full custody, their ability to combine conservative views toward gender relations with the desire to have at least shared custody is not a contradiction. The Czech men's movement shows that in a certain context, the argument for shared custody could be rather an argument for going back to pre-industrial gender relations rather than a desire to support involved fatherhood, eliminate gender roles, and support a caring masculinity.

Below we argue that—with the exception of LOM (which displays a caring masculinity)—the Czech men's organizations embrace a pre-modern type of masculinity, in which the family should be under the control of the father, so that the father should also get at least shared custody after divorces, even though fathers should not need to also share in the child-raising duties before a divorce.

3. Methodology

We conducted a qualitative thematic content analysis of Czech men's organizations active in the public debate on fatherhood and gender relations in 2025. We use it in the sense of identifying patterns in the text that combine to have some kind of meaning (Neuendorf, 2018). The idea is to see which basic themes emerge (Jaspal, 2020). In our case, for the conservative men's groups, the main themes were the traditional family, child custody, and anti-feminism, while for LOM the main themes were involved fatherhood, harmonization of work and family life, and opposition to violence toward women and children.

The analysis focused on materials published on organizational webpages, blogs, and Facebook discussion forums. We chose all the men's organizations that we could find that had been active in the previous decade and the current one. Our starting point was the groups mentioned in previous studies (Saxonberg, 2017; Fafejta, 2018), as well as searching the web pages (via Google) and searching newspaper articles (via the Newton database). Thus, we investigated all the known men's groups. In conducting our analysis, we searched for all the phrases dealing with caring, fatherhood, childcare, shared custody, divorce, family, and gender.

Our sample includes organizations and opinion platforms representing diverse ideological orientations. Only LOM and the Unie otců (Union of Fathers) were active. The other previously important men's advocacy groups, Aliance pro rodiče a děti (The Alliance for Parents and Children), Český svaz mužů (the Czech Union of Men), and Spravedlnost dětem (Justice for Children), were no longer active in 2025. In our analysis of the posts, we examined stridavka.cz and K213.cz, which serve as key online platforms for men's and fathers' rights activists, though neither is formally registered as an organization. Stridavka.cz provides a platform for its founder and prominent figure in the Czech fathers' rights movement, Aleš Hodina, while K213 features the views of Jiří Fiala, who established the site in 2004 as an advocacy space related to his own custody dispute following divorce.

Among the actors analyzed, only LOM consistently promotes discourses aligned with "caring masculinities" and "involved fatherhood," whereas the remaining organizations predominantly articulate more traditional, conservative, or anti-feminist positions. There is another organization focusing on the rights of fathers, called

PROUD, but this organization encompasses parenting rights of the LGBTQ+ community, so it is not solely a male organization. For this reason, we have not included them in the analysis.

Altogether, we originally identified over 100 texts, including Facebook posts, public statements, and discussion threads, selected for their relevance to the themes of fatherhood (*otec*, *otce*, *otců*, *otcem*) and shared custody (*střídavá péče*, *střídavé péče*, *střídavou péči*), published between 2010 and 2025. The online materials were identified both manually by the authors with the assistance of AI tools (ChatGPT-5.0) to enhance search efficiency (we searched for father/hood, shared custody, and we also looked specifically at Covid). We focused on original texts created for the online media, not reposted documents and articles. At the last stage, we have selected 27 texts for our analysis, which included both fatherhood and shared custody, focusing on personal experiences and on evaluative opinions and statements (e.g., in the case of webpage *Střídavka*, the sections "Your Experiences" (*Vaše zkušenosti*) and "Opinions and Commentaries" (*Úvahy a komentáře*). The data were coded thematically using an inductive approach to identify dominant narratives and ideological framings. The findings are presented primarily through thematic content analysis, which we found most suitable for capturing recurrent frames and value positions across organizations. Our main objective was to understand the diversity of interpretations of "involved fatherhood" within the online spaces maintained by these organizations and platforms.

Since we rely on publicly available online sources, no ethical issues arise concerning consent. Consent would be an issue if we had conducted interviews.

