

**BRATISLAVA INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF LIBERAL ARTS**

*Fathers Negotiating a New Role (in Family and Beyond):  
Qualitative Analysis of New Forms of Fatherhood in Slovakia*

**Bachelor Thesis**

**Bratislava, 2016**

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**Bachelor Thesis**

Study Program: Liberal Arts

Field of Study: Political Science

University: Bratislava International School of Liberal Arts

Thesis Supervisor: Mgr. Petra Ezzeddine, Ph.D

Qualification: Bachelor of Science (abbr. "BSc.")

Submission date: February 22, 2016

Date of defence: June 10, 2016

**Bratislava, 2016**

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## **Declaration of Originality**

I hereby declare that this bachelor thesis is the work of my own and has not been published in part or in whole elsewhere. All used literature and other sources are attributed and cited in references.

Bratislava, February 21, 2016

Michaela Križáková,

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to express my gratitude to my thesis advisor Mgr. Petra Ezzeddine, Ph.D. for all her advice, information and patience.

My gratitude also goes to those who supported me while I was working on this bachelor thesis and did not let me give up on the whole enterprise.

***Fathers Negotiating a New Role (in Family and Beyond):  
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**Názov vysokej školy:** Bratislava International School of Liberal Arts

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**Vedúci komisie pre obhajoby:** doc. Samuel Abrahám, PhD

**Miesto:** Bratislava

**Rok:** 2016

**Rozsah práce:** 44 strán (14 576 slov)

**Stupeň odbornej kvalifikácie:** Bakalár (Bc.)

**Kľúčové pojmy:** otcovia, rodičovská dovolenka, rodová identita mužov (mužstvo)

### **Abstrakt**

V tejto práci sa budem snažiť priblížiť tému otcov na rodičovskej dovolenke a aké sú nové podoby otcovstva. Tak isto sa sa pozriem na to, ako táto forma mení rodovú identitu mužov (mužstvo) a gendrovú dynamiku rodiny.

Zaujímam sa bude špecifická situácia, v ktorej muži menia heteronormatívnu ideu o mužstve v tradičnej slovenskej spoločnosti. Ďalej sa pozriem ako tento spôsob mení rodovú dynamiku rodiny, aký vplyv má na rodovú identitu muža a aké sú praktiky a sociálna organizácia aktívneho otcovstva v starostlivosti o rodinu a domácnosť.

Metodológia, ktorú pre môj výskum použijem, bude prípadová štúdia, v ktorej urobím rozhovory so štyrmi otcami na rodičovskej dovolenke. Na základe ich príbehov o starostlivosti o deti a domácnosť sa pozriem na to, ako sa mení rodová dynamika mužov, ktorá je v rozpore s heteronormatívnou predstavou o mužstve.

Prepoklady môjho výskumu sú: zmena rodovej dynamiky mužstva v spoločnosti, jej dopad na rodinu a okolie ako aj postoj spoločnosti k tejto problematike.

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**Chair of Defence:** doc. Samuel Abrahám, PhD

**Place:** Bratislava

**Year:** 2016

**Length of the thesis:** 44 pages (14 576 words)

**Qualification Degree:** Bachelor of Science (abbr. "BSc.")

**Keywords:** fatherhood, masculinity, parental leave

### **Abstract**

This thesis examines the position of fathers on parental leave, who constitute a new position in the family and its immediate sphere. At the same time, it examines new forms and patterns of fatherhood and the transition to these in Slovakia.

I will take a particular interest in specific situations in which men alter the heteronormative conception of maleness in the conservative and traditional Slovak society. I will also look at how this issue changes the gender dynamics of the family and how big an influence it has on the gender identity of men (masculinity), the description of social organization in active fatherhood, and the taking care of the family and household.

For my research I will use a case-study methodology – a specific situation in which I will interview four men that decided to give up their work and stay at home with their children while their wives were working full-time. This situation is the opposite of the heteronormative ideal of masculinity. I will focus on the impact on the gender dynamic of men.

The expected implications of my research are: the change of social and gender roles (masculinity), its impact on the family and its environment, as well as the slow liberalization of society in the upbringing of kids and new form of family.

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## **Introduction**

Active fathering is a relatively unfamiliar term in Slovakia. Since mothers are primarily the ones who raise and take care of children, fathers in conservative Slovak society are considered to be breadwinners – those who work outside the household and earn enough money to ensure that the family has all it needs.

As the Industrial Revolution emerged, as well as the establishment and evolution of feminism, parental and professional roles started to change (e.g. married mothers started to work on a daily basis), and the whole picture of mother and father positions began to change. First of all, women entered the professional sphere and began to compete with men. “Instead of being full-time mothers, they embarked and focused on developing their careers” (Badinter, 1998, p. 73). Moreover they began to manage both the family and the professional spheres. Thus, they took on a double-shift day.

Since feminists started to fight for equal rights such as equal pay and conditions at work, they have gradually achieved equal treatment and remuneration. This fact contributed a lot to the changing of gender identity and its liberalization when it comes to gender characteristics and “duties”. Women became valued for the double shifts they were able to complete, from the viewpoint of fathers and society. On the other hand, fathers started to withdraw from the professional sphere and move towards the family they started to collaborate with their wives on sharing household responsibilities, which slowly transformed them into stay-at-home fathers who were fully responsible for taking care of both the children and the household.

Even though active fathering is not very common in Slovakia, the aforementioned trends are gradually changing the attitudes of the younger generation in which partners are willing to share as many responsibilities as possible. As mentioned above, women shifted from being professional caretakers to being working professionals and fathers willingly gave up their jobs or were financially obliged to stay at home because the women equalled or exceeded them in terms of their earning capacity. For the younger generation, where partners have changed traditional roles, this trend is spontaneous and natural.

In recent years, many women in my neighbourhood have decided to have babies and raise them while their husbands continued working, and espouse the traditional role of the father-as-breadwinner. This traditional, settled status quo is not surprising at all. The interesting thing is that in every sphere we can find at least one exception - I have witnessed one when it comes to changing parental roles and liberalizing view of such phenomena in traditional Slovak society. My former high school professor and her husband decided that, after six months of obligatory maternity leave they would switch, and thus the mother returned to work and the father became a stay-at-home dad. All of a sudden I became interested in why they decided to approach motherhood in this untraditional way, what motivated them, where they got to know about the possibilities and options, what were their reasons, how it worked for them (and separately for the mother and father), what were the opinions of their families and closest friends, colleagues, employers as well as their influence on others, and vice-versa.

In my bachelor thesis I will thus use terms such as effective fatherhood, stay-at-home fathers, change of gender identity (masculinity) and traditional family. I will use all of these terms in the research that I use in my case-study methodology. I will interview four fathers that represent examples of active fatherhood. I will analyze how the gender identity of men has changed, what motivated fathers to take parental leave and what were the internal and external factors of their decision-making. Ultimately I will compare all the interviews and try to find similarities and differences.

The anticipated assumptions of my research are the following: a change of gender roles (in masculinity), a shift of active fathering in Slovak society as an unfamiliar term until recently, and a progressive transition of parental roles in families, as well as the liberalization of motherhood and posing of new forms of fatherhood.

The aim of my research is to find out how new forms of fatherhood change and at the same time influence the gender dynamics of men (masculinity), what are the practices and social organization of active fatherhood. Last but not least I would like to take a look at a specific situation in which men challenge the heteronormative ideology of maleness within the dominant political discourse about the traditional family, which I

will also find out from interviews with such fathers (interviews with mothers will help to contextualize my research problem). With my research and findings I would like to reach and support the younger generation to practise new forms of fatherhood, change the old traditional view about family and gender roles, and ultimately highlight the equality of parents in raising their children.

## CHAPTER I

In Slovakia, which is a conservative country, all people are defined as either men or women. This division of sexes labels every person by certain biological as well as social features.

From a sociological and biological point of view, every person has certain characteristics that identify him/her among other people within society. There are three main features which identify every person: sex, gender and gender identity. Although they are all different but related, they all are aspects of our sexuality and characterize every person as an individual.

Gender refers to societal expectations – how an individual should think, act and behave. It involves the social as well as the biological status of a person to be a man or a woman (Valdrová, 2015).

Gender identity is the social and legal status of each person. This term represents the feelings and expression of an individual that is not determined by their sex organs but instead by their beliefs, behaviours, characteristics as well as by how the person feels and expresses their gender and gender role in terms of behavior and personal appearance. An individual experiences a feeling of gender identity at the age of two or three years (Valdrová, 2015).

By biological features, which include one's whole genetic makeup, hormones and body parts that include sex and reproductive organs we can define every person to be either male or female.

