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The Role of the Father in Childcare

Rola ojca w opiece nad dzieckiem

Streszczenie

Rola współczesnej rodziny w wychowaniu dziecka jest coraz mniejsza. Historyczna rola ojca bywała zmienna: w przeważającej większości ojcowie podejmowali decyzje w rodzinie oraz dostarczali jej środków do życia, natomiast kobiety pilnowały ogniska domowego i domowego ciepła. Emancypacja kobiet spowodowała ich niezadowolone z ustalonych ról i dała możliwość opuszczenia rodziny w zastępstwie wcześniejszego stawiania czoła problemom i poszukiwania rozwiązania. Dziś uzyskanie rozwodu jest często szybsze i prostsze niż uzyskanie innych oficjalnych dokumentów.

To dzieci płacą najwyższą cenę za tę pożałowania godną sytuację. Nawet jeśli dwoje ludzi nie może już żyć razem, dzieci mają prawo do dwóch rodziców. Jest to gwarantowane przez prawo, chociaż rzeczywistość bywa często odmienna. Na Słowacji dzieci najczęściej trafiają pod opiekę matki. Powodem tego jest społeczne przekonanie o tym, że matka potrafi opiekować się dzieckiem lepiej niż ojciec. Ojciec zaś jest tym, z którym dziecko spędza czas jedynie okazjonalnie.

Rodzice muszą zdać sobie sprawę, że w przypadku rozpadu związku zakończyli oni partnerstwo, ale nie zakończyli rodzicielstwa. Na szczęście liczba ojców, którzy zainteresowani są nie tylko w większym uczestniczeniu w opiece nad dzieckiem, ale także w utrzymywaniu kontaktów z nim, wzrasta. Spróbujemy zbadać czy sytuacja ta blokowana jest brakiem zainteresowania ojców, czy ich postawami społecznymi.

Słowa kluczowe: dzieci, ojciec, prawo, rodzice, rozwód, obowiązki, opieka, wychowanie.

Abstract

The role of the modern family in child rearing is diminishing. The historical role of the fathers is changing – they were the decision makers of the family and they were the main breadwinners as well. The women were homemakers. The emancipation of women has brought their dissatisfaction with their established family role. In the case of a family problem they suddenly could choose to leave the family rather than facing the issue and searching for a solution. Today, obtaining a divorce is often faster and simpler than obtaining many other official documents.

The children are those who pay the most for this regrettable situation. Even when the two people are not able to live together any more, the children have the right to have two parents. This is guaranteed by law; however, the real situation is frequently different. In Slovakia, children are usually put into the mother's care. The reason behind this is the societal view that the mother can take care of the child better than the father. The father is the one that the child spends time with only from time to time.

The parents need to realize that in the case of a relationship failure they have ended the partnership, but not the parenthood. Fortunately, there are an increasing number of fathers having not only an interest to participate more in the childcare, but also to maintain the contact with the child. We will try to examine what this situation stems from.

Keywords: Child. Father. Law/Rights. Parents. Divorce. Obligations. Care. Upbringing.

The topic of fatherhood and the role of the father resonates in society in approximately the last 30 years. The role of the father in education was considered as marginal up to the 1970s and at present the traditional division of roles dominates in the subconscious mind¹. Gender stereotypes were affected; that the role of the woman was related to housekeeping and bringing up the children, she was both babysitter and educational authority and the person primarily entitled to make teaching and child maintenance decisions. She is expected to provide all-day care and in the case of a small child to spend some period at maternity leave. The mother is also expected to accept this role with pleasure and that it will bring her satisfaction and define her identity. The role of the mother is, according to Vágnerová, socially highly valuable with considerable prestige, the role of women in households – complementary to role of mother, on the contrary, has very low prestige. Changing social conditions such as the growth of employment of mothers, demographic changes, the effects of different feministic and other movements, new social policy and specialized discoveries and that the impact of the father on child development brought the necessity of parental equality². According to McBride – Lutz they became the factors for change and the phe-

¹ I. Sobotková, *Psychologie rodiny*, 2. vyd., Wyd. Portál, Praha 2004, p. 224.