3.1. Limits of Our Study

Our analysis is based on publicly available online published documents on organizational websites and social media platforms rather than on original interview data. Consequently, the selection of analyzed texts is necessarily constrained. We do not claim that this online content reflects the full diversity of voices and opinions within the men's organizations; rather, it represents only those positions that are publicly communicated and curated by organizational gatekeepers who manage these platforms. Also, we look at the content mostly published in recent years and so we do not show all the possible narratives which appeared over decades since the organizations were founded; however, this was not our aim.

AI-assisted sampling helped to systematically identify and screen a large volume of online texts; nonetheless, it also constitutes a potential limitation. AI-based tools may privilege more visible, frequently referenced, or algorithmically salient content. Although the final selection and coding decisions were made by the research team, the initial AI-supported filtering may have shaped the boundaries of the dataset. Thematic analysis was considered an appropriate method for identifying the dominant themes resonating within the movement based on this type of material.

Combining online content analysis with in-depth interviews would strengthen the findings. We contacted the key representatives of the main organizations, but except for LOM, we were unable to secure interviews. A possible reason why many activists refused to participate could be because they know who we are and perceive us to be feminist researchers who do not sympathize with their views. This dynamic itself points to the polarized nature of the field and may be analytically relevant. Given this limited access, we decided to rely exclusively on data that was equally available for all the relevant actors to avoid excessive heterogeneity in data sources.

Finally, this study focuses on a single national context, so future research would benefit from cross-national comparisons to examine whether similar themes emerge in different national settings. However, we have compared our findings to similar studies from other countries to increase the validity of our findings.

4. Results

In recent decades, the conservative men's organizations paradoxically weakened as they lost their main agenda—shared custody—and with it, their means to express anger and frustration publicly. This shift began in 2010, when the Czech Constitutional Court supported alternating custody as a human right (ruling no. 1206/09). In 2014, it declared shared custody the preferred practice (Forejtová & Grygerová, 2016). Currently, new legislation from 2025 recognizes both parents as equal in their rights to care, so custody arrangements are based on mutual negotiation between parents and the child. With their primary objective—joint custody—achieved, the conservative men's organizations have either disbanded or shifted to a broader conservative agenda with a strong antifeminist stance, which we discuss below after first discussing the group that espouses a caring masculinity.

4.1. Caring Masculinity

Initially an informal self-help group for fathers, LOM has become a professional organization to support men's involvement in relationships with their sons and has never had shared custody as its agenda. Instead, they focus on broader male engagement in caregiving, often collaborating with pro-women and feminist organizations. It has actively tried to encourage involved fatherhood and a caring masculinity. It is the only men's organization in Czechia that has good relations with women's organizations and that actively cooperates with them. In fact, of its current 16 employees, 10 are women. It supports gender equality and, consequently, is the only men's organization that became a member of the Czech Government Council for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men. Examples of its cooperation with women's organizations include engaging in activities with the Gender Studies Center. They also joined the campaign Bílá stužka: Muži proti násilí na ženách a dětech ("The White Ribbon Campaign: Men Against Violence Against Women and Children"). In addition, they have worked on common projects with other mother and family organizations, such as the Mother Center Network (mateřská centra) and the Union of Family and Community Centers (Unie pro rodinu a komunitu). It is also part of international networks like MenEngage and Ressurssenter for Men (Saxonberg, 2017; see also: https://ilom.cz).

As part of their effort to promote involved fatherhood and a caring masculinity, they promote such issues as the harmonization of work and family, the presence of the father during childbirth, etc. They also organize vacations for fathers with their children, as it started out as an organization promoting the active engagement of fathers in care through common weekends and vacations with their children. Furthermore, they have also run campaigns supporting fathers' care for children (e.g., the Táta dneska frčí campaign). LOM supports involved fatherhood by encouraging fathers to share the parental leave time and promoting involvement in care since the prenatal age, as is obvious on the part of the LOM webpage, the title of which translates to "The Father Website" (https://tataweb.cz). For example, on their Facebook page, on May 31, 2023, they write: "We try to motivate employers to actively support fatherhood. In addition to a series of courses for active dads, we have also prepared a handbook, an outdoor workshop for fathers and children and a management course" (LOM, 2023).

