



RESEARCH ON FATHERS IN HUNGARY

CONFERENCE AND BOOK LAUNCH

ABSTRACT BOOKLET

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HUNGARIAN RESEARCH RESULTS ON FATHERS' SCHOOL-BASED INVOLVEMENT

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Keywords:

Hungarian fathers, school-based involvement, qualitative and quantitative results

Parental involvement has long been a subject of research in the international literature. One of its forms is school-based involvement, which includes communication with teachers, participation in formal and informal school programs, and, for example, parents' volunteer work within schools. Research has also shown that intensive parental involvement increases children's academic achievement and has several other positive effects, such as fostering awareness of the importance of learning. However, Hungarian research has rarely examined differences between paternal and maternal involvement, despite the international literature indicating that the involvement of both parents has a positive impact on children's development. In our qualitative and quantitative studies conducted over the past five years, we examined the forms of fathers' involvement in Hungary, the factors influencing such involvement, and its long-term effects, drawing on the models of Pleck and Epstein. Our results indicate that fathers are more inclined to participate in informal school programs, and that their involvement is influenced by their own paternal role models as well as by mothers' supportive attitudes. Based on our analyses, everyday maternal involvement and paternal value-transmitting involvement experienced during secondary school contribute in the long term to the academic success of students in higher education. Both forms of involvement included an item measuring academic socialization, namely discussions about the importance of learning. Overall, fathers' participation in school would increase if schools organized more informal programs that fathers would be willing to attend and through which they could also develop better relationships with teachers. Furthermore, greater societal acceptance of fathers' school involvement, along with increased maternal support and a reduction in mothers' gatekeeping role, could also contribute to higher levels of paternal participation.

HARD BIRTH: CHANGES IN THE FATHER'S ROLE

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Keywords:

fatherhood, parenting, childbirth, family and gender discourses

On the scale of paternal involvement, at one end we find the father whose role ends with procreation; at the other end the father who takes over the entire care and upbringing from the moment of birth. On this scale, there are densifications that can be grasped as types. In more populous societies, we can always find “extreme” cases – but it varies greatly which type of father is considered “normal”, exceptional, or even “deviant” in different societies. And what is considered dominant, group-specific, or marginal in a given society at a given time, what is considered traditional or a product of crisis, and so on, not only the participants in contemporary discourses, but also professional observers of posterity do not always agree.

In my presentation, I will outline the historical typology of father roles, and in this context, I will also look at the most important changing tendencies of modern Western societies, including Hungarian society (at least in the last one and a half to two centuries). In doing so, I will try to avoid the double trap of either simplifying the narrative to a shift along the traditional/modern dimension or making the presentation too mosaic. Finally, I will look at a spectacular element of the changes, to a certain extent, its symbol, namely, the phenomenon of paternal childbirth.

CARING ROMA FATHERS: THE ROLE OF CLASS AND RACISM IN DIFFERENT CONSTRUCTIONS OF FATHERHOOD

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Keywords:

caring masculinities, involved fatherhood; kinship and care; minority mobility; post-socialist Hungary; racialised fatherhood; roma fathers

Scholarship on fatherhood has increasingly emphasised men's practical and emotional involvement in childcare; yet, this research has largely focused on majority middle-class populations. Roma fathers in Hungary are often stereotyped from a deficit view, and their practices remain underexplored. This article draws on two qualitative projects: (1) long-term ethnographic fieldwork in a marginalised, lower-class Roma settlement in Northern Hungary; and (2) narrative life-history interviews with first-in-family graduate Roma fathers. Two ethnographic case studies – a working-class Roma fathers and a graduate Roma fathers – are presented as theoretical narratives. The working-class father enacts involved fatherhood through alternative forms of caring masculinities, in which physical protection, emotional expressiveness, pragmatic acts of provision (breadwinning), and kinship-based solidarity are the main modes of fatherly care under economically precarious conditions. In contrast, the graduate father mobilises cultural capital, institutional knowledge, and reflexive parenting repertoires, as well as the transmission of a recast Roma identity, even in non-residential contexts. The comparison shows that their practices are not dichotomous but form a continuum of involved fatherhood, shaped by classed resources, kinship ties, and the experience of racialisation. The paper contributes to international debates on involved fatherhood, caring masculinities, and racialised minority fatherhood beyond middle-class benchmarks.

FATHERS ON PARENTAL LEAVE IN HUNGARY

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Keywords:

involved fatherhood, parental leave, family policies, census data, gender norms

This presentation examines developments in involved and caring fatherhood in Hungary, using recent census data. The analysis draws on the conceptual frameworks of involved fatherhood and caring masculinities (Doucet, 2004; Hanlon, 2012), as well as prior research on caring fatherhood practices in Hungary (Takács, 2020; Sztáray-Drjenovszky, 2025).