² M. Vágnerová, *Vývojová psychologie II. Dospělost a stáří*, Wyd. Karolinum, Praha 2007.

nomenon of the “new” father appears, who in comparison with the traditional father contributes significantly to the so-called female obligations of education and involvement in child care, the running of the household running and activities associated with it. There is a transition from traditional understanding/notion of the man as the breadwinner engaged in work to the so-called active and engaged father who is considered as being as capable and competent a keeper and educator as a woman³. “The term “new fatherhood” reflects the fact that the current generation of fathers is different from previous generations of men”⁴. Career doesn’t constitute the main purpose of life for them and they are subjectively more content and healthier physically and mentally if they are allowed to have closer contact with the child. They try to be emotionally and physically close to child and it provides them an enrichment and personal satisfaction.

At the same time the partner again shares the role of bread-winner⁵. The father was considered the one who provides for the family materially. His role is not clear in our culture. His rights and responsibilities are not clearly defined despite the fact that our legislation has enshrined equality between the parents. Based on the statistics relating to the entrustment of children after the break-up of the family in the care of one parent or both parents is not on an equal footing. In Slovak practice we agree with Maříková⁶ and Brannen, Moss⁷ that although officially the mother and the father are the equal partners in child care, there is still prevalent a stereotypical stagnation in the traditional division of parental roles in the world, as well as in the Czech Republic.

Acceptance of the man’s identity is often one of the hardest functions of an adult man just because the father is an ideal in bringing up a child and the representative of the male role. Traditionally he was seen as so-called “occasional authority/Sunday authority”⁸, while he makes felt a different style of parenting and many times he is more authoritative than a mother. His role does not emerge in isolation and in case of involved fathers, who are not the same as lone fathers, just complement the mother role. Despite the fact that his relationship to the child develops slowly and the prestige of this role is lesser, he is important for the expansion and the enrichment of mother’s role. He appeals to the child for its

³ B.A. McBride, M.M. Lutz, *Intervention. Changing the Nature and Extent of Father Involment*, [in:] M.E. Lamb (Ed.), *The Role of the Father in Child Development*, 4th Ed., Wyd. Hoboken, New Jersey 2004, p. 538.

⁴ H. Maříková, *Muž v rodině: Demokratizace sféry soukromé*, Wyd. Sociologický ústav AV ČR 1999, p. 19.

⁵ I. Šmidová, „Matkové”, [in:] P. Mareš, T. Potočný (Eds.), *Modernizace a česká rodina*, Wyd. Barrister & Principal, Brno 2003, pp. 157–175.

⁶ H. Maříková, *Proměna rolí muže a ženy v rodině*, [in:] E. Věšínová-Kalivodová – H. Maříková, *Společnost žen a mužů z aspektu gender*. Sborník studií., Wyd. Open Society Fund, Praha 1999.

⁷ J. Brannen, P. Moss, *Fathers in dual-earner households – through mothers’s eyes*, [in:] Ch. Lewis, M. O’Brien (Eds.), *Reassessing Fatherhood. New Observations on Fathers and the Modern Family*, Wyd. Sage Publications, London 1987, pp. 36–53.

⁸ M. Vágnerová, *Vývojová psychologie II...*, op. cit.

leisure activities, hobbies, or sports activities. There are fathers who are active and engaged but also those who note the child just as a burden in the form of money going out from their bank account. According to Vodáková⁹ the father has influence on the development of child's socialisation, on its moral and emotional development; he functions as an ideal and as a model for the development of child's sexual role. He shows to the child the world from his point of view and the behaviour of the second half of humanity which enriches the life of a child. Raus¹⁰, who shares this view, writes that research indicates the father affects the ability of the children's socialisation, satisfaction of their relations with adults and their popularity in a society. The certainty of the emotional relationship of the baby anchored to the father is reflected in its sociability. According to studies the children of involved fathers more easily start school attendance and establish and maintain friendly relations with others. Mazálková's psychological examination showed that boys from a family with one absent member – mostly the father – were unsure and hesitant in their approach to tasks. During the examination they were nervous and tense; they were reserved in relation to the examiner in their social response, they obeyed with delay and less often and showed weak self-criticism. The father is the embodiment of patterns of stability, safety, protection, determination, differentiation and action. The mother is the embodiment of emotiveness, care, love, and home. The children were themselves aware that the father was the one with more power and the decision maker and saw the mothers as being kinder and "being there". Španeľová¹¹ proposed that the father plays a specific and different role at certain stages of the lives of girls and boys.