4.2. Backlash of Pre-Modern Family Arrangements

Except for LOM, the men's organizations support conservative family values, despite their demand for joint custody, which might seem to be a feminist stance. Unie otců, stridavka.cz, and K213 emerged in Czechia as advocacy groups for fathers, centering their efforts on securing shared custody in the context of divorce and family disputes. The members of these organizations are often conservative and economically secure men who experienced divorce as a loss of social status—home, family identity, and fatherhood—leading to expressions of anger and grievance (Saxonberg, 2017). Their activism intensified in the 2000s, marked by public protests, petitions, hunger strikes, and blockades of public institutions, framing fathers as victims of biased legal and social systems. This confrontational approach reflected their defensive stance toward women's organizations and state institutions, situating them in what Jordan (2019) defines as "backlash" men's groups.

4.2.1. Support for Shared Custody

Men's participation in care is seen as the main aspect of caring masculinities. Post-divorce caregiving can foster caring masculinities under certain conditions—but the Czech case shows how it can also be mobilized within non-egalitarian frameworks. Shared custody (*střídavá péče*) is central to these groups' advocacy and is often framed as the ultimate solution for improving children's well-being after the divorce of parents. This can be seen by the fact that the most popular discussion forum is stridavka.cz, which can be translated to "shared custody.cz." The organization K213 described shared custody as "the only effective means of improving the situation of children" (Kluzák, 2011). Its founder, Jiří Fiala, started this platform in 2004 as an advocacy space for his own custody battle for his children after his divorce.

Unie otců repeatedly posts on its webpage claims that shared custody arrangements are in the best interest of children and that having both parents is their right. In the section titled "Information" (*Infomace*), calling for a protest in front of the Highest Court in Brno in October 2022, the petition states:

> Children have the right to both parents! We remind the victims of the judicial malice of custody courts and OSPOD [the Social and Legal Protection of Children Authority]. The actions and inactions of courts and authorities for social and legal protection of children often lead to serious disruption or destruction of the relationship between parent and child, tolerance of national and cross-border abductions, as well as harm to the health of children and parents resulting in death (suicides of minors and adults), self-harm… (Unie otců, 2022)

In the pre-modern model, fathers often received full custody of their children after divorce since the family, including the children, was seen as the father's property. Thus, even if the mother had been the main person responsible for raising the children, the father still got custody after a divorce. In the more recent situation in Czechia, in which the courts almost automatically gave full custody to the mothers, such a demand would be unrealistic even for the most radical men's activists, so shared custody represented a preferable alternative to no custody. Nonetheless, some activists indicate that fathers are actually better carers than mothers. For example, in a discussion on stridavka.cz, on May 28, 2010, at 10:44 pm, a user by the name of Doctor writes: "My daughter is fixated on me and cries repeatedly when her maternal grandmother picks her up. Her mother spends most of her time at work and does not spend enough time with her." Similarly, Petr, on September 6, 2010, at 19:55 pm, maintains that he is a better carer than his wife, whom he is leaving,

claiming that his wife turned her back on him and the children and only lives for herself. He adds he would like to demand full custody of the children, but he does not think it is possible to get it, given how the Czech legal system operates.

During the Covid pandemic, shared custody arrangements were limited due to quarantine measures. There were several posts discussing the practice of cross-border care arrangements, as well as articles focusing on children's vaccination and fathers' participation at birth on stridavka.cz. What is not addressed in these sources, however, is any shift in opinions regarding fathers' involvement during the pandemic (being victims of the system and mothers). However, in some cases, fathers claimed that the pandemic measures were used against them in their attempt to exercise their custody rights. A comment from April 29, 2020, reads: "The mother repeatedly refused to hand over the daughter to the father because of the pandemic. Police patrol changed nothing. Father found no support from the court either" (Kozelka, 2020).

