

# Father's participation in childcare and household tasks

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*The paper presents the results of a study on fathers' engagement in caregiving and household tasks and their perception of a father's role in the household. The aim of the paper is to find out what fathers perceive as »being responsible« and how their perception is related to their engagement and role in the household. Therefore, we carried out research among employed or self-employed men, living with their female partners and children in the same household. The research was carried out in September 2019 in a Central European country (Slovenia). Results of our research support the stereotypic classification of household tasks in terms of gender. Fathers who consider participation in care and upbringing of children as a relevant aspect of a responsible father more frequently do housekeeping, washing the dishes (washing and stacking), garbage collection and hanging up and collecting laundry. Fathers who consider financial support as a relevant aspect of a responsible father more frequently pay the bills; they also agree that a mother is considered to be much more burdened with regard to unpaid work than a father.*

**Keywords:** childcare, household task, mother, father, work-life balance.

## INTRODUCTION

With the increasing employment of women, research on work and family life is becoming more important. The process of balancing professional and personal life is associated with ensuring greater gender equality and equal opportunities in the labour market and with distributing of house-

work and childcare between men (fathers) and women (mothers) at home. Kozjek et al. (2014) claim that finding a balance between different spheres of work and life, or work-life balance, requires a variety of measures and good cooperation between employees, organisations, schools, nursery schools, trade unions, local communities

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and the state. Doorne-Huiskes et al. (2003), McMillan et al. (2011) and Tomazevic et al. (2014) emphasise that work-life balance can be seen in at least three social contexts: increasing participation of women in the labour market, demographic changes (aging of population, increasing average age of first-time mothers, etc.) and corporate interest regarding flexible labour. They also claim that work-life balance ranges from a narrow understanding of work-life balance primarily addressing the balance of work and family life to an expanded understanding including health care, (further) training and life-long learning.

The role of men in family life has changed throughout history. Men are much more active in childcare and family life today than they were in the past. While in the past the main task of fathers was the financial support and protection of the family, today being a »responsible father« means much more than that. According to Coates et al. (2011), characteristics of responsible fathers are »being there« for the child, helping to take care of the child, loving and caring for the child and providing financial support. Fathers are much more involved in family life, both emotionally and physically, today than they were in the past. Involvement of men in childcare and housework could also be crucial in fostering gender equality or »undoing gender«, as Deutsch (2007) defines situations in which gender differences might be reduced. Björk (2015) agrees that the potential for change in gendered understanding of caregiving is explored through the concepts of undoing gender.

This research adds to the empirical knowledge in regard to two concepts of a responsible father: providing financial sup-

port and participation in care, upbringing and actively spending time with family, which may contribute to undoing gender literature. According to Brandth & Kvande (2018), fathers that are caring for children can be understood as »undoing gender«, because they are entering into a highly mothered context. This research also adds to the empirical knowledge of the relationship between two aspects of a responsible father and statements about work-life balance, which may contribute to work-life balance literature. According to Anderson et al. (2002), changing gender roles and women's increased rates of participation in paid labour force fathers to assume different parenting responsibilities. In addition, Bailey (2015) agrees that balanced gender involvement of parents in childcare may produce a transformation of the gender roles in private spheres.

We analysed the perceptions of men (fathers) about their own involvement in childcare and household tasks. The research was carried out in September 2019 in a Central European country (Slovenia) among employed (in a company) or self-employed men, living with their female partners and children in the same household. In order to investigate the fathers' participation in the household, we listed 13 household tasks and asked our respondents how often they carry them out. To relate the aspects of a responsible father with frequency of participation in household tasks, we used the Mann-Whitney test<sup>1</sup>.

A very important aspect in our survey included two concepts of a responsible father, i.e. (1) supply of means of subsistence for the family (providing financial support) and (2) participation in care, upbringing and actively spending time with family. Addi-

<sup>1</sup> Mann-Whitney test is a nonparametric alternative to independent samples t-test. It is used to determine if two samples derive from the same population. Its assumptions are less strict, and it is therefore more appropriate to use it on ordinal data where mean values make no sense.

tional analysis included the relationship between two aspects of a responsible father and level of agreement with 13 statements about work-life balance.

The aim of the study is to explore fathers' engagement in household tasks and further to identify the role of gender in the household. Using the questionnaire, we will answer the main research question: Which tasks are more dominantly »female« and which »male«, and how do fathers perceive them? The second aim of the paper is to analyse the aspect of responsible father in terms of their household engagements and their perception of household tasks.

Based on the aims of the study and research question, we formulated two hypotheses:

H1: Fathers who consider participation in care and upbringing of children as a relevant aspect of a responsible father do »routine (everyday)« tasks (including housekeeping, washing the dishes, garbage collection, hanging up and collecting laundry) more frequently than others. These fathers also consider such tasks more important compared to other fathers.

H2: Fathers who consider financial support as a relevant aspect of a responsible father pay the bills more frequently than others. In contrast, their engagement in routine tasks is lower.

These fathers also consider that routine tasks are more in their partner's domain and think that a man's job is to take care of the material well-being of the family.

The paper is divided into six sections. In the next section, theoretical backgrounds on participation of men (fathers) in caregiving and household tasks are given, after which the situation in Slovenia is represented. The methodology of the research is then outlined in the third section. In the fourth section, results are presented, after which a discussion follows in the fifth section and conclusions in the sixth section.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Full equality of women can be achieved through men's fair participation in caregiving (unpaid care work) and domestic work (household tasks) (Doyle, Kato-Wallace, Kazimbaya & Barker, 2014). Holter (2014) agrees that involvement of men in housework is important in fostering gender equality, which can enable women to pursue professional careers and can lead to a higher quality of life for both partners. Baxter (1997) points out that women's involvement in professional careers may lead to egalitarian divisions of housework.