According to Potančok¹², "Traditional conception of Parsonian nuclear family (in the sense parents-children) is facing major challenges and efforts in redefinition now." As Warshak¹³ mentions, in Ancient Rome the fathers had absolute power over their children. They could sell them as slaves or kill them. The rights of the mothers were actually nonexistent. In the case of divorce the right to look after children passes to the father – it was equal to right to own property. The British civil code confirmed the tradition of father's superiority, too. Society considered the father as the natural tender of his children in accordance with the laws of God, as also says the imperial patent of Joseph II. 1787, as well as the General Civil Code called as Allgemeines Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch ABGB 1811. "In many countries the laws enshrined so-called paternal

⁹ J. Vodáková, *Nové pohledy na otcovství*. Bakalářská práce, Wyd. FF, Masarykova Univerzita, Brno 2002.

¹⁰ P. Raus, *Role otce v rodině*, [in:] *Sborník konference Zdravé rodičovství na téma otcovství*, Wyd. CENAP, Brno 2004.

¹¹ I. Špaňhelová, *Dítě a rozvod rodičů*, Wyd. Grada, Praha 2010.

¹² J. Potančok, *Zmeny v chápaní úlohy otca v súčasnej rodine*, „Sociológia“ 2010, ročník 42, číslo 2, p. 113.

¹³ A.R. Warshak, *Revoluce v porozvodové péči o deti*, Wyd. Portál, Praha 1996, p. 24.

power in various forms. The father could decide almost everything concerning the child. He was also required to look after his child and to pay all his living costs. In the case of a divorce there was obligation to pay alimony only for fathers¹⁴. At the beginning of the 19th century the child was, after a divorce, mostly entrusted to the father but during the century when fathers left home and spent longer time at work the liability for kids devolved to mothers. According to Warshak¹⁵, in the 19th century the absolute power of fathers started to be limited. They kept the formal status of the head of the family but according to Blankenhorn (In Černá)¹⁶ “fatherhood became a less important social role” and as Chmelařová states¹⁷ ambitions and success were more important for them. The beginning of the 20th century brought a deepening of the father’s debarment from family life and primarily with the start of a depth of psychological theories (e.g. Freud, Bowlby) the cult of motherhood began to be promoted. Women are naturally better parents than men and are more important for children than fathers¹⁸. “The mother’s love is the predominant feature even in the weakest women and generally exceeds the paternal feelings towards children. The child needs more mothers’ love than father’s love.” For these reasons, the courts were loathe to disallow the mother to look after her children and in 1918 the judge from North Dakota wrote...“The court will not break the most sacred ties of nature that connect the mother with her children, except in extreme cases.” ... In 1921 another judge wrote “Motherhood is an institution of the Lord God for the care and upbringing.” Especially this period can be dated as the time when the fathers were relegated to the background and began the long wait to gain equal status in the care¹⁹.

At those times according to canon law a marriage was considered in the sense of the Bible “What God has joined together, let no man separate” as indissoluble. According to Možný²⁰, “the principled indissolubility of marriage, nevertheless, was softened by Catholic canon law and circumvented by the institution of nullity of marriage and the institution of divorce from a “lodge”. As Teyber²¹ points out “nowadays almost each second marriage ends in divorce and divorce is considered as something executed by the judge’s gavel hit, but parents later realize that divorce is only a phase among many difficult family changes.” In marriage an implementation of the role of the father was not so problematical.

