

# CONSTRUCTIONS OF PARENTHOOD IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC: MATERNAL CARE AND PATERNAL HELP

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## INTRODUCTION

●Czech society underwent huge changes during last two decades in relation with politic and economic transitions

## CONSIDERING PARENTHOOD:

### COMMUNIST ERA

- Parenthood was a norm (only about 5% of women remained childless)
- Women gave birth early, usually had two children in quick succession
- In 1989 mean age of primiparas: 22 years
- In 1970s women employment become a norm (mothers including)
- Communist system highly supported employment
  - Well established network of child care facilities
  - Mothers did not face discrimination at the labour market
  - Parenthood did not jeopardize career

### POSTCOMMUNIST TRANSITION

- Parenthood was postponed to higher age, it has become a matter of choice
- In 2011 mean age of primiparas: 27.8 (and 31.3 for first fathers in 2008)
- Substantial rise of proportion out of marriage born children (from 9% in 1990 to 40% in 2010)
- Labour market become less stable, unemployment rate has risen significantly (from 0.8% in 1990 to 8.6% in 2011)
  - Women with small children have been discriminated at the labour market
  - Motherhood and career come into conflict
  - Most employers have not applied family friendly policy (combining work and family became harder)
  - Most public nurseries (for babies aged 0-3) were closed down

# Czech qualitative study

- First wave data collection – from October 2011 to April 2012
  - Research design: semi-structured unstandardized interviews according to German design
  - Plans for second wave data collection: when child is about one and half year old (summer 2013)
  - **RESEARCH SAMPLE**
    - **16 couples** of parents expecting their first child
    - 11 couples lived in marriage, 5 did not
    - **Region:** 10 couples from Prague or its suburbs, 5 from South Bohemian region, 1 from Pilsen (West Bohemia)
    - Completed **education** of 32 participants: 19 college, 7 secondary education with General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), 6 vocational secondary education without GCSE
    - Age of the informants ranged from 21 to 35, mean age for women 28.3, for men 29.2
- Research sample included **many informants with higher educational level and higher income** (20 informants reported to have higher than average monthly income)

# Distribution of parental roles between parents

- The **women** anticipated that **childcare and household chores would be predominantly their responsibility**. They expected their partners to alleviate them of some of those tasks after coming home from work.
- *We both wanted the baby and we both have to do what it takes and accept its downsides as well. Right? So I'm gonna try and be more tolerant when he wants to go to the mountains or go out with friends, he won't have to sit there with me every night, but it'll be, like, if you go tonight then you're babysitting tomorrow and I'm going out with my friends. Like, really, to achieve some kind of a balance. **It is actually quite unbalanced**, looking at my pregnancy now, when the man's life did not change at all and the woman's turned upside down, by 480 degrees. Like, all my hobbies had to be thrown away; I abandoned all that I had lived with because even the job had been quite important to me. It all collapsed and I have to learn to live with it, so I want him to learn to live with the fact that he has a baby and it brings consequences for him, too, that it's not like he plays with the baby when he has time and feels like it. (Edita, IT project manager)*

# Distribution of parental roles between parents

- Expectant **mothers** often **perceived their partner's help as essential** to their ability to maintain at least some hobbies and social contacts from the time before childbirth.
- Expectant **fathers** also **planned to „help“ their partners with childcare and housework**. It is significant, that hardly any father planned to care of the child in order to let their partners to work or make their career. They always argued that they want to help the partner so she could have a rest, relax or to do her hobbies.
- Nascent **fathers** **did not talk about caring very much**, it was more implicit than verbalized theme. Usually they expected that their partner will be present with them (at the same place) most of the time when they will care of their baby.

# Use of maternal and parental leave

- **Maternal leave** (for women)
  - Takes from 8 to 6 weeks before the anticipated birth date and ends at 6 months postpartum
  - Most of the expectant mothers intended not to work during that time period
- → followed by **Parental leave** (for women, for men since 2001)
  - Since it was the mothers who were planning to take up parental leave, they were also those setting its length

## Parental allowance

- **2 years** (6 couples) (the biggest amount of parental benefit €460/month)
- **3 years** (7 couples) (€305/month)
- **4 years** (1 couple) (€145/month)
- Women guard the domain of motherhood from men by insisting on taking the parental leave. If they admitted men to this domain, they would lose the role of primary caregivers around which many women build their identity and they felt their men would look after the child but not the household
- When the woman earned more money and wanted to take parental leave and stay at home with the child, both the man and the woman argued that “being at home with the child” rather belongs to the woman, it is more natural for her and she is better equipped, e.g. for breastfeeding. Thus, the woman’s a higher salary does not substantially increase the man’s odds of taking parental leave
- Everyday care was perceived as maternal, while occasional assistance and playtime as paternal