In addition, Kaźmierczak-Kaźuźna (2018) stresses that doing housework is not usually treated as a full-fledged job, because it is unpaid and its effects are ignored in the calculation of national budgets. Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard (2010) agree that household labour has usually been conceptualised as a set of unpaid tasks, performed to satisfy the needs of family members or to maintain the home or the family's possessions. According to Arrighi & Maume (2000), Cunningham (2001) and Lincoln (2008), the tasks included in the concept of household labour are general house cleaning, meal planning, cooking, dishwashing or loading the dishwasher, cleaning up after meals, grocery shopping, laundry (washing, ironing, mending clothes), caring for sick family members, yard work, car maintenance and repairs, outdoor and household maintenance, taking out the garbage, paying bills and transporting family members. Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard (2010) and Cerrato & Cifre (2018) claim that household tasks are most often classified in two categories, namely stereotypical female or routine (every day) tasks that are on-going, nondiscretionary and very time consuming (shopping, cooking, cleaning up after meals, washing dishes, laundry and cleaning the home) and stereotypical male or intermittent (neutral) tasks

that are carried out only occasionally and are more flexible and less time-consuming (paying bills, household repairs, car maintenance and yard work). Sroda (2006, in Kaźmierczak-Kałużna, 2018) adds that women who do housework perform many jobs and social roles at the same time. A woman is a cook, an accountant, hygienist, secretary, negotiator, teacher, needlewoman, washerwomen, dressmaker, porter, nutritionist, driver, buyer, nurse, interior decorator, cleaner, educator, waitress, technician, food engineer, consultant, therapist and gardener. Women continue to assume the larger portion of household tasks, although changes towards gender equality have been noted (Sullivan, 2000; Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010). Sullivan (2000) and Bianchi, Sayer, Milkie & Robinson (2012) found that in most Western countries the gap between women's and men's time spent doing general housework has narrowed. In addition, Holm et al. (2015) found that despite the narrower gap, most household tasks are still done by women. According to Cerrato & Cifre (2018), in Western studies, the home sphere and the household tasks that are part of this sphere are assumed to be the responsibility of women. They claim that a traditional gender role model prescribes that work domain and instrumentality are more important for men than for women, whereas the home domain and expressiveness are more important for women.

Kosakowska-Berezecka, Korzenieska & Kaczorowska (2016) emphasise that men's involvement in household duties is usually smaller because of different cultural norms and gender stereotypes. Coltrane & Ishii-Kuntz (1992) stated that divisions of household tasks are the result of time availability, resources and ideology. According to de Laat & Sevilla-Sanz (2011), in more egalitarian countries individual attitudes run opposite to social norms for the case of women. Öun (2013) adds that women who earn less are more involved in household tasks.

According to Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard (2010), the manner by which couples share the household tasks in their home is shaped through complex processes. Wernli & Henchoz (2011) add that individual and interactional factors play a central explanatory role in understanding the variations in women's housework and family life, while this is less the case for men; women use their individual resources, such as income, to reduce the time they spend on cooking, dishwashing, cleaning and laundry. In relation to division of household tasks, Nyman, Reinikainen & Eriksson (2018) define three theoretical perspectives: the relative resource perspective states that the partner with greater external resources, regardless of their gender, can abstain from housework; the time availability perspective relates to a negative relationship between partners' share of housework and the time spent in paid work in the labour market; according to the gender ideology perspective, gender attitudes contribute to division of household labour.

The couples' unpaid domestic work impacts the quality of their relationship (Norman, Elliot & Fagan, 2018). Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard (2010) stress that individual characteristics and social, cultural and political context shape individuals' behaviour and influence couples' relationships. In addition, Ruppanner, Brandén & Turunen (2018) stated that if one partner carries out a disproportionate share of routine housework (cleaning, laundry, cooking), it can lead to dissatisfaction, depression and divorce. Henz (2008) distinguishes between five types of partnership in accordance with household work, shopping, cleaning and cooking. In role-changed partnerships, the man does more household work than the woman; in equal partnerships, there is an equal division of household work; in semi-equal partnerships, the man does quite a lot of housework, but the woman has the main responsibility; in conventional partnerships, the woman does most of the tasks related

to shopping and cleaning, while cooking is shared between spouses; in patriarchal relationships, the woman carries out most of the mentioned tasks.

The need for greater male (father's) involvement in care work has been discussed in major development policy arenas for a number of years (Doyle et al., 2014). As Yavorsky et al. (2015) stated, a transition to parenthood is a significant shifting point for the gender dynamics of a relationship, because the presence of an infant can restructure parents' time across a variety of activities. Schober (2012) claims that parental involvement in childcare has a positive effect on the quality and stability of the parental relationship. Tobío (2001) found that care and household tasks are basically women's affairs and defined four type of strategies. According to the main strategy, the mother responds to most of the demands of the household and family work. A complementary strategy states that the mother cannot solve all the demands of the household and family work alone, but other family members help her. The extreme or undesirable strategy is bad for the mother or for the children, because the mother does not have (or want) help with household and family work, and she leaves small children alone at home when she goes to work. The indirect strategy states that a woman postpones pregnancy or reduces the number of children.

According to Cerrato & Cifre (2018), men do not feel the same obligation when they are involved in the home as women do, because they perceive it more as a hobby or free choice. Collett, Vercel & Boykin (2015) stress that a man who has a clear idea about what is expected of fathers (i.e. changing diapers, picking the kids up from school) has an opportunity to feel competent and efficacious when engaging in those behaviours. Results of the research of Kotowska-Wójcik & Luty-Michalak (2018) show that most fathers realised that a traditional family model (women focusing on the household

and raising children, men being responsible for securing the family's financial livelihood only) is one that can no longer be followed contemporarily, as women-mothers are increasingly frequent participants in the labour market. Therefore, fathers are more often involved in family life and raising children. In addition, Kosakowska-Berezecka et al. (2016) claim that father's type of employment influences the amount of time they spent with their children; atypical employment might give men more opportunities to engage in the household.