Since in Slovakia there are only two legal sexes that divide people according to different social and biological features – male and female, both include traditional traits that also describe stereotypical perceptions of each gender. Masculinity then defines a male's nature and describes the usual ways of behavior that the culture associates with being a man (Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, 2005). The most frequent words that describe masculinity and thus give us a

view of whom to consider a man are: independent, competitive, strong, rebellious, non-emotional and self-confident. Femininity, on the other hand, is described by words such words as submissive, emotional, caring, soft and tender (Brewer, 2015). Even though our modern culture teaches us – every man and woman – to have opposite traits to each other, the truth is that men and women are more alike than different. The more our culture proceeds, liberalizes and changes, the more people express feminine and masculine traits equally which in other words means that no masculine or feminine traits dominate. Such a view is defined by the term androgyny.

As mentioned above, even as our culture changes and liberalizes, gender stereotypes persist and inaccurately generalize each gender role. Stereotypes in other words are widely negative judgments and assumptions applied to a person or a group of people. These are usually considered to be norms in society, and are expected from men and women on a general scale. When it comes to gender, stereotypes can cause unfair treatment and inequality of persons, which is called sexism.

## CHAPTER II

### **The socio-historical context of parenting**

The closest period to our era in which the patriarchal family was determined by two typical gender roles is the period before communism. Men were expected to enter the public sphere, which was basically the world of policy and public affairs. They were those who worked outside the house, and secured the family financially – they were considered to be the only breadwinners. Women, on the other hand, were supposed to take care of the children as well as of the household, and they were not supposed to work or to be involved in politics at all. They were destined to stay only in the private sphere.

History, religion and ethnicity are aspects that had a significant impact on gender roles. Those aspects influenced the norms, values and attitudes of people living within the Slovak region which, by the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, had been part of the multi-ethnic Hungarian Monarchy for almost 1,000 years.

The Slovak region was at that time a rural area composed mainly of strong patriarchal families and it was under the strong influence of Roman Catholicism, which was the dominant religion. Women were still discouraged from entering higher education or working outside the household. They were expected to be submissive to their husbands. The idea that women should be family-oriented, follow the demands of their men and ideally not have opinions was prevalent. It is important to mention the different attitude towards the education of women from religions other than Catholicism, such as Judaism or Lutheran Protestantism, which were not as widespread in our region. Girls from such religions were encouraged to finish secondary education or university by their families.

In 1918, Slovakia became part of Czechoslovakia. During the inter-war period, Czechoslovak women had more open opportunities and were allowed to join political movements legally since their equal political status was recognized in 1919.

In the socialist period (1948-1989) the political equality of men and women was proclaimed in the constitution. Women were required to enter and actively contribute to the labour market. Thus, unequal working conditions that handicapped women compared to men emerged. Women became a source of cheap labour for successive 5-year plans and industrialization. Nevertheless women in the socialist period were an active and visible force in the public sphere, and they had full responsibility for the family and taking care of the household, a role which remained unchanged. In effect, women were forced to work two shifts a day. The first shift was at work, and the second shift was at home: shopping, cooking, taking care of children and of the household. All tasks fell upon the woman's shoulders. Since women had jobs secured by the state, the rise in their education and social rights was a positive side of their integration into the labour market. The policy of socialist Czechoslovakia guaranteed certain points that played a crucial role in "creating" independent women: every woman had a secured job, every mother had a guaranteed job after returning to work from maternity leave and was entitled to significant social benefits for her as well as for her children. Ultimately, more women in Czechoslovakia completed higher education during the communist era, compared to their counterparts in Western Europe.

When we look at the history of post-socialist Slovakia and Central and Eastern Europe, we can see that women did not have to fight for their rights because they had them guaranteed during communism. Even women's mind-sets were influenced by communist ideology. They were formed from early childhood, meaning that they were organized into unions or pioneer units, and later into women's associations. This formation from childhood is responsible for the fact that socialist women were able to handle both the private and the professional spheres of their lives. At the time that feminism arrived in Central and Eastern Europe to enlighten women in their personal development (education, career) besides typical women's "tasks" – taking care of children and of the household – women here did not understand their message, since they had been capable of handling both – a career and a private life – for a long period of time. Our women did not view taking care of the household as work, but instead as pleasurable relaxation after a hard day at work. Caring about the household was at that time a substitute for having hobbies like those pursued by present-day women. This fact was for feminists a new "way of life" and thus their sympathies did not meet. As

mentioned above, socialist women had guaranteed professional advantages (thanks to the communist regime dominating at that time) and political rights for which they did not have to fight.

After the fall of communism, the position of women in the capitalist free market changed rapidly. During the pre-1989 period, employment policies for women were dictated by “the economic and political needs of the totalitarians state” (Allen, 2008, p. 138), but after the revolution all that changed. The new regime did not secure jobs for people as the previous regime had: “state-owned enterprises were closed down or reorganized under private management” (ibid., p.138). Moreover, innovation using modern technology became part of how every good enterprise was run. The more technology advanced, the more people were replaced and physical force was no longer essential. Employers “fired worker who were no longer needed” (ibid., p. 138). Most importantly, “state-owned enterprises were closed down or reorganized under private management” (ibid, p. 138). Job discrimination occurred and employers started hiring predominantly men, which led to the fact that, “in the Slovak Republic only 29 per cent of the vacancies listed by government employment agencies in 1991 were for women.” (ibid., p. 140).

Despite privatization and the reduction in job vacancies, women became able to run their own businesses. This opportunity opened up a new world for women with entrepreneurial skills. “Women obtain status, experience, skills in their jobs, they find financial independence, many of them fulfil themselves in and identify with their work” (ibid., p. 142). By such means, women started achieving men’s positions and status in the market, which led to the fact that many women decided to work on their careers instead of starting families. This gradual process (by which some women started to earn more than men) caused a reversion in the domestic role of breadwinner. Because of this (i.e. professional career and income) women started to switch with men for parental leave and thus the gender role and dynamics of the family have been modified. All of a sudden, women do not devote themselves predominantly to the domestic sphere, but are able to develop a professional career (ibid., p. 141).

Thanks to the state established after 1989 and the changes consequent thereon, professional opportunities arose for both women and men. Thus their private lives



were affected by professional development. The consequences of such changes led to changes in both gender roles. Women started to focus on their careers, earn more money, and be valued equally compared to men, and thus began to step aside from the family sphere and become modern 20<sup>th</sup>-century women. Women became more independent in the social, political and economic spheres.

## CHAPTER III

Despite the fact that in most societies the patriarchal alignment of the family still prevails, scientists have decided to study the importance of the role of the father in the early stages of childhood, and how this influences children's development.

“The world was radically changed by the social, economic and technical changes of the 20th century and, with those changes, came a basic change in the structure and function of the family – with a consequent shift in the authority of the father. His influence was increasingly seen as minor, even negligible, and his importance was defined by how well he provided for the family” (Oliker, 2011).

In patriarchal families, father is considered to be the breadwinner and the head of the family – who financially supports it. The mother usually takes care of the babies and the household. This difference in gender roles has been changing since women started to participate in the labor market, professional opportunities arose and the choice of whether to have children and how to bring them up passed to the women.

Lots of successful women could not stay on maternity leave for a long period of time because they would lose their positions at work. Thus they were forced to find a substitute for taking care of their babies. If it was possible (depending on the country and the possibilities there), fathers started to switch with mothers on parental leave and in taking full-time care of babies.

For my research I have decided to refer to a manual called *The Importance of Fathers in the Healthy Development of Children*, written by Jeffrey Rosenberg and W. Bradford Wilcox. The manual “lays out the connection between fathers and child outcomes, including cognitive ability, educational achievement, psychological well-being, and social behavior”. It also talks about the fact that “fathers bring positive benefits to their children that no other person is as likely to bring” (Rosenberg, 2006, p. 11).

It does not look at a baby's development and later behaviour only from a sociological point of view, but from a psychological one. I think that these are two major factors that influence one's attitude to oneself and others.

A father who not only participates in a baby's mechanical upbringing but also interacts with them emotionally can be said to engage in effective fathering (Rosenberg, 2006, p. 11). At the same time, he nurtures the children and disciplines them appropriately. He shows them how to interact with the outside world and provides them with guidance. While doing so, he is protective and provides them with help in exploring the unknown. He serves as a role model to them. Above all these points that define effective fathering is the relationship between the father and the mother that the children see. If the relationship between the mother and the father is good, then the father is more likely to be involved in raising children in a way which is psychologically and emotionally healthy for them. If the mother feels acknowledged and respected by the children's father, she is likely to be a better mother, and vice versa. This fact makes them responsible and more confident with infants.