# Plans for reconciling mothers' family and work lives

- Most expectant mothers in the research sample were planning some **economic activity** during the maternity or parental leave. They differed in anticipated time of starting, namely between six weeks and two years after childbirth
- They also differed in the form of work – some anticipated working from home, others going to work outside home
- Most of the couples emphasized reconciliation between work and family and **distanced from “careerism”** at the expense of their maternal role and relationship with the child
- **More educated** and qualified **women** working for international employers with policies facilitating flexible or part-time jobs **were more likely to anticipate early return to part-time work**. Nevertheless, all of them were planning their return with regard to the priority of their child's interests
- Several women considered part-time jobs from two years after birth as a way of transitioning smoothly to full time
- The expectant mothers who decided to work during parental or maternal leave tried to **justify their intention to work**. They often stated they **did not want to “grow stupid”** and intended to continue their professional development in order to be more useful after parental leave and diminish the shock of returning to work. Of course, finances were also important

# Plans for reconciling fathers' family and work lives

Some expectant fathers intended to work **extra hours** to better provide for the family

- They considered childbirth a reason to spend more time at work in order to increase their earnings
  - „What's going to change? The baby means a higher financial burden so I'm going to try, as I have just finished college, I'm able to apply for higher positions, so I'm probably going to try and **get a higher position with higher salary**. This situation is probably going to force me to do it. Otherwise I probably wouldn't think about it.“ (Jaroslav, policeman)

Others wanted to **reduce their workload** in order to spend more time with the family

- The fathers also considered taking more home office days, approximately once a week
  - „Well, for at least the first two weeks or so, I practically won't be working at all. And then for another, like, month, I'd like to delegate it away and I'm already in the process of finding people and training them in order to assign my work to them. And actually, not only for the month now, around or after the childbirth, but even when the kid is six months, twelve months old, I still **don't intend to work for, like, 50, 60 hours a week**. Compared to the present time, **I think I'll be working much less. Ideally, I'd like to cut it down to 35 or 40 hours**. But maybe it's just a nice dream of mine.“ (Bruno, businessman, market research)

# Entrusting the child to the care of another person or institution

- Most of the couples counted primarily on the **mother** to look after the baby and on the father to assist her. The couples often expected the **father** to participate in everyday care such as changing the diapers
- Almost none of them were planning to have a **nanny** or other persons outside the family look after the baby. Those expectant parents who exceptionally considered getting assistance outside the family mentioned hiring a **housekeeper** (for example, for ironing). A few of them talked about getting a nanny for babysitting in exceptional cases. The expectant parents were rather distrustful of this way of babysitting, i.e. by an outside nanny. The informants' attitudes to babysitting by a third person were generally negative. A few male informants and even one woman strongly opposed letting a person from outside look after their child
- No one mentioned the reality of high **financial costs** of babysitting when arguing against it.
- Most of the expectant parents weren't planning to place their babies in **nurseries** but some of them were considering **private kindergartens** from the age of about two years. Some of the parents strictly opposed this form of care
  - „I would be strongly against institutions such as nurseries, I really would – this is perhaps the only thing in all those years where I would be in strong opposition because we chose to have a baby after a lot of thinking and the baby was planned. And this was one of the things I told Diana – “look, if you want to pursue your career for another five years, I'm fine with it, my daddy plans can wait, but I really desire that mommy stays with the kids at home for, like, three years.“ (Denis, business executive)
- All-day **kindergarten** attendance was planned for children aged two-and-a-half or rather three years
- Babysitting by **grandparents** was the most frequently mentioned way of ensuring proper non-parental childcare (barrier – high distance)

# Effects of social policy on the construction of parenthood in the Czech Republic

- **Effect of social policy** on constructions of motherhood and fatherhood is **obvious** (also evidenced by changes of parenthood brought about by political reversal in 1989)
- **Family policy** was and largely continues to be **gendered**
- **Gender equality** is far from being widely **accepted** both by the general population and the political elite
- Social policy supports **complementary model of parental roles** in early stages of parenthood – **mother-caregiver and father-breadwinner** - mother provides full time care for youngest children (up to three or four years) at home, while the father generates income
- **Slow development toward more equal parenting roles** and toward **higher participation of mothers at the labour market**. Many expectant mothers planned to work partially during parental leave (while caring of baby under three years of age)
- The **timing of crucial events** perceived by expecting parents **copies well current available institutes** such as parental leave and the absence of public child care facilities for children under three years