Yavorsky, Dush & Schoppe Sullivan (2015) stated that the study of parenthood is crucial for understanding the state of the gender revolution. According to Álvarez Bernardo et al. (2018), women continue to be obedient to reproductive and associated work. Pailhé & Solaz (2008) found that childcare, regardless of state regime and the level of fertility, heavily depends on gender norms. They stated that parental time is not an orderly domestic task and is more highly valued than other household tasks. Each partner wishes to hold on to their parental activities, even if the other partner spends more time on them. Brandth & Kvande (2018) claim that fathers' involvement in caring for children has been an important focus for scholars concerned with changes to masculinity. According to Lomas (2013), masculinity refers to the way men are socialised to act »as men« (e.g. reluctance to seek help). Different authors explain different types of masculinities. Connel (1995) recognises »multiple masculinities«, which can either be hegemonic or subordinate. Doucet (2007) defines »hegemonic masculinity« as »being strong, successful, capable, reliable and in control«. Lomas (2013) claims that this type of masculinity is often reduced to a negative type and misses the positive dimension of hegemony, which maintains its power through a degree of consent and participation (e.g. men »providing« for their family). For Elliott (2016), the

central features of »caring masculinities« are »rejection of domination and integration of values of care, such as positive emotion, independence and relationality, into masculine identities«. »Inclusive masculinity«, as argued by Anderson (2009), refers to a greater variety of previously feminine practices that men can engage in without being a source of subordination. Mutua (2013) adds that, according to masculinity scholarship, men are not monolithic but are diverse; they can be seen (1) internally (behaviourally – how they present or act or by how they appear and behave) or (2) externally (by the intersecting hierarchical systems of race, class, nationality, sexuality and age, among others). She also claims that, in the context of masculinities, compelled heterosexuality may be more complicated for men than for women, because women are not categorically admonished to be »not like men«; even more so, in certain realities women are required to act like men. Doucet (2007) claims that when fathers take responsibilities for the children, they do it in »dad style«, therefore they are not »mothering« but are »re-inventing fathering«.

According to Brandth & Kvande (2018), masculinities are dynamic and fathers take up various elements to construct new gender identities; fathers today are expected to be involved in the daily care of their children. Wall & Arnold (2007) claim that »involved fatherhood« represents a transformation of the traditional role of breadwinner and promotes nurturing, childcare and co-parenting. According to Solomon (2014), »involved fathers« are fathers that engage in hands-on care while continuing employment. Bach (2019) agrees that involved fathering refers to the close relationship obtained through caregiving. Farstad & Stefansen (2015) claim that »involved fatherhood« refers to the ideal of an emotionally present and nurturing father. Furthermore, Dermott (2008, pp. 128) designed the concept of »intimate fatherhood«, which refers

to intimate father-child relationship with regard to six themes gleaned from intimacy literature: sexuality, reflexivity, equality, fragility, communication and the meaning of time. According to Elliott (2016), caring masculinities constitute a critical form of men's engagement and involvement in gender equality and offer the potential of sustained social change for men and gender relations. Karu & Tremblay (2018) claim that more equal distribution of the childcare has positive effects for the whole family and the individual family members. According to Lammi-Taskula (2008), an increasing number of men wish to take parental leave. Seierstad & Kirton (2015) carried out research among Norwegian women and found that a policy principle of gender symmetrical parenting has normalised the combining of career and family for them. Barrere-Maurisson and Rivier (2002, in Pailhé & Solaz, 2008) defined four type of parental time: care time (eating, washing, medical care), which is a routine activity centred around the home; homework time, which is an activity that may be an investment in the future, since it acts on education; social and leisure activities (conversations, reading, playing games, artistic activities, sports, excursions), which are fun quality time with children and involve a high level of interaction between parents and children; transportation time devoted to children, this time is mainly related to children's social and leisure activities. In their research, Brandth & Kvande (2018) found that on the one hand, fathers on parental leave demonstrated great enthusiasm at being given the opportunity to be home with their babies, while on the other, they were humbled by their responsibility.

Elliott (2016) found that »caring masculinities« are a critical form of the men's engagement in gender equality and the potential of men's caring practices that lead to gender equality. Coles et al. (2018) surveyed the sociodemographic and family

factors, work factors and paternal identity between fathers who were engaged in long hours of childcare and those working long hours. Their results show that a number of factors were significantly associated with the time fathers spent with children, irrespective of hours in paid work. Fathers were more likely to spend long hours caring for the children when they worked in a female-dominated or more equal gender community, rather than a male-dominated community. Results of the Ralph (2016) survey on gender-differentiated parenting experiences show that parenting experiences are strongly influenced by ambivalent attitudes of fathers and mothers. Mothers draw on »primarily mother« moral rationalities that associate »good mothering« with long time periods spent on childcare, while fathers have »primarily worker« rationality, associated with strong commitment to the labour market. McGill (2014) examines the relationship between working hours, father involvement and whether fathering attitudes moderate that relationship, and found that working hours are not strongly related to the fathers' involvement. Despite generally long working hours, a subgroup of »new fathers« were better able to preserve time with children by including children into their leisure time.

Involved fatherhood is high on the agenda not only among researchers but also among family policy-makers in EU countries. Blum et al. (2018) claim that most of the EU Member States have a statutory right to paternity leave, and if they do not have it, fathers can take either the non-transferable or transferable part of the parental leave or have other defined rights to use paid leave due to extraordinary circumstances. According to Albrecht et al. (2017), in Austria, the Czech Republic, Croatia, Cyprus, Germany, Ireland and Slovakia, part of the parental leave is »reserved« only for fathers. Belgium, Finland, France, Luxembourg, Portugal and Sweden have mixed systems