Fathers, according to the studies, play a significant role in the cognitive, linguistic and behavioral areas of children's lives, as well as in their well-being and general health. Research also shows that children who have spent enough time with their father during childhood are academically ready, have higher IQs, are patient and can handle the stress and frustrations associated with schooling easier than children who have spent less time with fathers (Rosenberg, 2006, p. 12). Moreover, the presence of a father during a child's development is responsible for the emotional security of a baby – their confidence in exploring their surroundings and having better social connections. Since mothers stress nurturing, fathers promote orientation to the outside world, which leads to the independence of the baby, which thus exhibits self-control and shows marked pro-social behaviour.

Overall, having a positive male role-model helps both boys and girls to develop positive gender-role features. Girls who were "fathered" are likely to form positive opinions of men when they are older. They have stronger self-esteem and "during the college years, these daughters are more likely than poorly-fathered women to turn to

their boyfriends for emotional comfort and support and they are less likely to be 'talked into' having sex. As a consequence of having made wiser decisions in regard to sex and dating, these daughters generally have more satisfying, more long-lasting marriages. What is surprising is not that fathers have such an impact on their daughters' relationships with men, but that they generally have *more* impact than mothers do" (Newman, 2014).

Having a good relationship with their fathers helps girls/daughters understand people better in general, since they are shown more than one (maternal) approach to the issue. Thus, the formation of their opinions and views is freer and more open. They already have certain experience of contact with another gender and it is easier for them to establish social connections.

Boys/sons, when "fathered" since childhood, see how to communicate and behave towards women, children and people in general. They do not see fathers only in an authoritative way, but on the same level as mothers – that fathers are nurturing and loving people. They see their fathers from a different perspective and their views are not unidirectional.

Although there are positive factors from effective fathering, and fathers spending time with their children, secondary factors discredit them in many. Fathers who are involved actively in their children's lives still hit barriers, in most of the countries in the world, from the side of employers, the media and ultimately from their wives. Employers have not – in many countries – got used to the fact that fathers want to go on parental leave, since nurturing babies is regarded as the responsibility of women. It is not only that employers then have to figure out to substitute for fathers on leave from work but (and this is surprising in many cases) the general patriarchal views of the father are still pretty traditional. Fathers are considered to be breadwinners responsible for the financial security of the family, as well as being work and career-oriented. That is the reason why many unprejudiced people around such fathers are surprised in both negative and positive ways.

The media, too, advertises the picture of nurturing mothers, depicting only mothers at home with babies and taking care of the children. Most child equipment is adjusted

mainly to mothers – strollers (weight, height, easy manipulation), body straps for holding babies, pillows, etc. and do not fit fathers. Even in advertisements for diapers or baby milk, only women are shown with the babies, not fathers. This creates a socially constructed view of who should bring up children (Oliker, 2011).

The third factor that influences how much fathers are involved in the raising of children are their wives, who are typically also the mothers of their children. The fact is that the mother gives birth to the baby and feeds it, sacrifices her time for the sake of its development, and considers herself to be the most important person in its life. As mentioned above, if the partners have a good relationship, they share caring and attending to the baby and thus both have equal access to the baby's life, nurture and tutoring. Also in some cases, mothers feel that if the father were to be admitted to the full attendance of the child, they themselves would lose their exclusive position in their babies' lives – which we can call the “daddy instead of mommy syndrome.”

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **Maternity Leave**

According to the Labour Code of the Slovak Republic, when it comes to maternity and later parental leave, every woman who gives birth to a child has the right to stay at home and take care of it for 34 weeks. If a woman is a single parent she can demand up to 37 weeks and a woman who gives birth to two or more children can stay at home with them for 43 weeks in total. The law also allows a man to have 28 weeks of maternity leave. After finishing 34-43 weeks, depending on the situation of the woman, maternity leave changes to parental leave and one parent can stay at home with the baby up to the time when it is three years old (Law no. 311/2001 Coll. § 166).

Maternity and parental leave are paid in Slovakia. A woman can request the termination of maternity leave six weeks after giving birth and return to work. At the same time, a man (one month before he proposes to commence parental leave he must submit to his employer a request to do so) can swap with the woman and stay with the child for the same period of time. The amount of money that every parent who has worked at least 270 days and paid sickness benefits before beginning maternity/parental leave is measured at 70 percent of their gross salary for the first eight months of maternity leave as of 1 January 2016, which is 5 percent higher compared to 2015 (Law No. 461/2003 Coll. § 53).

### **Parental Leave and Social Benefits**

After eight months, every parent who stays at home with a baby gets a fixed sum of €203.20 per month, which can be received up to the time when the baby is three years old (Law No. 571/2009). In addition to monthly maternity/parental salary, parents get a monthly financial contribution from the state amounting to €23.56 (Law No. 600/2003).

Maternity and then parental leave starts to be counted from the first day that a woman begins maternity leave. So maternity leave usually starts six weeks before the estimated day of birth. In some cases, such as when a woman has complications during her pregnancy, she can request maternity leave to begin eight weeks before the estimated due date.

### **Maternity leave in Slovakia compared to other countries**

Conditions for both maternity and parental leaves in Slovakia are among the best in the world.

Maternity leave in the USA is unpaid and only for 12 week in total. In other countries, fathers can take parental leave for two weeks only, and in Cameroon and Cote d'Ivoire for only ten days. In Thailand and Malaysia there is no parental leave at all. Australia is, by contrast, friendlier to parents and offers 52 weeks of parental leave, but unpaid. Japan is similar to Australia and offers unpaid parental leave of up to one year. South Korea differs from Japan in the fact that parental leave is paid but its length is the same – up to one year (Henley, 2013).

In Europe, countries have better conditions for mothers and fathers. In Greece, for example, a father has the right to stay with his baby for two days that are paid. In Italy, fathers can demand three months of paid parental leave. France offers two years and Spain three years of unpaid leave. Germany is even more enthusiastic when it comes to a parental leave, which is for a period of fourteen months with a salary calculated monthly at sixty-five percent of gross salary, similar to the Slovak Republic (Henley, 2013).

Slovakia's neighbour, the Czech Republic, is trying to pass a law granting ten days of paid parental leave for fathers, which can be taken during the first six weeks when the mother is on maternity leave (Domeova, 2016).

### **Slovakia can still get better**

Even though Slovakia offers very good options for maternal and parental leave, there are still certain defects in comparison with other countries that have better resources for maternal and paternal leave. The top three countries in terms of the conditions for fathers to participate in bringing up their children, as well as for gender equality, are Sweden, Norway and Iceland.

In Sweden, there is an extensive welfare system that promotes healthy work-life and makes it a gender-equal leader in the world. Parents have 480 days of paid parental leave, i.e. approximately sixteen months. The parent that stays at home and takes care of the baby gets 80 percent of their salary for 390 days during parental leave. The other 90 days are paid at a flat daily rate. Within those 480 days, 90 days (three months) are allocated to each parent. These three months cannot be transferred to the other parent.

In addition to parental leave, one partner can get 10 extra days of leave in connection with the birth and thus stay with the new-born baby (Chronhol, 2016).

In Norway, a so-called Father's quota (in Norwegian, Fadrekvote) plays an important role. This policy instrument was introduced on 1 April, 1993 by the then Labour Government. It reserves a set period of parental leave exclusively for fathers (paternity leave). It has been changed several times since 2005 and currently guarantees ten weeks for either the mother or the father.

After the birth of the baby, it is usual that the father gets two weeks of paid leave while staying with the baby and the mother at home. This is covered by the employer, and is not related to parental leave or the Father's quota (Chemin, 2011).

In the Slovak Republic, it is unusual for men to take parental leave, since our society is patriarchal and conservative. Despite this fact, some fathers have started to swap with their wives and stay at home to take care of their children.



## CHAPTER V

### Methodology

To understand how the role of active fathering in Slovakia has been changing recently, I used a qualitative research method – case studies (Silverman, 2004, p. 5). By using case studies, I decided to interview my sample since “the interview is an interpersonal drama with developing plot” (Silverman, 2004, p. 154), which allowed me to look deeper into my research problem, analyze each interview individually and finally compare all of them and arrive at specific outcomes.

I was working with a so-called purposive sample (Silverman, 2013, p. 149) composed of four men who have experienced taking parental leave while their wives worked full-time. It was not easy to find them. Since the phenomenon of “fathers on parental leave” is not common in Slovakia, I had to use all my connections and ask for them everywhere. Moreover, managing the meetings with them was difficult because they were from different cities and in many cases we had to postpone the arrangements we had made.