Using a comparative analysis of the 2011 and 2022 Hungarian census databases, the study identifies fathers who took parental leave and explores the socio-demographic characteristics of this group. The longitudinal perspective enables tracing changes in fathers' uptake of parental leave over the past decade, with particular attention to the role of family policy reforms and broader institutional changes, such as the introduction of the GYED Extra package.

The findings show a clear increase in the number of fathers on parental leave, alongside the emergence of distinct paternal groups. One group of fathers appears to take parental leave primarily in response to policy incentives, aiming to maximise household income by combining benefits with continued labour market participation. At the same time, a smaller but growing group of fathers can be identified as providing full-time care for their children. These fathers can be interpreted as embodying a form of involved and caring fatherhood (Dermott, 2003). Overall, the results highlight how changes in family policy intersect with shifting norms of fatherhood, pointing to a gradual pluralisation of paternal roles in contemporary Hungarian society.

DETERMINANTS OF FATHERS' CHILDCARE INVOLVEMENT IN FAMILIES WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

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Keywords:

childcare tasks; work-family conflict; fathering; workload; paternal involvement

Despite changing social expectations regarding fatherhood, the division of childcare tasks in Hungary remains strongly gendered. This paper examines how fathers' employment conditions, subjective experiences of work-family balance, and attitudes toward fatherhood are associated with the level of paternal involvement in childcare in families with young children. The analysis draws on data from the third wave of the Cohort '18 – Growing Up In Hungary study conducted at the HCSO IQPER Hungarian Demographic Research Institute, based on responses from more than 1,700 fathers of 18-month-old children. Using linear regression models, we analyze the division of childcare tasks between parents on weekdays and weekends. The results indicate that childcare in Hungarian families with young children is still largely the responsibility of mothers, while fathers' overall involvement remains limited. Longer working hours and higher levels of perceived work-family conflict are associated with lower levels of paternal participation in childcare. In contrast, fathers' egalitarian attitudes toward parenting and their endorsement of a more involved, "new fathering" are linked to significantly higher levels of paternal involvement. This association is particularly pronounced on weekdays, when fathers face tighter time constraints and competing demands. These findings highlight the combined importance of structural constraints and attitudinal factors in shaping fathers' everyday childcare practices.

SOCIAL PATTERNS OF CONTACT INTENSITY BETWEEN CHILDREN AND NON-RESIDENT FATHERS

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Keywords:

divorce, non-resident parents, fatherhood, child development

A substantial body of sociological and psychological research has examined the effects of parental divorce on children's cognitive and mental development. At the same time, the literature increasingly emphasizes that these effects cannot be regarded as uniform or deterministic, as they are substantially shaped by the circumstances of the divorce, the relational dynamics between parents, and the forms and intensity of contact between non-resident parents and their children. The presentation examines the frequency and nature of contact between non-resident parents and their children on the basis of survey data, with particular attention to the social embeddedness of these patterns. The study aims to explore how often and in what forms non-resident parents maintain contact with their children, and how these contact practices are related to parents' socio-economic position. The analysis focuses on educational attainment, income position, as well as selected demographic and family characteristics. The empirical analysis draws on data from the KOHORSZ '18 longitudinal study, specifically the wave in which children born in 2018/2019 were surveyed at the age of three.

PARENTAL ROLES AFTER PARTNERSHIP DISSOLUTION

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Keyworlds:

parental custody, child–parent contact, child support, Hungary, qualitative data

In this presentation, I look at how parental custody, contact with children, and child support payments work in the everyday lives of separated parents in Hungary. As divorce and partnership breakups have become more common, more children grow up in families where parents live in different households. This raises important questions about how parental roles change after separation.

My research focuses on the factors that influence how separated parents, especially fathers, stay involved in their children's lives. I examine how contact arrangements are practiced in real life and what patterns can be seen in child support payments. The study is based on qualitative, semi-structured interviews, which provide insight into parents' personal experiences.

The results show that there are often differences between legal rules and everyday practice. Parental involvement is shaped not only by financial and institutional conditions, but also by the relationship between the parents and social expectations. The aim of this presentation is to offer an empirical overview of separated parenthood in Hungary and to contribute to discussions in family sociology and family policy.

FATHERS IN CHARGE STAY-AT-HOME FATHERS IN LIGHT OF A SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH

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Keywords:

stay-at-home fathers, caring fatherhood, parental roles

What does it mean to be a father in Hungary today? How is the role of fatherhood changing in a society where caregiving is traditionally associated with mothers, while more and more fathers are now playing an active, even primary role in raising their children?

Focusing on Hungarian fathers who stay at home with their children, the monograph offers a comprehensive account of their families' life situations, grounded in extensive theoretical and empirical research and embedded in the context of family policy and the broader social environment. Through interviews with fathers and data collection involving mothers, it provides a nuanced picture of the transformation of the fathers' role, new forms of division of labour within the family, and the challenges of balancing work and private life.