that allow fathers to have both paternity and parental leave. In these countries, the total amount of father leave is also the largest in the EU. Jurviste et al. (2019) add that the parental leave and parental allowance differ greatly between countries. The average length of the paternity leave in the EU-28 is two weeks; the longest paternity leave is in Finland (9 weeks) and the shortest in Greece (2 days). In April 2019, the European Parliament adopted new rules for paternity leave and non-transferable parental leave. Minimum requirements for paternity and parental leave, the leave for the care and protection of a child and flexible working arrangements were stipulated (Article 1, Directive EU 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council). The EU Member States must accept measures in their national laws that will enable fathers or equivalent parents the right to paternity leave (the right of fathers to be absent from work due to the birth of a child) for a period of ten days due to the birth of a child. The EU Member States can decide how the fathers or equivalent parents will use the leave (e.g. time frame, flexible forms of work, etc.). A minimum period of four months of parental leave must be taken within the child's first 8 years. To encourage fathers to take the parental leave, a minimum period of two months of parental leave cannot be transferred from one parent to another parent (Article 4 and 5, Directive EU 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council). The EU Member States must provide sufficient parental allowance, which must be at least equivalent to the amount of the sick leave. The EU Member States are encouraged to provide the same allowance for paternity leave as for the maternity leave at the national level. After the expiration of the agreed flexible form of work, the employee has the right to return to the original distribution of working hours and in justified circumstances may request this before the end of the agreed period (Arti-

cle 8 and 9, Directive EU 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council).

In order to achieve more equal distribution of the childcare, household tasks and employment between women and men, some countries (Norway, Sweden, Iceland, Germany, France) have stipulated the paternity quotas for parental leave (Tamm, 2019). By introducing paternity quotas within parental leave, family policies try to influence the behaviour of fathers with newborns and thus indirectly influence the inclusion of men and women in the labour market and contribute to the idea of changing social norms and attitudes towards the role of gender within society (Unterhofer & Wrohlich, 2017). The paternal quotas focus on two key factors: it is impossible for the mother and father to negotiate who will take the leave, because the leave cannot be transferred; and employees and employers can more easily accept it, because they are obligated (Kvande & Brandth, 2017).

For better equality between both parents and better personal and professional life balancing, mothers and fathers should participate in caregiving and household tasks. This participation is associated with individual factors of each parent and with interactional factors between both partners. The literature review shows that partners with greater external resources usually do less household tasks, which is associated also with how much time they spend away from their homes. The role of men in family life has changed throughout history; nowadays, fathers are more emotionally and physically involved and responsible for everyday family and household tasks; not only that they are providing the financial support, but they are also caregiving and doing household tasks. Responsible fatherhood should be understood more broadly: in addition to involvement in caregiving, also being engaged in household tasks. Therefore, responsible fatherhood can be seen as a part of social change in the field of »undoing gender« and

»caring masculinities«. The policy-makers of the EU Member States also contribute to responsible fatherhood by enabling fathers a statutory right to paternity leave (which may differ between different EU Member States), because fathers who have paternity leave should help mothers by caregiving and doing household tasks while continuing employment.

To understand better the results of the survey, we will first describe the situation and legal rights in Slovenia. The main results will follow; we will analyse the aspect of responsible father in terms of their household engagement and their perception of household tasks.

## **SITUATION IN SLOVENIA**

According to Eurostat data, in 2017, the female employment rate in the EU was 11.5% lower than male employment. According to Dobrotić (2015), patterns of behaviour in the labour market are a reflection of the economic situation, the cultural context, individual beliefs and the existing institutional arrangements in the area of social policies and work-family policies.

Slovenia belongs to the group of countries with a high rate of employed women (69.7%) and a low percentage difference of the employment rate between men and women (7.2 percentage points) (Eurostat, 2019). Findings of the European Commission (2017a) show that the key driver of the gender employment gap is the unequal distribution of obligations related to care. Many men are unwilling to take leave or flexible work arrangements due to family reasons, therefore women are forced to leave the labour market or work part-time.

Despite a number of measures to achieve greater gender equality in the EU and its Member States, men by comparison with women take much less care for children and older family members and participate



less in household chores. According to the European Commission (2017, p. 8), in 2017, 73% of Europeans agreed that women spend more time on household tasks and childcare. Eurofound (2017) data show that women are more burdened in the field of unpaid work per week than men. The number of hours of unpaid work increases for men and women that are parents, but the proportion of household tasks and childcare is far from equal. In 2016, 92% of women between the ages of 25 and 49 (with children under the age of 18) took care of a child on a daily basis, compared to 68% of men. A larger gender gap was found with daily household chores and cooking, where the proportion for women is 79% and for men 34% (Eurostat, 2018).

Slovenia still has traditional distribution of tasks; this has also been confirmed by different researchers (e.g. Sedmak & Medarič, 2007; Renner et al., 2008); they found that most household tasks are done by women; men's tasks were less routine and more enjoyable. Results of the Slovenian Public Opinion Survey in 2012 showed that women spend an average of 22.69 hours on household tasks (Šori, 2018). The biggest differences (in addition to taking parental leave) are also reflected by the use of care leave for sick children, which was mostly used by women. In 2012, women in Slovenia used 82.2% of all care leave for a sick family member (Resolution on the national programme for equal opportunities for women and men 2015-2020). According to the Slovenian Public Opinion Survey in 2016, 36.9% of respondents said that partners equally share childcare at home, which was almost 9 percentage points more than the division of household tasks (Šori, 2018). According to the European Commission (2016), in order to achieve 75% of the EU's workforce (for women and men) by 2020, a more equitable distribution of time dedicated to household chores and caring for family members is needed.

The EU Council recognised equality between women and men as a fundamental principle of the EU. According to the EU Council, quality policies are the »key« to economic growth, prosperity and competitiveness. The European Pact for Gender Equality (2011-2020) reaffirms the EU's commitment to reach objectives connected to increasing gender equality. In 2016, in order to achieve higher gender equality, the European Commission adopted a document entitled »Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality 2016-2019«.