Each of the interviews lasted between forty minutes to over an hour, depending on how talkative the interviewee was, what he was willing to tell me about his personal life besides responding to my research questions, and what our relationship was like – for instance, depending on whether we were meeting for the first time or we had known each other for longer. After recording the interviews, I transcribed and encoded all of them according to themes I had designed, and analyzed each of them. Ultimately, I analyzed the interviews all together and tried to find common and varying features which made the cases unique, but at the same time connected in some important ways.\*.

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\* I am aware of the fact that different type of research sample would change my final data.

Since the interviews were anonymous (names are made-up) and each research participant agreed and consequently signed an informed consent form on this basis, in the analysis I changed their names and concealed the names of the cities they live in.

Although women were not active participants of my research sample I used their experiences and views for the contextualization of my research problem – so as to have opinions from both sides on the changing of parental roles, on parental leave, and on participation in the upbringing of a small child.

In analyzing each interview, I used a voice strategy for the research sample in order to better understand the problem and define each case according to the different aspects they were talking about. Furthermore I also used redacted English language, to maintain authenticity in translation from the Slovak language in which the narratives were told.

### **Interview 1**

The first informant is a 28 year old Jakub. He finished a bachelor's degree, lives in a city and worked in a marketing department for several years. His decision to take a paternity leave came when his son was 18 months old. The reason was his wife working in a high position accompanied by a successful career. Simply, she could not afford to take a maternity leave for three straight years. Moreover her salary was higher than his, even though they both earned more than the Slovak average.

“Living on my salary – even though it was above Slovak standards - our life would be more modest. We would not have the same living standard that we have now.”

The other important factor that played a huge role in the decision-making was that Jakub, even before his son was born, used to say publicly that he would love to take parental leave with his baby and believed that, “it will be, for sure, a pleasant time. I have always loved kids and have spent my time with them. I even remember babysitting some of my friends' kids.”

He admits now that he did not see all the responsibilities that come with paternity leave, excluding having to change diapers, bathing or feeding.

Despite these necessities Jakub summarizes: “I want to spend as much time as possible with my son right now because this is the time when he shows me love and I have his attention. When he is ten, he will have other interests and I am sure I will not be one of them. Ultimately this is a priceless and unrepeatably time and I hope it lasts as long as possible.”

Jakub also acknowledged that staying with the baby at home was easier for him. His son was already eighteen months old and used to eating other meals besides breast milk, which was easier in feeding. “I am actually on fake parental leave because all the hard work was on the shoulders of my wife – she taught our son to eat from a spoon or drink through straw”, he smiles. Jakub explains that he switched with his wife when their son already knew how to eat and talk, which simplified the process in understanding and functioning when they were alone. When I asked Jakub if it was hard for him to stay at home with his son and pay constant attention to the baby, he said he was already used to it.

“I used to wake up in the middle of the night and help my wife so she could sleep a little bit longer. However, this was not the only reason. Our son got fat because he used to overeat and wanted breast milk every time he scented his mother. It was also a practical decision.” When Jakub’s son was born he helped his wife taking care of the baby, so it was not an entirely “unknown world”.

What’s interesting about Jakub’s case is that he, as the only one of the four cases I studied, had the help of a nanny. She helped him take care of the baby when he needed to do some work for the agency he worked for. It was a couple of hours per week since he was still working on quarter load.

Paternity leave in Slovakia is a new phenomenon, uncommon among families. People’s reactions are predominantly positive rather than negative. The couple’s decision in this case was positively supported by their families. In many cases fathers on parental leave are given as an example to other men. Jakub recalls one of his

friends telling him: “You know, I talked to Alexandra and she said that you help her a lot and want to take parental leave.” On the other hand, this kind of praise often puts other men into a difficult position and when their wives mention Jakub as an positive example to emulate their husbands often tend to reply: “you should have married Jakub instead!” This statement makes Jakub angry because he considers such an attitude a negative one. Taking care of his baby comes naturally to him. Jakub admits that he cannot cook and has difficulties with turning on a washing machine. Alexandra has been taking care of the household. “When my wife came home from work and saw a mess – and I thought it was fine – she dealt with it, because she could have cleaned the whole apartment within an hour. It would take me half a day.”

In Jakub’s neighborhood he is the only father who has taken parental leave but as he says, “I see a lot of fathers playing with their babies at the playground, but I assume it is because during lunchtime they just need to help their wives.” Despite this fact, he encounters other mothers on maternal leave and spends some time with them. “Actually they all are our friends that we [Jakub and Alexandra] used to party with. Alexandra used to go for walks with them and now it is me. We all had babies in a short period of time, so now we have lots of people to meet with.”

Jakub’s “time-management is non-organized and randomly put together”. He admits that it takes him a long time to leave the house. Especially now when he has to think not only about himself but about his son, too. “We can get up early in the morning but because of all the circumstances we go for a walk around noon.” Although Jakub and his wife are used to go swimming with a baby or to a play-wise kindergarten, they switch in supervising. “Sometimes I take the baby and sometimes it is my wife’s turn,” he says.

At this point we arrived to the question of whether Jakub has time for his hobbies. He plays two or three times a month in a club as a DJ. He does not get invited that much to go out for a pint with his friends because they often think: “You are on parental leave so we thought...” or “we went just yesterday.” Jakub says that he feels that his friends automatically assume that if he is on paternal leave he does not have any spare time. “I do not know if they do it on purpose...” He admits that “the last time we went out together was on my bachelor party which was a year ago.”

At the end of our interview I asked him what the advantages of taking a paternity leave were. According to Jakub those advantages are not visible on the baby's behaviour yet, but cheerfully adds that he is responsible for his son starting to speak early – “I think that it is all because of me.”

As I mentioned above, being a father on paternity leave is not that common in Slovakia so I asked Jakub if he has ever thought of writing a blog and sharing pleasant and funny and any other adventures of staying at home with a baby. He said that he played with the idea for a little while. He even created an account but ultimately did not post any articles because he realized that it would not be funny stories but rather a socio – political criticism. Mostly about the difficulties that mothers have to deal with on daily basis such as unadjusted public transportation or cabs without baby car seats and many other little things that people without a baby do not even notice.

Jakub also confesses that “now I understand and am able to judge accordingly behavior of parents with a screaming baby in restaurant, coffee houses or anywhere else. My first thought used to be that parents were unable to watch and raise a baby. What I understand now is that probably that baby does not feel comfortable in that sweater, he is hot, he does not want to walk anymore or he wants to be hold and carried, he is hungry or for any thousand other reasons. Now I can see that ninety-nine per cent why babies are crying is not parent's fault.” He apologizes for not being thoughtful some time ago, but now he understands and does not judge other parents.

To sum up the interview with Jakub. It was a friendly conversation in which he discussed a lot of stories, which helped better describe his experiences and feelings about being on a paternity leave. Since Jakub has had positive relationships towards children and enjoyed time with his son, we can typology him as a father – adventurer. Also he was the youngest among all research participants and considered being a father prior to his career and argued that “I want to be with him now, when he is small and I will work on my career later” and compared himself to his colleagues: “they had babies when they were older and worked on their careers so when they are forty they do not have to work. But ultimately when they achieved it all, their kids were already around fifteen years old and did not want to spend time with them because of their

hobbies.” Despite the fact that we met once and did not know each other, he discussed openly about being on paternity leave and I did not have to ask questions because his narrative was fluent and sequential.

## **Interview 2**

The Second interviewee who opened up his private life and family sphere is Alex, 32 years old professor at a secondary grammar school in a city. He switched with his wife on parental leave when his son was six months old. Since that time Alex has been on parental leave and at the beginning of our conversation he said that “this project was created and ready before the baby was born.” The reason why Alex and his wife Lea made this decision was financial. Lea works as a representative of a foreign publishing house. Thus her monthly salary is higher than Alex’s. The other factor that played an important role in their decision-making is that Alex, being a professor, needed some time off work, students, and stress. All this made Alex and Lea to come up with the best scenario that met the needs of both of them.

When Alex’s baby was born, he participated in daily caring from the very beginning. Lea had had to undergo a C-section and could not initially strain around the baby too much. Alex took two weeks off and spent them with his new family. They together took care of the baby and helped each other. Later, Alex taught at school for another two months, but spent his afternoons with the family. During the next two months Alex did not work because of the summer holidays and could enjoy the most beautiful moments of his life with his family. As he adds “we did everything together.”

Before going on parental leave Alex had to talk to his employer and discuss administration, the transfer of his class to another teacher, and the study plan (he taught a specific subject so school needed to find a suitable substitute). Overall, Alex was supported by his employer who tried to meet Alex’s demands. Besides that Alex was writing a textbook, which required time and further study. Basically Alex was working on the textbook during his paternity leave. Generally, he worked on it during the night when the baby was asleep.