In such cases, fathers were effectively cut off from any meaningful contact with their children. Even in situations where contact was maintained, it occurred under extremely restricted conditions, as exposed in a comment from February 4, 2021: "The entire visit…we spent most of the time in the car. I'd say fathers have it tough." Aleš Hodina argues that fathers lacked appropriate spaces to meet their children due to quarantine measures: "The situation is absolutely dreadful—even humiliating. The solution is not to look for storage rooms where they can meet for three hours, but to resolve the situation fundamentally" (Cigániková, 2021).

These firsthand accounts echo the findings of Szalma and Rékai (2020), who examined the decline in in-person contact between nonresident parents and children during the Covid-19 pandemic in Hungary. However, while their study notes that online contact partially substituted for physical proximity, the articles we have found did not discuss online meetings.

4.2.2. Support for Conservative Family Values

Shared custody reflects the principles of involved parenthood, emphasizing equal parental participation and reframing men's roles from distant breadwinners to active caregivers. However, in this case, their support for shared custody reflects a conservative value system. For example, Český svaz mužů (2007) lamented on its website that "the traditional family" was under "attack" and protested against the alleged "destruction of traditional family values." K213 criticized supporters of "pseudo-intellectual feminist ideology" because of their (a) "denial of the social value of traditional women in the home" and (b) "rejection of the usual role of the father in the family" (Fiala, 2017). K213 also showed its support for conservative versions of Christianity and complained about the "dying Christian world" that "enabled feminism to arise" (Fiala, 2020a). Since they support the "traditional" family, they also oppose LGBT+ rights. In addition, Střídavka, Unie otců, and K213 have all participated in a protest against the gay Pride week (D.O.S.T., 2012).

Although support for traditional family values is not the main topic of recent posts, it is clear that the traditional model of a heterosexual partnership and family is viewed as the norm. In this context, numerous posts on stridavka.cz criticize the legal changes allowing same-sex couples to enjoy the same rights as heterosexual couples in terms of marriage. For instance, in the article "Catalyzed Marriage: Will the Constitutional Court Introduce Same-sex Marriage?" (*Katalyzované manželství: Zavede Ústavní soud stejnopohlavní manželství?*) the author argues:

> The fact that marriage, as a permanent mutual self-giving of a man and a woman, differs substantially from the cohabitation of same-sex persons…bringing children into the world and the need for their upbringing (among other things) justifies the demands for stability and exclusivity of the relationship. We call this interpersonal reality marriage; we could call it something else, and it would not change its existence. (Kříž, 2025)

Another example is the post "Some Children Lost the Right to Their Mother" (*Některé děti přišly o právo na mámu*; see Jochová, 2025), written by the ultra-conservative activist Jana Jochová, representative of the Aliance pro rodinu, who states that the adoption of the amendment on partnerships for same-sex couples "has, in essence, entirely allowed the adoption of children by homosexual couples," which is seen as violence against traditional family values.

The discourse around conservative Czech men's organizations reveals a paradoxical dynamic: While these groups embrace elements of "new masculinity" by advocating for shared custody and emphasizing men's active engagement in child-rearing, their rhetoric remains rooted in a conservative, hetero-normative framework. They support the preservation of the "traditional family," understood as a heterosexual union centered on gender-complementary parenting. Men's organizations (except for LOM) explicitly link fatherhood to defending traditional gender hierarchies, often framing feminist and LGBT+ rights as threats to familial stability and moral order. This suggests that their advocacy for shared custody is about reinforcing paternal authority within a conservative social order.