In Slovenia, the field of family policy is sector-regulated, with close cross-sectoral cooperation and interdisciplinary integration. Family policy in Slovenia is based on a holistic and inclusive approach; it takes into account all types of families and different family forms and needs, respects individual members and emphasises the protection and the quality of families and children's lives. Important elements of family policy are ensuring equal opportunities for men and women, work-life balancing, setting up programs and services for families, costs of childcare and protecting families in special life circumstances (Resolution on the Family Policy 2018–2028). The field of family policy in Slovenia is regulated by the Resolution on the Family Policy 2018–2028: »A Society Friendly to All Families«, the Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia, the Equal Opportunities of Women and Men Act, the Resolution on the national programme for equal opportunities for women and men 2015-2020, the Employment Relations Act and the Parental Protection and Family Benefits Act.

According to the ReDP18-28 (2018) international comparison, Slovenia achieved a relatively high level of quality of life for families and children; regarding the level of the risk for poverty and social exclusion of children (in 2015), Slovenia ranked fourth in terms of lowest level of risk. The mater-

nity, paternity and parental allowance are in the international arena also recognised as a good practice that contributes to the level of quality of life for families and children. In Slovenia, these allowances add up to 100% of the base wage. In order to improve the quality of life of families, some legislative changes have been made in recent years. With passing of the resolution ReDP18-28, the Republic of Slovenia strives to ensure more flexible distribution of paternity and parental leave between both parents, a more positive attitude of employers towards the use of paternity and parental leave and easier work-life balance. To fulfil these goals, the following measures have been accepted:

- increasing the amount of paternity and parental allowance to 100%,
- ensuring more flexible use of paternity leave (the right of fathers to be absent from work due to the birth of a child) between both partners,
- providing an additional 10 days of paternity leave for the birth of more than one child,
- raising employers' awareness about the paternity and parental leave,
- informing parents (and citizens) about parental leave and encouraging fathers to use it,
- increasing the age limit of children for the right to use part-time work,
- change of legislation regarding part-time work so that beneficiaries receive equal pension,
- increasing the amount of parental allowance,
- providing the possibility for gradual return to work after parental leave.

Parental protection rights base on the principle of contributions payments. The extent of the rights depends on the amount of paid contributions; unless in accordance with the principle of solidarity, it is defined differently.

The Republic of Slovenia tries to achieve the greatest possible involvement of fathers in the care and protection of children. Therefore, it tries to encourage fathers toward greater use of paternity leave and more equal distribution of parental leave between both parents. Although fathers in Slovenia have had the legal possibility of sharing the use of parental leave with their partners since 1976, statistics of the use of parental leave show that fathers still transfer most of their parental leave to the child's mother and use only non-transferable paternity leave. In recent years, this proportion increased from 4.86% in 2006 to 7.08% in 2013 and remains around 6% today (5.82% in 2016 – last available data). Paternity leave was accepted in 2001 in the Parental Care and Family Benefits Act.

Fathers have the right to use 30 days of non-transferable paternity leave. If two or more live-born children are born at the same time, paternity leave for the second or subsequent child is extended by an additional ten days, but just until the end of the first grade of primary school of the oldest child (Articles 25 Parental Care and Family Benefits Act-1). Fathers can use at least 15 calendar days from the birth of the child until no later than one month after the expiration of parental leave/parental allowance, and the remaining up to 30 days at any time until the end of the first grade of primary school (Articles 27 Parental Care and Family Benefits Act-1). Despite a certain right to 30 days of paid paternity leave, the law provided transitional provisions for a delay of an additional 15 days of paid leave, namely in the three years following a year in which gross domestic product growth reaches 2.5%. Every year, the amount of paid paternity leave increased by 5 days and the amount of unpaid paternity leave decreased by 25 days (Article 115 of Parental Care and Family Benefits Act-1).

The so-called »leave for the care and protection of a child« (or parental leave),

after the end of maternity leave, lasts 260 days. Each parent has the right to use 130 days of parental leave. The mother is allowed to transfer 100 days of parental leave to the father; 30 days are non-transferable. The father can transfer 130 days of parental leave to the mother (Article 29 Parental Care and Family Benefits Act-1). Parents have to fill out a form of the agreement about the use of the leave for the care and protection of a child 30 days before the end of the maternity leave and inform the competent centre for social work and their employers. If parents do not agree or the decision is contrary to the benefit of the child, the decision is made by the centre for social work (Article 29 of the Parental Care and Family Benefits Act-1). The state provides them a supplement in the amount of 100% of their wage.

## METHODOLOGY

### Participants

We analysed the perceptions of men (fathers) about their own involvement in childcare and household tasks. Therefore, we included in our sample only employed (in a company) or self-employed men living with their female partners and children in the same household. The obtained final sample included 207 men. On average, the men in our sample had 1.91 children (with standard deviation of 0.95); most of the men (54%) had two children in the household. The most frequent groups of children were pre-school children (58% of men had at least one pre-school child in the household) and children in primary school (in 52% of households). Most of them belonged to the 36-45 age group (46%), followed by the 26-35 age group (31%); most of them were secondary school graduates (28%), followed by professional study or university study programme graduates (26% each). All men in our sample were employed (86% in a company and 14% self-employed); 42% of them

had a leadership position in their company. The relatively high share of employees that had leadership positions is most likely due to the large number of self-employed men included in the survey sample. Self-employed people are usually both managers and contractors (employees) at the same time. Other socio-demographic characteristics (such as region, location: rural/urban, etc.) were not measured in the survey. The percentages in relation to the whole population are very similar – most of the men with children have two children (51%). In 2017 (the most recent available data), the average age men became fathers was 33.6 years (which is almost 4 years more than 20 years ago) (SiStat, 2020). According to SiStat (2020), the most recent data (for 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of year 2019) show that on average among 1000 men, 429 of them were employed in a labour relationship, while 81 of them were self-employed. Since our analysis is focussed on employed men, we can conclude that 84% of the employed men are employed in a company, while 16% are self-employed. The structure of our sample in terms of age, number of children and type of employment is very similar to the structure of the whole population, which indicates that our sample is representative and the conclusions derived from it are valid.