As the baby grew older, Alex's daily regime was changing day by day according to his occupancy and needs. From the beginning "we all started our day together. We had breakfast then Lea went to work and I stayed with the baby at home." Since the baby slept more intensively at the beginning the daily regime was slower and Alex had more time for studying and writing. "The baby's sleep rhythm was more intense so it was all predominantly about sleeping and feeding, sleeping and feeding." When I asked Alex if it was hard for him to get used to being alone with the baby he said "I had to make a to-do list with the basic routines, such as what and how much baby has to eat. Just in case. The only change when Lea went back to work was that I could not discuss things with her so I had to deal with them on my own. That was it."

When Lea started to work full-time she continued breast-feeding. She had half an hour to feed the baby legally. Lea's boss allowed her to move this pause to the end of her shift, so she could go home earlier. However, Alex was the one in charge of not only taking care of the baby but also of taking care of the household. He dealt with checks, shopping and basic clean-ups. "It is not Lea's turn to take care of baby when she comes home from work. We spend time together and share duties. The only thing that she does on a daily basis is that she cooks dinner for all of us because she wants to and at the same time it is relaxing for her. That is all." Moreover, Alex adds and emphasizes the fact that they both take care of the baby and do not make differences in responsibilities.

When Alex goes for a walk with the baby he does not really interact with other mothers. "They live through motherhood so intensively. They have studied everything into little details and they feel that being a mother is the only way of life for them. I cannot identify with such an attitude." Alex admits that he feels being negligent. "They always talk about baby's clothing, eating, how should they exercise with their babies, they talk about what one should buy for a baby, where and why. "Alex loves being a father and his attitude is moderate. He is not overwhelmed by it. "I do not feel that being a parent is the only duty I live for. It has never been like this for me. I have been couching, writing, having my hobbies and spending time with my friends which of course is not that often now." He has many other activities besides parenting which make him think about parenting—as he puts—it "rationally". Thus he cannot identify

with other mothers who permanently talk about “our teeth growing or we pooped today.”

Alex is used to getting positive compliments about the fact that he is on a paternity leave.” My colleagues did admire my decision and determination.” Also paediatrician and other doctors were surprised and glad seeing Alex as a father on paternity leave. The same positive reaction Alex and Lea received from their families. “Our parents were surprised by our decision but supported us and understood why we decided so. Moreover they could not help us with the baby because they are still employed so we were on our own and had to find the best possibility.” Despite the fact that Alex comes from conservative Catholic circles, he did not witness much negative judgement except one. “The guy was from Catholic circles same as I am. He told me that a man should build his career and work on it and that a woman is gifted differently...” To which Alex shook his head and said that he considers being a father as important role as building a successful career. Moreover he is a teacher and he feels that these two characters influence each other and that “education and upbringing go hand in hand. Now I can implement my profession, which I am paid for into upbringing my son.” And the whole argument with this guy finish with words “that is my duty.” Lea also mentioned her experience with negative reactions: “I was once told that I am step dame who prioritized career to taking care of my baby. Or even when we went to a family reunion couple of month ago and my son wanted to cuddle with me people started telling me: oh, little boy misses his mom, you see. But I do not feel like I am a bad mom or that I am neglecting my baby. It is just that I have also other responsibilities.”

Alex is satisfied with his decision that he took paternity leave. “It was awesome, I would do it again.” But he says that this experience is not for everybody. He would recommend it because he believes that this is unrepeatable acquaintance but on the other hand he thinks that not everybody is suitable for this role. It is all connected to work and character of an individual. “Not even every woman is identified with the role of a mother / being a parent. It all depends on personality and attitude toward kids.” Alex also confesses that staying at home with the baby was relaxing for him. He needed a break from work, stress and many people. “It was a pleasant change. I



took some time off and rested. Sure it was not that easy but comparing to working under such pressure and students at school it was a salutary change.”

Because Alex spent almost all of his time with the baby he believes that he better understands what baby wants and talks about. “I think that if I have not spent so much time with him I would not understand him that well. Even when he tries something new I see his delight and reactions.” At the same time he is amused that he spent significant period of time with his son.

Alex also created an account for his video-blog so he could share his experiences with the baby. “I did video but ultimately I did not post it. I realized that I do not want to make a show of it... It is one of the most beautiful and most important things in life - that you have your own baby – that you can spend time with him, try to understand him and thus, learn about yourself new things too. I was not sure if I want to share such an intimate sphere of my life with other people – whether in funny or serious way.” Alex explains that what he experienced with his son was then “authentic and was not staged for picture or a story.” It was only about the two of them and their shared time together. He does not even feel that being a father on paternity leave should be promoted in media and present fathers as heroes. “Fathers who have decided to be on parental leave have certain reasons why they decided to do so. I do not think that the topic [Father on Parental Leave] should be glorified and such fathers to be considered as stars. What I think, however, is that state should support fathers and create better conditions which are not ideal now. Maybe state should offer better social benefits and promote the whole idea.”

Alex experienced his staying on a parental leave for pragmatic reasons. Since his decision to switch with Lea on parental leave was a rational choice his whole attitude about taking care of the baby was not exaggerated. The fact that Alex is in his mid-thirties and had a successful professional background, having a baby was a pleasurable life experience. Positive factor that influenced decision-making is that Alex has had good relationships with children (students), was an out-going person and loved social interactions.

### **Interview 3**

My third respondent Dennis is an absolvent of Technical University, who works in IT enterprise, specifically in Human Resources (HR) department. He lives in a rural area but originally comes from a big city.

Dennis has two daughters – twins born in 2009. Before they were born he played with an idea of taking paternity leave. He said that it was only on a hypothetical level but he never considered it seriously. Despite considering the idea it was an unexpected outcome.

Since Dennis's wife Petra had a high-risk pregnancy “which is typical when a woman expects twins” she was exhausted a little bit more than women who were expecting one child. When girls were born in May, Petra was on a maternal and then parental leave up to time when they were eighteen months old. After that Dennis switched with his wife and stayed on a parental leave when girls reached thirty months of age.

Taking care of twins was psychologically and physically exhausting “let me be honest. Being at home with twins is psychically exhausting which led to a point where my wife was on the edge of a burnout syndrome. She could not handle it anymore because taking care of twins is difficult.” They demanded attention, diligence and she always had to watch them and Dennis saw that she was tired. “Because I tried it I understand it now. This was the main factor that made us change on paternity leave.”

Dennis worked for other enterprise before he entered parental leave. He was overwhelmed with the work because he had lots of responsibilities and was working under huge pressure. At the same time Dennis and Petra were building their house, which meant for Dennis also managing workers on the house-construction. Taking all these factors together, Dennis and Petra agreed that they will change roles on paternity leave. “It is too much for me at work, you are tired of girls so let's switch” Dennis described the final verdict of the decision. Economic factor did not play important role because up to the point, Dennis was the breadwinner, thus financially supported the family.

Dennis's every day with girls was organized and planned. "It was a regular twelve hours shift with tough time and task management." Dennis also admits that taking care of children is stereotypical and challenging.

Dennis started his day with girls every morning around 7:30 AM. "I made them breakfast – it used to be many variations of porridge. Then they played in the living room or watched some cartoons. During the time they were occupied I prepared lunch and I myself had breakfast. After that we went to the backyard and played or went to the park nearby, which was close to a kindergarten so sometimes girls played with older kids. Around 1:00 PM we came back, had lunch and then girls were supposed to go to sleep. This task was very challenging, trust me. Sometimes it took only fifteen minutes till they fell asleep and sometimes it took an hour and fifteen minutes. Making them go to sleep was exhausting, but when they finally did I had an hour or two to relax, read magazines, books or just watch TV. My wife used to come home around six o'clock. So I waited for her impatiently," Dennis admits. Occasionally, Dennis needed a little time off after a long day with the girls. "When she came home and I was very tired, I asked her to watch girls and I needed to spend some time alone." Dennis explains that it was not easy because he understood that even his wife was tired after tough day at work and naturally she also wanted to relax. Since he has experienced both working and full-time caretaking he could see through both roles. He did not dare to leave kids and housing responsibilities only upon wife's shoulders when she got back home. "From 7:30 till 8:00 was bathing time and around 8:30 girls used to go to sleep which also was not easy. They were happy to have their mom home and wanted to play all the time. They were restless."

Besides taking care of the girls, Dennis took care of the household. "Petra used to go shopping on her way home but cooking and keeping house in ambulant mode – that was on my shoulders. I was in charge of this," he smiles.

Reactions of family about the fact that Dennis stayed at home with the girls were positive. "Family was surprised and friends were shocked. They supported me and used to tell me how brave I was to stay at home with twins."