4.2.3. Anti-Feminism

Because of their support for conservative family values, these organizations are strongly anti-feminist. Even though demands for shared custody would logically fall in line with feminist demands for gender equality and eliminating gender roles, these activists are extremely critical and even hateful toward the feminist movement. Thus, many texts on K213.cz portray fathers as victims of an unjust system dominated by "feminist courts" and biased social services. In "Unwanted Testimonies Are the Most Truthful" (*Nechtěná svědectví jsou ta nejpravdivější*), an organization describing a custody battle concludes that:

> The Courts in Olomouc are notorious feminist strongholds. Almost exclusively female judges preside there, and they blatantly favor mothers….These female judges—in support of their unlawful custody practices—commission so-called "expert opinions" only from pre-selected "female experts," who then produce professionally worthless nonsense in support of maternal care. (Fiala, 2020b)

Similarly, on the website stridavka.cz, article entitled "Father Running Away" (*Otec na útěku*) talks about biased "feminist courts" and the criminalization of fathers merely for wanting to see their children (Jadlovský, 2025). These texts undeniably bring forward marginalized experiences of men in custody battles but do so through a highly adversarial and gender-polarized rhetoric. Not only do these men's activists oppose what they consider to be "feminism," they often display aggression toward women and a system that they claim women and feminists control. Thus, advocacy texts often gloss over these complexities, presenting alternating custody as an unquestioned good arrangement for children, which is opposed by both the system and the individual mothers. As a men's activist writes on stridavka.cz: "State gender discrimination against fathers is a systemic phenomenon" (Le Haaro, 2023). Rather than framing fatherhood as

collaborative caregiving, the discourse often casts it as a battleground for men resisting an oppressive, feminized system. This "warrior father" narrative offers one form of masculine reinvention but risks reinforcing adversarial gender binaries instead of promoting relational, co-parenting models.

Not only do they blame the allegedly feminist system for being against them, they also show hostility toward mothers. In "Child as Hostage of the System?" (*Dítě jako rukojmí systému?*), the author writes: "The children in these stories are certainly not hostages of the system, but of selfish mothers….Some mothers are willing to employ highly conflictual strategies to exclude fathers from their children's lives" (Hodina, 2025). This framing personalizes systemic issues and situates blame on individual mothers, presenting them as manipulative actors, while fathers are portrayed as powerless victims.

The content on K213.cz and stridavka.cz reproduces simplified, polarized narratives: Women are frequently depicted as "selfish" or "manipulative," while fathers are framed as helpless victims of a "feminist judiciary." The idea of new masculinities—masculine identities redefined through caregiving, emotional engagement, and gender equality—emerges only indirectly in these texts. Fathers are presented as proactive caregivers and defenders of their children's rights, an identity shift from the distant breadwinner to the engaged parent. Yet this redefinition is entangled with resentment and combative rhetoric. In terms of new masculinities, these texts advance the image of the engaged, caring father—but one forged in opposition, characterized by defensiveness and antagonism toward women and institutions. This undermines the transformative potential of new fatherhood by reinforcing the very gendered conflicts it seeks to transcend.

These websites present themselves as defenders of fathers' positions in family law and as critics of institutional bias in custody disputes. In the case of the conservative men's organizations, involved fatherhood has been limited to the period after divorce as an excuse for demanding shared custody. Since the activists claim to support the "traditional" family, they do not advocate for involved fatherhood *before* the divorce.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

In summary, Czech men's activists align well with the pre-industrial view of gender relations. The man should be in charge of the family, but he must be able to provide for the family. Male organizations, except for LOM, therefore, construct a polarized gender narrative: mothers appear as obstructive and emotionally manipulative, while fathers are positioned as righteous victims and warriors for justice. This framing advances a version of involved fatherhood defined through opposition to gender equality rather than relational care and shared care arrangements. Despite their shared ideological core, K213.cz and stridavka.cz differ in tone, authorship, and strategic focus. While both organizations criticize what they perceive as bias within the family court system, stridavka.cz engages more actively with broader intellectual and policy debates. It often re-publishes professional and expert opinions, including the then Czech Minister of Justice, Eva Decroix's article on post-separation judicial arrangements in France. K213.cz, by contrast, tends to avoid an engagement with the expert discourse, framing the issue instead as a moral struggle between fathers and an unjust institutional system.

Even though all the conservative men's organizations display a pre-modern masculinity, some differences emerge among them. Both K213.cz and Unie otců function primarily as personal advocacy platforms for their founders. The sites blend legal commentary, polemics, and autobiographical reflections, often adopting

a militant tone against the judiciary, social services, and feminist movements. Their content emphasizes direct confrontation with state institutions; their rhetorical style is aggressive, emotional, and appeals to the collective outrage and solidarity among wronged fathers.