Most men in our sample  $159/207 = 77\%$  took paternity leave. We found out they were significantly younger compared to those who did not take it. However, there were no significant differences in terms of their education and the position in their company.

### Measures

In order to investigate the participation of fathers in the household, we listed 13 household tasks and asked our respondents how often they carry them out. To relate the aspects of a responsible father with frequency of participation in household tasks,

we used the Mann-Whitney test. A very important aspect in our survey included the concept of a responsible father. We analysed two aspects, i.e. (1) supply of means of subsistence for the family (providing financial support), and (2) participation in care, upbringing and actively spending time with family. A further analysis included the relationship between two aspects of responsible fathering and the level of agreement with 13 statements. We also analysed 13 statements about fathers' work-life balance. For further analysis, we used a t-test.

**Procedure**

The research was carried out in September 2019 in a Central European country (Slovenia). A questionnaire was prepared following the literature review. It was prepared in English and then translated into the native language using a standard back-translation process (Brislin, 1980). The survey was implemented in the Ika application for online surveys. The invitation link for participation was sent via e-mail and was publicly available on Facebook. The final data sample was obtained using the convenience sampling method.

**Ethical aspect**

An ethical approval does not apply to the current study, since no personal data that could identify the respondents were used. Participation in the survey was voluntary,

the data were collected anonymously and there were no open-ended questions.

**RESULTS OF THE SURVEY**

A very important aspect in our survey included the concept of a responsible father. According to Coates et al. (2011), characteristics of responsible fathers are »being there« for the child, helping to take care of the child, loving and caring for the child, taking care for the child and providing financial support. We analysed two aspects, i.e. (1) supply of means of subsistence for the family (providing financial support), and (2) participation in care, upbringing and actively spending time with family. Our respondents evaluated the two aspects with Yes or No answers. They could, however, select Yes for both aspects. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 shows that 80 respondents (39%) considered both aspects of responsible fathering important. If we analyse each aspect of responsible fathering individually, we have to consider the marginal frequency of the contingency table. We can see that the more relevant aspect of responsible fathering is participation in care, upbringing of children and time spent with family (191 answers, i.e. 92%). In contrast, only 91 (44%) of the respondents considered the supply of means of subsistence for the family as an important aspect of a responsible father. In further analysis, we analysed each of these

Table 1  
Contingency table describing the aspects of a responsible father

		Participates in care, upbringing of children and actively spends the time with them and partner		Total
		Yes	No	
Provides means of subsistence for the family	Yes	80 (39%)	11 (5%)	91 (44%)
	No	111 (54%)	5 (2%)	116 (56%)
Total		191 (92%)	16 (8%)	207 (100%)

two aspects separately. For both aspects of the responsible father, we compared the two groups of respondents (those who agree with the statement and those who disagree) in terms of their participation in household tasks and attitudes towards aspects of work-life balance.

In order to investigate the fathers' participation in the household, we listed 13 household tasks and asked our respondents how often they carry them out. Table 2 shows the relative frequencies for each task together with the top two boxes score (often and very often). The table is sorted descending in terms of the top two boxes score, i.e. the

tasks with higher father engagement appear at the top of the table.

From Table 2, we can deduce that the task with highest father participation is minor repairs and maintenance, together with work around the house (87% of fathers carry this task out very often or often). This task is followed by car cleaning and maintenance (top two boxes score 79%), major purchases (73%), payment of bills (72%) and garbage collection (71%). Smaller purchases, food preparation and washing the dishes are carried out by more than half of the fathers often or very often. The other household tasks are carried out predominantly

Table 2  
Fathers' participation in household tasks

Task	Never	Seldom	Occasionally	Often	Very often	Top two box score (often and very often)
Minor repairs and maintenance, work around the house	0%	2%	10%	32%	55%	87%
Car cleaning and maintenance	3%	6%	12%	36%	43%	79%
Major purchases (furniture, car, etc.)	2%	6%	18%	37%	36%	73%
Payment of bills (water, electricity, telephone, etc.)	8%	5%	15%	27%	45%	72%
Garbage collection	2%	6%	21%	35%	36%	71%
Smaller purchases (food, clothing, footwear, cosmetics)	2%	13%	29%	33%	23%	56%
Food preparation	2%	15%	29%	33%	20%	53%
Cleaning the dishes (washing and stacking)	3%	19%	26%	25%	27%	52%
Housekeeping	2%	23%	33%	25%	16%	41%
Linen change	14%	29%	29%	18%	9%	27%
Hanging and picking up laundry	20%	28%	34%	13%	6%	19%
Window cleaning	42%	31%	16%	7%	4%	11%
Ironing	63%	20%	12%	2%	2%	4%

by their female partners, especially ironing, window cleaning, hanging up and collecting laundry and linen change. The results are consistent with findings of Craig (2006), Man Yee Kan et al. (2011), Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard (2010), Yavorsky et al. (2015) and Cerrato & Cifre (2018) and support the stereotypical classification of household tasks in terms of gender.

To relate the aspects of a responsible father with frequency of participation in household tasks, we used the Mann-Whitney test. Table 3 shows the results of two separate analyses (one for each aspect). Besides the p-values, Table 3 provides the mean-ranks for each household task. Higher values of mean-rank indicate higher frequency of a particular task.