Dennis also said that his employer was shocked when Dennis sent a request for going on a paternity leave. “Employers do not expect such changes when it comes to men. My boss was shocked. Also others used to say that I should focus on my career.” Since it is not common in Slovakia and the traditional view prevails that men are the breadwinners, Dennis is more than happy that he decided to take some time off from work. “I think that in today’s society there are only ‘evening-fathers’ or even worse ‘weekend-daddies’. Mostly because they support family financially, but I think that life is not only about money. When it comes to your babies...when you spend as much time with them as possible it is a marvellous feeling. These bonds are different. Even trust, quality of relationships...everything is firmer.”

Dennis’s friends tried to convince him to write a blog about staying at home with the girls. He was given an example of the famous Czech stay-at-home father – Dominik Landsman (father on paternity leave in Czech Republic who became famous by writing blogs about his own experience in humorous way) in order to start working on his blog. “I thought it would be funny and actually it was an interesting idea. My friends were encouraging me, saying that my experience would be popular because I was looking after twins, which is nothing comparing to what Dominik was going through. But writing is not for me and also, I did not have time for this.”

Thanks to time that Dennis spent with the girls he could relax and focus on different things. “Number of emails and calls decreased from 50-60 to one or two a day. It was a wonderful feeling. I did not have to deal with any other things besides the babies. It was really worth it. I got what I wanted and my wife got what she needed...I would recommend this to every man who is thinking about taking paternity leave. Go for it!” Dennis realised that when a man goes on a parental leave, a gap in his professional career will occur, “but that is logical.”

Dennis was overall a pragmatic father. Fathering was for him very similar to work – used technical vocabulary such as time or task management, his daily routine was planned and tried to do his best to stay organized. Thanks to his lucrative job he was allowed to take advantage and go on a parental leave.

Couple of months ago Dennis' third child was born. I asked if he was also going switch with Petra this time and he said: "I would rather not. To be honest, after this one year I think I have had my fair share of it." He thinks that taking care of a baby requires a stereotype, reduction of social contact and socialization and ultimately it is physically exhausting. Moreover they went through taking care of twins so it is a bound to be easier for them this time.

#### **Interview 4**

The last case study is a unique case concerning a mother, who was offered a job abroad. Consequently, the whole family had to move abroad and the father had to take on parental responsibilities. Patrick, a theology graduate is now working in a non-governmental organization. However, before he decided to support his wife's career and become a stay-at-home dad with their daughter, he "decided to cumulate two rewarding things – professional development of my wife and my stay-at-home time with our daughter. "Since Patrick was forty-six years old and his professional background had already been built—excommunicated priest from Catholic circles, former principal of high school and now working in a non-governmental organization—being on a parental leave presented him with a new, delightful aspect on his life trajectory.

Before they moved abroad, Daniela spent 14 months on maternity and parental leave. Although they did not plan for Patrick to take time off from work, he says: "I agreed, that I will take care of the baby and stay on maternal leave." Since Patrick and Daniela moved abroad social surrounding, relationships and culture of the new country were all new and "unfamiliar" to them.

Patrick explains that he spent all day with his daughter. He cooked, played with her and used to go for walks to the nearest park. Daniela used to come home in the evening because her working day usually finished around 6:00 or 7:00 PM. At the park, Patrick used to meet with other parents and their babies but as he says "they were shy and reserved," which was caused by foreign environment and everyone speaking a different language.

For Patrick, staying at home with the baby was a radical change. “I used to work with people, meet students and these interactions were all intense. But all of a sudden it changed and it was only about the two of us – me and my daughter.” The only issue Patrick came across was breast-feeding. “Sometimes I used to call my wife so she would come home during lunch break and breast-feed our baby.”

Patrick points out that a baby requires a certain stereotype. It usually was about playing, reading books and going for walks. “It was a procedural existence.”

Patrick admits that besides taking care of the baby he was also in charge of the household. Daniela used to come home in the evening. “Shopping and household finances were all my responsibility. I took our daughter everywhere. She was either in the stroller or the car seat. I held her in my arms even while I was shaving my facial hair.”

The only thing that Patrick did not do was separating clothes before washing and ironing. “I do not know how to separate clothes the way it should be done and I did not iron them either. Since I burnt a blouse once, I have never ironed clothes again,” he smiles. Patrick points out that even baby apparatus is adjusted predominately for women. “Baby scarves and carries are not customized for men, so that was a disadvantage.” Besides this Patrick used to clean up, cook, pay bills and to communicate with bureau. “I took care of everything.”

When it comes to reactions of Patrick’s family and friends regarding his being on a parental leave he explains: “Family agreed and supported me. I was not the first who decided to stay at home with a baby. My brother in law did the same because of almost the same reason as me. So it was not a novelty in our family.” When Patrick told his friends that he will be on parental leave they were surprised. “My friends understood my decision and some of them even admired it.”

Other people did not share my determination. “They used to say that it will spoil my career, that if they were in my shoes they would not sacrifice and overall they expressed damnation.” Patrick met with opinions such as that a man should develop his professional career, financially support family and be a breadwinner, whereas a

woman should take care of children and the household. Those opinions were predominantly from religious circles. Despite Patrick's decision, people did not argue about his changing role thanks to his professional background and Patrick also adds: "they told me they would never do it, that they would not leave their jobs and would not follow their wives the way I did."

On the other hand, Patrick said that some women told him they would never trust their husbands with staying at home with children. "They could not imagine it. I was told their partners would not handle it." Other men were stunned and admired Patrick. "They used to say that they would not dare to stay at home with baby because they would not handle it and ultimately taking care of a child must be terrifically hard. Seeing wives who permanently cleaned up and nurtured babies was horrifying for them."

Patrick's experience of being on parental leave is unforgettable. "I think that my own experience of staying at home with the baby is very good. I would recommend it to everybody but I am not saying that everybody would handle it." He also admits that if he knew he was going on parental leave again, he would study more. "Probably I would read more books about child psychology."

Although Patrick was one of a few men who stayed at home with their baby, he does not think that he is hero. "It is normal. But I have to admit that it also depends on a personality. But I never divided things into 'those for women' and 'those for men'." He also adds that he can do anything but of course there are some things that are easier for both partners when done together. "Combing daughter's hair was hard for my rougher fingers. That's why my wife used to do it." But besides these little things, he does not have a problem to take care of any other task.

When it comes to blogging or recording any experiences while being on parental leave, Patrick is the one who shared some stories. "I wrote some blogs few times about some adventures in parks. Sometimes it was funny what my daughter said. But predominately I used to blog about socio-political issues."

Patrick also does not agree with the phenomenon that fathers on parental leave should be put on pedestal. “I do not consider myself as a pathfinder because I was on parental leave.” He also does not agree that children should spend time only with mothers because he believes that it is very important to form bonds between parents and children in the early stages of child’s development. That is the reason why father plays a crucial role in the development of a child as well as in creating relationships.

Patrick considers staying on parental leave as an enriching experience. His professional background and taking care of the baby and household was a pleasurable experience. He also strongly supported his wife in her professional path.

Patrick went through different dramatic turning points in his life such as excommunication from the Church, moving to foreign country and staying on a parental leave. Besides this he was not in touch with people on daily bases as he was used to. Most importantly, he supported his wife in career development. From my point of view, thanks to his open-minded attitude to life, I have a feeling from our interview that Patrick is a modest and virtuous man who does not let unfamiliar people into his private life, which was quite obvious from his narrative. Although, he told me about his experiences our conversation was professional and not that personal comparing to other research participants.

### **Interviews – analysis**

To create certain conclusions, which would answer my hypothesis, I am going to compare all interviews and find common and different features. By analyzing the interviews I will try to understand how the fathers are negotiating a new role in the family and beyond. I will focus on how this new form changes the dynamics of family and what factors played crucial role in decision-making about fathers switching on parental leaves with their wives. Moreover I will look at practices and social organization of active fathering in taking care of a family and household as well as what are the impacts of gender identity (masculinity).

After analyzing all four interviews separately, I have found many similarities and differences about being on a paternity leave. I have decided to divide each analysis



according to main themes I created. This will ultimately help me in finding similarities and differences in my four research samples. The main themes I have been focusing on are: description of my research sample, factors that influenced their decision-making, support and reaction of their family and friends, taking care of a household, occupation with hobbies and ultimately language used by the interviewees while telling their personal experience from their staying on parental leave.

My research participants were from twenty-eight to forty-six years old and live in big Slovak cities. They are graduates and have good professional positions that enabled them to take some time off and stay on a full-time parental leave.