¹⁴ P. Černá, *Rozvod, otcové a děti (sociálně právní ochrana dětí v rozvodové a porozvodové situaci)*. Diplomová práce, Wyd. FF Univerzita Karlova, Praha 2000, p. 9.

¹⁵ A.R. Warshak, *Revoluce v porozvodové péči o děti...*, op. cit.

¹⁶ P. Černá, *Rozvod, otcové a děti...*, op. cit., p. 11.

¹⁷ H. Chmelařová, *Tátové v historii*, [in:] L. Sedláček, K. Pleskovská (Eds.), *Aktivní otcovství*, Wyd. Nesehnutí, Brno 2008.

¹⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁹ A.R. Warshak, *Revoluce v porozvodové péči o děti...*, op. cit., p. 28.

²⁰ I. Možný, *Sociologie rodiny*, Wyd. SLON, Praha 2002, p. 172.

²¹ E. Teyber, *Děti a rozvod*, Wyd. Návrat domů, Praha 2007.

However, in the case of divorce fathers were and generally are those who either rarely ask for custody of the child in their care or often the fight against existing stereotypes is lost. Many of today's fathers missed their own father whether due to the fact that family was broken and the father showed no interest and did not keep contact with the child, which was very often traumatic for child or any interest from the father was blocked by the mother or her family. Maybe the memory of this spurred today's fathers to take up their role more actively and be more engaged. Due to feminization and better job opportunities for women, the myth of man's irremediability as bread-winner was broken. On the other side, despite the obstacles the number of men who apply to get the child in their charge has increased.

The Act N. 571/2009 Coll. of laws on parental allowance allows the father to take up the parental leave. According to the statistics of the Social Insurance, the fathers use this option in only 0.36% of cases, and their number has doubled in recent years. In 2010, there were 109 men as recipients, in 2011 there were 145 male recipients and in 2012 the number increased to 210 recipients. The trend of men on paternity leave is showing an increasing tendency although this usually occurs in cases where the child's father has a lower income. Šmídová²² states also that in the Czech Republic the men are led by particular economic reasons and according to Kubičková²³ the fathers on parental leave was 2% in 2004. This was not possible in the Slovak republic and we do not have data to compare with the Czech Republic in 2012. Each family and its functioning is unique either as a complete or incomplete family therefore we disagree with the opinion, published in the media, of the head of the Department of Gender Equality and Equal Opportunities of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic Olga Pietruchová in a TV JOJ discussion that "the child is power privilege of mother". "If we automatically assign each child into the same arrangement, we lose the opportunity to make such an arrangement which would meet the needs of the family. Not every family fits into the same scheme. What works in the family in the neighbours, shouldn't be the best for your family"²⁴. As Novák – Průchová²⁵ state, so many years the division 9:1 holds over while only one child in ten is entrusted to the care of the father. This division can be considered in our experience for both the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

However, the harmonious father with a clear desire to have the child in own care has the possibility unless he wants to use it as duress on child's mother.

²² I. Šmídová, „*Matkové*“..., op. cit., pp. 157–175.

²³ K. Kubičková, *Alternativní model otcovství: pečující otcové*. Klauzurní práce, Wyd. FSS Masarykova Univerzita, Brno 2004.

²⁴ A.R. Warshak, *Revoluce v porozvodové péči o děti*..., op. cit., p. 28.

²⁵ T. Novák, B. Průchová, *Předrozvodové a rozvodové poradenstvo*, 1. vyd., Wyd. Grada, Praha 2007, p. 144.