The volume thus fills a gap not only for sociologists and social researchers, but also for anyone interested in changing parental roles. A wider readership, including current and future parents, can gain a nuanced, multi-faceted understanding of a situation that is still relatively rare in contemporary Hungarian society presenting both challenges and opportunities.

INVOLVED FATHERHOOD IN 21ST CENTURY HUNGARY – WITH AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

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Keywords:

involved fathering practices, Hungary, structural constraints

This presentation explores the factors enabling and constraining Hungarian fathers' involvement in childcare, using Hanlon's framework of caring masculinities and Dermott's concept of intimate fathering. Drawing mainly on qualitative – but also the available quantitative – Hungarian research findings, it examines how work demands, work-life balance, economic calculations, quality of life concerns, childhood socialisation, and attitudes toward parental gender roles shape paternal engagement. Historical legacies of state socialism, which combined women's labour force participation with traditional domestic divisions, intersect with post-1989/90 economic transformations, re-traditionalization/re-familiarisation pressures, and Western gender equality discourses to produce complex and often contradictory fathering norms. Structural constraints such as low wages, gendered wage gaps, limited paternity leave and workplace inflexibility reinforce breadwinner roles, while younger, urban, and educated fathers show greater openness to involved fatherhood. The analysis uncovers a persistent gap between fathers' aspirations and practices, reflecting how tensions in cultural expectations, institutional structures and economic conditions shape contemporary fathering in present-day Hungary.

“NEW” FATHERHOOD IN CLERGY FAMILIES

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Keywords:

Protestant pastors, parental roles, childcare, division of tasks, involved fathers

In recent decades, there has been a clear trend of reinterpreting the role of fathers. In addition to the traditional role of breadwinner, the „new” norm of a caring father who is actively involved in his children’s lives has emerged as both an internal need and an external expectation. Our research question focuses on how and if this change is reflected in pastoral families. Religiosity generally increases acceptance of traditional family roles and division of labor, which aligns with the traditional image of the parish pastor and his family. However, research also supports the claim that intense religiosity can be associated with greater sensitivity and family-centeredness in men. Furthermore, pastors’ work inherently involves a caring role directed toward the congregation rather than the family. Our research, based on an analysis of semi-structured, in-depth interviews, examines how childcare tasks are organized in clergy families amid these conflicting influences. Specifically, we explore how tasks are divided between parents and whether a new model of fatherhood is emerging. If so, we examine how this model can be reconciled with the specific nature of pastoral work. As part of our ongoing research, we are analyzing twenty interviews with pastors who are raising children.

According to our preliminary findings, the image of the pastor as an emotionally distant decision-maker and authority figure is being replaced by one of emotional closeness and active involvement in the lives of children. While this is a widely expressed desire and norm, it is only partially realized among pastor fathers. Even among actively involved fathers, the primary caregiving responsibility remains with the mothers.

RESEARCH ON FATHERS IN HUNGARY

PROGRAMME OF THE CONFERENCE COMBINED WITH THE BOOK LAUNCH

9.00–9.30 REGISTRATION

9.30 AM WELCOME AND OPENING PRESENTATION

Opening address by **Dr. habil. Mózes Csoma**, Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at KRE
Csaba Dupcsik: HARD BIRTH: CHANGES IN THE FATHER'S ROLE

10.00–11.00 SECTION PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSION

Judit Takács: INVOLVED FATHERHOOD IN 21ST CENTURY HUNGARY – WITH AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Zsuzsanna Makay – Zsuzsanna Veroszta: DETERMINANTS OF FATHERS' CHILDCARE INVOLVEMENT IN FAMILIES WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

Zsolt Csák – Hajnalka Fényes: HUNGARIAN RESEARCH RESULTS ON FATHERS' SCHOOL-BASED INVOLVEMENT

Moderator: Éva Sztáray Kézdy

11.00–11.30 BREAK

11.30–13.00 SECTION PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSION

Judit Monostori: SOCIAL PATTERNS OF CONTACT INTENSITY BETWEEN CHILDREN AND NON-RESIDENT FATHERS

Ivett Szalma: PARENTAL ROLES AFTER PARTNERSHIP DISSOLUTION

Judit Durst: CARING ROMA FATHERS: THE ROLE OF CLASS AND RACISM IN DIFFERENT CONSTRUCTIONS OF FATHERHOOD

Emőke Török and Dániel Körösenyi: "NEW" FATHERHOOD IN CLERGY FAMILIES

Júlia Galántai: FATHERS ON PARENTAL LEAVE IN HUNGARY

Moderator: Zsófia Drjenovszky

13.00–14.00 BREAK

14.00–15.00 ROUND TABLE

Book launch for **Éva Sztáray Kézdy and Zsófia Drjenovszky's** „FATHERS IN CHARGE”

Participants: Fruzsina Albert, Zsófia Drjenovszky, Olga Tóth, Emőke Török, Éva Sztáray Kézdy

Discussion led by: Zsuzsanna Szvetelszky