### **Factors that influences switching on parental leave**

Three of four fathers entered parental leave after fourteen months of baby's age. In one case a father switched with his wife after six months of maternity leave (maternity leave is measured in eight months after that up to three years of child's age it is parental leave).

Factors that influenced their decision-making vary. In two out of four cases the fact that wives' salaries were higher had the highest influence in the decision-making. In other case unexpected turning point took place. The wife had a rough time staying at home with the twins, who demanded constant attention. To avoid having a burnout syndrome – from work and daily caretaking – partners decided to change in nurturing of babies.

In forth case the key factor was obtaining a foreign contract that required moving abroad. This job offered a development in professional career of the woman, which was ultimately supported by the husband who decided to go on parental leave. Surprisingly, two fathers admitted that they seriously considered the idea of staying at home with the baby even before the children were born. They started to talk about the idea openly even before they planned on having kids or their wives got pregnant. Both of them had positive relationships with children.

### **Daily routine**

All my informants acknowledged that children demand stereotype and thus, a daily routine was maintained. Although, daily care was steady, fathers used to recall daily tasks as not easy to complete. Schedule of duties referring to babies, according to fathers, was not easy to follow and hard to fulfil. This fact, acknowledged by all fathers, is understandable because babies like any other human beings are unpredictable when it comes to their needs and demands.

Besides taking care of babies, fathers were responsible for functioning of the household. Fathers were mostly in charge of big weekly shopping (despite small shopping on a way home from work done by their wives), paying the bills, cooking and cleaning up. However, some household works were left to the wives, such as separating clothes for washing or ironing. Overall, the fathers seemed to have been able to take care of both – children as well as the household – thus not excessively burdening their wives. This was proved by my research sample and has showed that men are not likely to struggle with multitasking, which changes traditional views of man as just breadwinners (one who financially support the family).

### **Lives besides parental leave**

Fathers also managed to enjoy their hobbies in their free time. However, they were naturally limited by children and housekeeping responsibilities. They continued meeting with friends, playing instruments and socializing. Basically they used to spend time in a similar manner as before going on parental leave. However, the father whose family moved abroad was the exception. In his case, socializing was more difficult due to new environment, culture and language.

Nevertheless, he spent time on his own – used to go jogging, swimming or reading books and magazines. Since men's attitude to nurturing was rational and fathers were not overwhelmed by being on parental leave, they were able to continue occupy with other things beside the babies.

## **Experiences**

First eight months of maternity leave mother/father gets seventy per cent of their monthly salary and for the rest of the time parental grant. Slovakia has very good opportunities for maternal and parental leave. Both of them are paid, whether mother or father of a child are at home and take care of him up to time when child is three years old. Of course we are still far behind Scandinavian countries, which offer better social benefits such as cutting taxes, financial contribution under certain conditions for a child, daddy's quota which guarantees a reserved time for fathers and their caring about babies. My research participants expressed their opinion when it comes to this issue. Almost all of them have stated the notion that the state should promote and offer benefits for fathers – even few days after a baby is born – so they can spend the first days with the family and help women to take care of the newborns.

In spite of increasing numbers of fathers taking a parental leave, they are still considered more of a rarity in the traditional, predominantly patriarchal Slovak society. This could explain both positive and negative reactions on their decisions, either from families, friends or the professional environment. All families supported my research participants. Some of their friends were surprised in a way that supported the fathers. Some friends, on the other hand, did know not what to expect and were curious about the outcomes.

Even some colleagues supported the fathers and their decision. “When I took my son for walk and we stopped at school, my colleagues did admire and supported my decision.” On the contrary as I mentioned above, Slovakia is a conservative country in which even the roles that are social constructed, such as the one of a father and a mother, take time to change. Three interviewees came from traditional Catholic circles where such a phenomenon – father on parental leave – is unique. All of them thus met with negative attitudes that they should be focusing on their professional careers and being the breadwinners, claiming that taking care of children a women's job because they are “gifted” and predetermined to do so.

### **Professional career**

Although all fathers had possibilities to take some time off from work, not every employer was delighted with the idea. Since maternal/parental leave is still considered to be a woman's domain, employers do not anticipate men requesting to go on parental leave. In some cases employers might not react appropriately. When submitting a request for going on a parental leave, one of the fathers recalls being lectured on gender roles by his employer, describing a man's role as a breadwinner providing for the family.

I divided my research participants into two groups. In group A, fathers have decided to be on a parental leave because of pragmatic reasons. First reason is that they wanted to bring up their babies and spend time with them. Second reason is that they have decided to focus on their career later, when babies are older and do not need so much an attention. Group B consisted of the two oldest research participants, whose professional careers were developed and their professional statuses were recognized on a broader scale. Thus nurturing babies was part of their life trajectory.

### **Not part of mommy gangs**

Extremely interesting thing about fathers on parental leave is that they do not spend their time with other mothers. Fathers do not feel comfortable in such an environment because "they always talk about baby's clothing, eating, how should they exercise with baby, they talk about what should they buy for baby, where to buy it and why. I do not feel that being a parent is the only duty I live for. It has never been like this for me. I have been tutoring students, writing, having my hobbies and spending time with my friends which of course is not that often now." The only people fathers met with were random parents on playgrounds and old friends who have babies and have known each other for a long time. "I call them 'mom-gangs', since I have been the only men among them. We have known each other for several years so our relationships are deeper than just spending time together because we have babies now."

## **Language**

Language that fathers used while describing their daily routines was mostly technical and they used professional terms such as: time-management, project baby, ask-management, service around baby and most importantly (label father leave is not rooted in Slovakia) they used to say maternal instead of parental leave.

Despite the fact that they were representative samples of fathers being on parental leave they somehow were not identified with their new role. They did not feel comfortable when other people tend to glorify their efforts for they do not feel extraordinary for staying at home with children. They all believe that staying on a parental leave is natural and obvious. Their argument: “It is my baby. I wanted to spend time with him. It is the unrepeatable experience which cannot be compensated with money.” They refuse to be put on pedestal and given as an example to other fathers even though some of their friends were inspired by their stories. Also, in one case, the couple was not first one in their broader family to decide that father would go on parental leave.

In spite of constantly being occupied by their children and household responsibilities, fathers were able to engage themselves in work and activities they enjoyed. Most of the research participants did not blog about their full-time daddy experience. However, one of them admits posting three articles, discussing parenting (experience). Moreover, the professor from my study compiled a textbook, while on parental leave and one of the participants engaged in professional DJ-ing and playing in a band. We could conclude that all our participants managed to maintain a healthy distance from their parenting and continued to enjoy their hobbies.

Implementation of changes in patriarchal and conservative society takes a long time. Stay-at-home fathers are still considered to be rarities and even heroes. However, interestingly enough, three out of four of the research samples came from traditional catholic families. The research participants stand against the stereotypical portrayal of man as a breadwinning and challenge the traditional views on masculinity in Slovakia.

Fathers who have decided to stay on parental leave are still considered as examples and are admired—though sometimes with mixed feelings—by other men. The most interesting fact that occurred in my research sample is that three out of four fathers were from traditional Catholic background. Since traditional view of man is conservative and the gender stereotype of a man as a breadwinner, strong and rational individual prevails heavily in our society, my research participants were confronted with such beliefs and thus, each in their unique way, attributed towards changing these normative notions. They refuse being put into a certain gender stereotype, what is more, they exercise change of masculinity in a field. They have not only lived it but also shared their experiences and opinions. Such attitudes not only have a positive influence on their surrounding, but also have the potential to gradually change the perception of male gender role – masculinity.

## **Conclusion**

In my bachelor thesis based on a qualitative research (case study), I analyzed how fathers negotiate new gender role in family and beyond. Moreover I looked at their personal experiences while staying on parental leave, how they identified with their new gender role and last but not least what language fathers used while describing their personal experience on parental leave.

First I looked at the socio-historical context of women and how they were involved into a labor market which is reason why they orientated on professional sphere and did not stay at home.

Second, there is not appropriate literature about fathering in Slovakia and Eastern and Central Europe because this theme has not been researched properly yet. Also I could not refer to foreign literature since conditions under which fathering has been researched elsewhere differ from Slovakia in both historical and sociological context.

For my research I decided to refer to a manual called *The Importance of Fathers in the Healthy Development of Children* written by Jeffrey Rosenberg and W. Bradford Wilcox. This manual looks at outcome of father's influence on child development from sociological and psychological points of view.

My research is based on personal experience of fathers who were involved in taking care of their children while staying on a parental leave. My research sample was composed from four participants. I interviewed fathers separately. Consequently I transcribed and analyzed each interview. In the end I compared all interviews to create a conclusion about how fathers negotiate their new gender roles.