Table 3  
Relation between aspects of a responsible father and frequency of participation in household tasks

Task – mean rank	Participates in care, upbringing of children and actively spends the time with them and partner			Provides means of subsistence for the family (providing financial support)		
	Yes (n=191)	No (n=16)	Sig.	Yes (n=91)	No (n=116)	Sig.
Food preparation	105.70	83.72	0.143	92.08	113.35	***0.008
Linen change	104.69	95.75	0.554	96.16	110.15	*0.086
Housekeeping	106.96	68.63	**0.011	104.09	103.93	0.985
Cleaning the dishes (washing and stacking)	106.72	71.56	*0.020	99.86	107.25	0.364
Window cleaning	105.42	87.09	0.213	101.42	106.02	0.562
Hanging and picking up laundry	105.94	80.84	*0.095	88.63	116.06	***0.001
Garbage collection	106.65	72.31	**0.020	99.05	107.88	0.267
Ironing	103.21	113.44	0.445	95.39	110.75	**0.033
Payment of bills (water, electricity, telephone, etc.)	105.64	84.38	0.147	113.73	96.37	**0.028
Smaller purchases (food, clothing, footwear, cosmetics)	105.82	82.31	0.117	98.22	108.53	0.201
Major purchases (furniture, car, etc.)	102.78	118.56	0.285	109.82	99.43	0.190
Minor repairs and maintenance (replacement of the bulb, clogging of drains, etc.). work around the house	105.14	90.38	0.289	104.60	103.53	0.886
Car cleaning and maintenance	103.57	109.19	0.699	106.64	101.93	0.548

The differences between groups are significant at level <0.1 (\*), <0.05 (\*\*), <0.01 (\*\*\*)

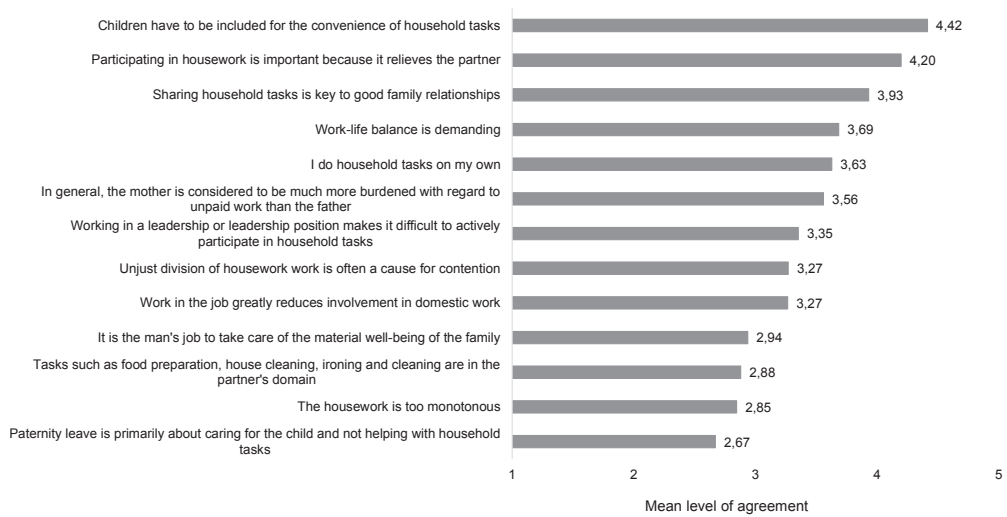
Results show that fathers who consider participation in care and upbringing of children as a relevant aspect of a responsible father do the following tasks significantly more frequently than the others: housekeeping, washing the dishes (washing and stacking), garbage collection and hanging up and collecting laundry (see Table 3). There are, however, no significant differences in frequency of participation in other activities.

Fathers who consider financial support as a relevant aspect of a responsible father pay the bills (water, electricity, telephone, etc.) more frequently than the others. There are, however, some tasks where their en-

gagement is less frequent: food preparation, hanging up and collecting laundry, ironing and change of linen. All the differences in frequency of these activities are significant. For other household tasks, we have discovered no significant results.

Additional analysis included 13 statements about fathers' work-life balance. Our respondents evaluated the level of agreement with each statement on a 5-point scale from 1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree. The means are shown in Figure 1. The bars are sorted in descending order so that the statements with highest average level of agreement appear at the top.

Figure 1  
Level of agreement with 13 statements about fathers' work-life balance



Our respondents on average agree most with the statements about importance of helping female partners in their housework. This help includes engagement of children (average level of agreement 4.42 on a scale from 1 to 5) and self-engagement (average 4.2), which is beneficial for good family relationships (average 3.93). The respondents

also expressed that they do household tasks on their own (average level of agreement 3.63 exceeded middle point of 3); they do not find housework too monotonous and think that the paternity leave is also important for helping in household. Respondents in general agree that work at their job reduces involvement in household (average 3.27)

and that active participation in household tasks is difficult for those that are working in leadership positions (average 3.35). The results are consistent with findings of Doyle et al. (2014) and suppose that in such cases women do the bulk of caregiving and household work.

Similarly to the previous analysis, we analysed the relationship between two aspects of responsible fathering and level of agreement with 13 statements. First, we fo-

cused on the aspect of responsible fathering related to providing of financial support. We compared 91 fathers who consider that an important aspect of a responsible father to 116 who do not. Then we compared 191 fathers who consider participation in care and upbringing of children as an important aspect of a responsible father to 16 who do not. The means for all analysed groups together with p-value (Sig.) computed using t-test are shown in Table 4.

Table 4  
Relation between aspects of a responsible father and average agreement with 13 statements regarding work-life balance

Statement – mean level of agreement	Participates in care, upbringing of children and actively spends the time with them and partner			Provides means of subsistence for the family (providing financial support)		
	Yes (n=191)	No (n=16)	Sig.	Yes (n=91)	No (n=116)	Sig.
Tasks such as food preparation, house cleaning, ironing and cleaning are in the partner's domain	2.81	3.75	***0.005	3.22	2.61	***0.001
It is the man's job to take care of the material well-being of the family	2.92	3.19	0.353	3.22	2.72	***0.001
Work in the job greatly reduces involvement in household tasks	3.26	3.31	0.769	3.41	3.16	*0.095
Paternity leave is primarily about caring for the child and not helping with household tasks	2.65	2.88	0.494	2.43	2.86	**0.012
Work-life balance is demanding	3.71	3.38	0.186	3.77	3.62	0.279
Sharing household tasks is key to good family relationships	3.98	3.31	***0.006	3.87	3.98	0.389
Working on a management or leadership position makes it difficult to actively participate in household	3.36	3.25	0.702	3.57	3.18	**0.012
In general, a mother is considered to be much more burdened with regard to unpaid work than a father	3.54	3.81	0.314	3.73	3.43	**0.043
The household work is too monotonous	2.82	3.13	0.317	2.91	2.79	0.465
Children have to be included in household tasks for the convenience of the household	4.43	4.25	0.325	4.44	4.4	0.661
Participating in household tasks is important because it relieves the partner	4.24	3.69	**0.011	4.21	4.19	0.872
Unjust division of household tasks is often a cause for contention	3.27	3.31	0.873	3.31	3.24	0.665
I do household tasks on my own	3.63	3.56	0.797	3.54	3.7	0.282