In contrast, stridavka.cz presents itself as a broader discussion forum for fathers and sympathizers. Its discourse, while still highly critical of institutions, tends to be more discursive and argumentative, seeking legitimacy through references to legal norms, psychological expertise, and public debates. Aleš Hodina, the founder, frequently positions himself as an expert advocate rather than a personal victim, publishing serialized commentaries, book reviews, and polemical essays.

While the image of an "involved father" is present in all men's organizations in the Czech Republic, except for LOM, they are embedded in antagonistic masculinities, limiting the transformative potential of any kind of caring masculinity. Rather than framing fatherhood as collaborative caregiving, the discourse often casts custody cases as a battleground for men resisting an oppressive, feminized system. This "warrior father" narrative offers one form of masculine reinvention but risks reinforcing adversarial gender binaries instead of promoting relational, co-parenting models.

This article highlights the manner in which masculinities are reconfigured through care practices and fatherhood discourses. There is a growing literature on the advantages of involved fatherhood and caring masculinities. In the Czech case, only one men's organization, LOM, promotes this type of masculinity, while the other men's organizations display a pre-modern type of masculinity, in which the family (including the mother and children) is the man's property. Given this view, it is not contradictory for these organizations to fight for shared custody of their children during divorces, while still advocating a "traditional family," in which the man is the head of the household. Similar to Poland (Wojnicka, 2016), some men's rights activists have claimed that fathers are actually better than mothers in raising their children, while at the same time promoting the traditional family. Given the starting point, in which the courts used to almost automatically give custody to the mothers, it made more sense to fight for shared custody rather than full custody. This article shows that the demand for shared or joint custody does not automatically imply some kind of caring masculinity. As Wojnicka (2016) shows for the Polish case, the demand for custody or joint custody can be part of a conservative type of masculinity. By tracing the origins of this type of thought to pre-modern times, this article shows that it does not have to be a contradiction to want to care for children after a divorce and still not have a caring masculinity. Rather than displaying a hybrid masculinity (Eisen & Yamashita, 2019) that includes a caring masculinity, these conservative men want to go back to a system in which the men were the head of the household and, as the head, they have the right to their "property" even after a divorce.

We use "pre-modern masculinity" not to suggest a direct historical survival of preindustrial practices, but as an *ideal-typical logic of gender relations* characterized by paternal authority, family-as-property, and conditional responsibility. In contemporary contexts, this logic may coexist with modern legal forms and backlash politics. Nonetheless, the demand of the conservative men's organizations for joint custody coincides with the demands of feminist groups for shared parental leave and shared custody. So far, Czechia has made little progress in promoting shared parental leave, but policies have gradually made shared custody after divorce much more common, which still promotes some amount of caring masculinity even if it differs from the goals of the conservative men's organizations. If it becomes common for fathers to share custody of their children after divorce, then it can also make it clear that they are capable of sharing parental leave.

Consequently, even though Czechia has a conservative, explicitly genderized parental leave system, reforms in custody laws that normalize shared post-divorce parenting may gradually shift cultural values toward greater gender equality. Over time, such changes could make it easier to introduce degenderizing parental leave policies, including well-paid paternity leave and father quotas that would promote a caring masculinity and greatly increase the involvement of fathers in childcare.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank the editors of the thematic issue and the anonymous reviewers for their careful reading of the manuscript and for their insightful comments. Their feedback helped strengthen the theoretical framing, methodological clarity, and overall quality of the article.

Funding

Work on this publication was supported by the Cooperatio Program provided by Charles University, research area SOAS, implemented at the Faculty of Arts of Charles University. Publication of this article in open access was made possible through the institutional membership agreement between Södertörn University and Cogitatio Press.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

LLMs Disclosure

As noted in the method section, the online materials were identified both manually by the authors with the assistance of AI tools (ChatGPT-5.0) to enhance search efficiency.

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