Main outcome of my qualitative analysis is that fathers are graduates of universities, live in cities and have good professional background. Evidently their wives' careers are successful because they were chose to return back to work from various reasons. Factors that influenced decision-making about fathers being on parental leave vary –

economic, foreign contract offer, mental-exhaustion and planned experience of parental leave.

According to different experiences and reasons why fathers decided to stay on parental leave I made typology based on their social practices of fathering and parental strategies: father-adventurer, pragmatic father (rational choice), father-manager and judicious father.

Common feature of the research sample is that interviewed spouses have great relationship and support each other. This is the most important aspect because mothers are the ones who decide whether they share and entrust the nurturing of a baby to someone else. Based on my research sample partners got along well which is evident on change of the roles on parental leave. Moreover the quality of parents' relationship influence later child's mental and emotional health (Rosenberg, 2006, p. 11).

Furthermore, if father has a good relationship with child's mother, he positively influences child's behavior in treating its future partner in a similar fashion. In my analysis all fathers supported their wives. Obvious sign being the fact that they switched with them on parental leave and supported them in their professional career and personal development (foreign job offer, psychical-exhaustion) (Rosenberg, 2016, p. 19).

The most important factor that influence relationship between child and father is spending time together. This is an indicator of fatherly love towards children. All fathers from my research sample are thus representative role models because they have spent time with their children since their very childhood.

On the other hand, fathers who spend time with their children are better at caring. They understand better behavior of baby, pay more attention to him or are more sensitive towards him (Rosenberg, 2006, p. 20).



Fathers admitted experience: “I think that I understand what he is saying. Even when he experienced something new, I can see his reaction and predict his behavior” (Alex, 32).

My research participants were glad that they could stay at home with their babies. “I would do it again. It was a delightful time” (Dennis, 37). They are conscious about having a career gap but on the other hand they supported their wives and this new experience enriched their life trajectories. Moreover, they admitted that taking care of a baby is sort of a stereotype. They stayed managed to stay engaged with their hobbies.

Interesting fact was that fathers did not use to interact much with other mothers. They did not identify with their perception of the role of being (first and foremost) a parent. “They are doing nothing but talking about their babies-what should baby eat, wear or do. And they express themselves in plural. I do not identify with such attitude” (Alex, 32).

Despite the fact that fathers enjoyed staying on parental leave they had difficulties talking about their experience. Most of the fathers used expression maternity leave instead of parental leave. The possible reason why they did so is that the term parental leave is not rooted in Slovak society and father on parental leave is still a unique phenomenon. Moreover, the language that fathers used in their narratives was “technical” – connected to their previous “productive” life. This is important moment in realizing that they also, to a certain extent, approached their parental leave as being sort of a job.

Lastly, another outcome from my research is that friends and families supported spouses in their decisions about switching roles on parental leave. Reactions were predominantly positive rather than negative. This could definitely be seen as an indicator that fathers are successfully negotiating a new role in Slovak society, since even people from conservative Catholic circles have been themselves contributing in changing the stereotypical gender role of maleness and thus promoting the change of the family dynamics as a whole.

## Resumé

Téma mojej bakalárskej práce znie: Otcovia vyjednávajúci novú rolu (v rodine a okolí) Kvalitatívna analýza v získavaní významu nových podôb otcovstva. V práci som sa snažila priblížiť ako táto forma mení rodovú dynamiku rodiny ako aj rodovú identitu mužov (mužnosť). Zamerala som sa na praktiky a sociálnu organizáciu aktívneho otcovstva v starostlivosti o rodinu a domácnosť, a tak isto aj na to ako táto špecifická situácia nabúrava heteronormatívnu predstavu o mužstve.

Pred tým než som sa mohla pustiť do samotného skúmania problému, som sa pozrela na sociologicko-historický koncept ženy v našej spoločnosti – ako sa menilo jej postavenie nielen v súkromnej, ale aj verejnej sfére života, čo bolo, samozrejme, ovplyvnené aj štátnym zriadením (20. storočie).

Keďže na Slovensku ešte neprebehol žiaden výskum otcov na rodičovskej dovolenke, rovnako nie je dostupná žiadna literatúra blízka tejto téme, nebolo možné sa použiť a čerpať zo žiadnych z takýchto zdrojov. Zahraniční autori, ktorí sa venovali tematike o otcov na rodičovskej dovolenke, brali do úvahy iný historicko-kultúrny vývoj otcov aký prebehol na území Slovenska. Preto som sa rozhodla, že otcov, ktorí aktívne participujú na výchove dieťaťa, podrobím výskumu z hľadiska psychologicko-sociologického, presnejšie sa pokúsim zodpovedať otázku ich vplyvu na vývoj dieťaťa a ich roly v živote ich dieťaťa.

V práci som opísala aj dĺžku materskej a rodičovskej dovolenky na Slovensku spolu s mesačnými príspevkami. Tieto informácie sú prevzaté a odvodené z právnych noriem platných v Slovenskej republike . Napokon som porovnala priebeh materskej a rodičovskej dovolenky s inými krajinami na svete.

Metodológia, ktorú som pre môj výskumný problém použila, bola prípadová štúdia, v ktorej som robila rozhovory so štyrmi otcami na rodičovskej dovolenke. Každý z rozhovorov bol v rozpätí štyridsať až šesťdesiat minút. Následne som všetky rozhovory prepísala a okódovala podľa tém, ktoré som si zvolila a ktoré mi následne

pomohli v analýze jednotlivých rozhovorov. Napokon som všetky štyri analýzy rozhovorov porovnala v konečnej analýze. V tejto časti práce som porovnala ich spoločné, resp. odlišné znaky.

Moja výskumná vzorka sa skladala zo štyroch vysokoškolských vzdelaných mužov, ktorí pochádzali z veľkých krajských miest na Slovensku. Všetci mali dobré pracovné postavenie, ktoré im umožňovalo ísť na rodičovskú dovolenku.

Dôvody, prečo sa moji respondenti rozhodli ísť na rodičovskú dovolenku sa líšili: ekonomický faktor, t.j. partnerka mala vyšší príjem; psychické vyčerpanie v starostlivosti o dvojčatá; partnerke bol ponúknutý zahraničný kontrakt; v neposlednom rade, aj iniciatíva zo strany partnerov vystriedať partnerku na rodičovskej dovolenke.

Všetci muži popri výchove dieťaťa zvládali starostlivosť o domácnosť, aj naďalej sa venovali svojim koníčkom. Vo väčšine prípadov sa nestretávali s inými matkami, pretože sa nestotožňovali s prístupom matky k výchove dieťaťa a s prežívaním ich novej životnej roly.

Otcovia sa stretávali s prevažne pozitívnymi ohlasmi ako v rodinnom kruhu, tak aj na verejnosti. Avšak ani jeden z nich sa necíti byť nijako výnimočný z toho dôvodu, že sa rozhodli byť na rodičovskej dovolenke s ich dieťaťom aj oni. Tak isto sa nepovažujú za hrdinov a nemyslia si, že by sa táto rola mala v spoločnosti heroizovať. Podľa ich názoru, je pre nich normálne, že sa starali o svoje dieťa, čo pokladajú za príjemnú životnú skúsenosť.

Na základe jazyka, aký používali pri rozprávaní svojich skúseností, som zistila nasledovné: napriek tomu, že sa otcovia starali o svoje deti, často krát používali termín materská dovolenka na miesto rodičovskej, čo je znakom zachovania si autenticity, používali technický jazyk (time-management, servis). Celkovo k vyjednávaniu novej roly pristupovali triezvo a racionálne.

Otcov som typologizovala na základe ich prístupu k skúsenosti a to: otcovstvo ako racionálna voľba; otec-manažér; zážitkový otec; uvážlivý otec.

Na konci mojej práce som poukázala na prepojenie teoretickej časti s praxou, kde som na základe jednotlivých príkladov potvrdila, spôsob vplyvu vzťahu otca a matky na vývoj dieťaťa a jeho neskorší prístup k partnerovi. Ďalej fakt, že trávenie dlhšieho času otca s dieťaťom je ukazovateľom lásky a starostlivosti o dieťa, kde sa vytvára priestor, v ktorom sa otec stáva pre svoje dieťa vzorom.

Na základe mojej vzorky som zistila, že otcovia sú stotožnení s ich rolou, avšak na základe ich slovníka bolo dokázané, že si zachovávali autenticitu. Taktiež dvaja z mojich respondentov pochádzali s prísnych katolíckych kruhov, čo je významným ukazovateľom toho, že aj v konzervatívnych kruhoch sa mení rodová identita mužov a následne dynamika rodiny.

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