Berger – Gravillon²⁶ show that father is able to execute all his responsibilities as well as the mother and to provide the care for baby, as it needs to evolve in the presence of one or two stable people. The mother remains as the primary person close to the child and the child prefers her in sad times, but it is not established whether it is a genetically programmed competence, whereas a close relationship between the mother and child occurs while she is pregnant. According to Gulášová²⁷, the aim of the father's upbringing is to appeal to the behaviour of the child through personality manifestations and in the case of the father's upbringing being neglected the relationship of the child to the mother can be impaired and it can blame her for the problems in the family. It is better to limit the father-child contact in cases where the father is dangerous for the child because of any pathology in his behaviour. Teyber²⁸ (2007) writes that children living with a father are as well adapted as children in the mother's custody. An adaptation depends on the father's ability to provide effective parenting (to ensure the care consistency and household arrangement) and his ability to support the child's relationship with his mother. Our experience suggests that fathers are more willing to compromise and to favour the relationship of the child to the mother than is the case in the opposite direction.

We agree with Matejček²⁹ that today's father is expected not only to be responsible, reliable, able to financially provide the family, but also, that he will listen to and understand his wife and children and will be in close contact with them, which brings many tasks and mental commitments. Therefore, if we look at not only the father's role, but that of both parents, especially after a family breakdown, so many parents should take to heart words of Pláňava³⁰ that, if they did not manage it together as a married couple, they shouldn't fail as parents, although their mission is different and under different conditions.

Children's problems, unfortunately, appear to adult eyes as being small. But they must be regarded according to the degree of pain which is often greater than you adults can imagine because children are small. If the child misses the father because they only spend four days a month together, which is not so much for high quality relationship, it is not necessary to follow the common stereotypes of the normal functioning of other families, but it is necessary to find what is the most suitable for the family. The role of the father is irreplaceable in every period of life regardless as to whether he is entrusted the care of a child or not. According to Možný (In Potančok)³¹, the mother mediates the relationship between the father and the child therefore the development of relationship between

²⁶ M. Berger, I. Gravillon, *Když se rodiče rozvádějí*, 1. vyd., Wyd. Portál, Praha 2011, p. 136.

²⁷ I. Gulášová, *Důsledky zanedbané otcovské výchovy u dětí v rodině*, Sborník konference Zdravé rodičovství na téma otcovství, Wyd. CENAP, Brno 2004.

²⁸ E. Teyber, *Děti a rozvod...*, op. cit.

²⁹ Z. Matějček, *Rodiče a děti.*, 1. vyd., Wyd. Avicenum, Brno 1986, p. 336.

³⁰ I. Pláňava, *Manželství a rodiny.*, 1. vyd., Wyd. Doplněk, Brno 2000, p. 294.

³¹ J. Potančok, *Změny v chápání úlohy otce v současné rodině...*, op. cit., p. 113.

partners can widen or restrict the development of the child-father relationship (present versus absent). Even though, we suppose that the model of joint custody would be ideal, because parents are the representatives of legal legitimacy to the child and the matters relating to it should be decided jointly. According to Jürgen³², the legal experts in the sphere of psychology considered as unsatisfactory if the court tasked them to provide the basis for the decision as to which parent is better but it did not solve the conflict between the parents, but worsened it. It is indisputable, and we identify with Špaňhelová³³, that the child needs both parents, needs to see and perceive all their habits, skills, with which each of them is endowed. For a child in a complete or incomplete family is necessary to obtain the maximum. In our opinion and experience, the child needs a home there where people it loves are and with whom it feels comfortable with. It is a place of safety for him, not real estate, which is provided by the mother and father depending on the level of care and interest in its needs. Experts in the United Kingdom argue that it would not be legal to have a built-in bias against the father or mother in broken families where there are no social problems. They want to strengthen the principle of the equal rights in the child's life of both parents, who should have a continuing role in the lives of their children, regardless of whether they are divorced or not. British government officials say they will continue to encourage the fathers to take responsibility for equivalence of parents and to be fully in touch with their children from the very beginning, and do not consider the courts as being the best place to resolve disputes and, therefore, encourage the use of mediation services. We consider this as suitable also for the solution to this issue in Slovak conditions.

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³² R. Jürgen, *Jsi moje dítě*, 1. vyd., Wyd. Magistrát hlavního města Prahy, Praha 2010, p. 80.

³³ I. Špaňhelová, *Dítě a rozvod rodičů*, Wyd. Grada, Praha 2010.

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