The differences between groups are significant at level <0.1 (\*), <0.05 (\*\*), <0.01 (\*\*\*)



From Table 4, we can deduce that fathers who consider participation in care and upbringing of children as an important aspect of a responsible father also find tasks such as food preparation, house cleaning, ironing and cleaning important. Their level of agreement with the statement that such tasks are in their partner's domain was on average 2.81, which is significantly less than the average of 3.75 on the other group ( $p=0.005$ ). Similarly, participating in household tasks (because it relieves the partner) is more important (average 4.24) for these fathers (compared to 3.69 on the other group  $p=0.011$ ). The same fathers on average agree more with the statement that sharing household tasks is key to good family relationships. The means for both groups (3.98 and 3.31 respectively) resulted in a significant difference ( $p=0.006$ ). For the second aspect of a responsible father (financial support), we discovered even more significant findings (see Table 4, last three columns). The fathers who consider financial support as a relevant aspect of a responsible father on average agree more that food preparation, house cleaning, etc. are more in their partner's domain. As expected, they think that the man's job is to take care of the material well-being of the family. They think that work in the job greatly reduces involvement in household tasks, especially when working in a management or leadership position, which makes work-life balance more difficult. Besides that, they agree significantly more with the statement that a mother is considered to be much more burdened with regard to unpaid work than a father. The results are consistent with findings of Nyman, Reinikainen & Eriksson (2018) and support the relative resource theories that state that the partner with greater external resources opts out of housework.

## DISCUSSION

The study explored fathers' engagement in household tasks and tried to identify the

role of gender in the household. Responsible fatherhood should be understood more broadly than involved fatherhood, since it focuses on caregiving and household tasks while continuing employment. This contributes to the theory of involved fatherhood, which according to Solomon (2014), Farstad & Stefansen (2015) and Bach (2019) refers to emotionally present, nurturing, caregiving fathers who continue their employment.

Results of the research support the stereotypical classification of household tasks in terms of gender. Fathers who consider participation in care and upbringing of children as a relevant aspect of a responsible father more frequently do housekeeping, washing the dishes (washing and stacking), garbage collection and hanging up and collecting laundry. According to the results, fathers also think that parenting and housework is important, because it relieves their partner, which confirms Doucet's (2007) claims that fathers are not »mothering« but are »re-inventing fathering«. This research adds to the empirical knowledge of undoing gender literature, since responsible fatherhood can be seen as a part of social change in the field of »undoing gender« and »caring masculinities«. This confirms Elliott's (2016) statement that caring masculinities constitute a critical form of men's engagement and involvement in gender equality and offer the potential of sustained social change for men and gender relations.

An analysis of the aspect of responsible father in terms of their household engagements and their perception of household tasks was also made. Results show that fathers who consider financial support as a relevant aspect of a responsible father more frequently pay the bills; they also agree that a mother is considered to be much more burdened with regard to unpaid work than a father. These results contribute to the Anderson et al. (2002) claims that changing gender roles and women's increased rates of

participation in the paid labour force fathers to assume different parenting responsibilities, since they also do household tasks.

Results of the research show that fathers understand paternity leave primarily as caregiving and not helping with household tasks, which is in accordance with involved fatherhood theory (Solomon (2014), Farstad & Stefansen (2015)), but responsible fathers should focus on caregiving and household tasks as well. According to Tamm (2019), some EU countries have stipulated the paternity quotas for parental leave in order to achieve more equal distribution of childcare, household tasks and employment between women and men, which confirms the definition of responsible fatherhood. Although fathers in Slovenia have had the legal possibility of sharing the use of parental leave with their partners, statistics on the use of parental leave show that fathers still transfer most of their parental leave to the child's mother and use only non-transferable paternity leave. Slovenia should stipulate paternity quotas for the parental leave.

The focus of the paper was to investigate fathers' engagement in household tasks, their perception on »being responsible« and how these two aspects are related. We confirmed a relationship between these two aspects. It would, however, be interesting to investigate this relationship in more detail. For instance, Kosakowska-Berezecka et al. (2016) claim that father's type of employment influences the amount of time they spend with their children; atypical employment might give men more opportunities to engage in the household. A possibility for future work would be to relate the perception on »being responsible« and type of employment (not just employed/self-employed but more detailed).

The survey was conducted just before the COVID-19 pandemic. It would therefore be interesting to analyse how the perception of fathers as being »responsible« changed

in this year. Besides the socio-demographic characteristics that could be included in the current survey (such as statistical region, type of settlement: urban/rural), other properties relevant for the pandemic could be measured (possibilities to work from home, availability of broadband Internet connection, access to computer, etc.). The other possibility for further research could be to ask the same questions to the mothers from the household and compare their perceptions.

## CONCLUSIONS

For equality between men and women, equal participation from men in childcare and household tasks should be achieved. In September 2019, in a Central European country, we conducted a survey among 207 employed or self-employed men living with their female partners and children in the same household. In the paper, we answered the main research question, i.e. we identified more dominantly »female« and »male« household tasks and fathers' perception of them. The results support the stereotypical classification of household tasks in terms of gender. Results show that mothers (women) still do most of the care and household tasks. The tasks with highest father participation are minor repairs and maintenance, together with work around the house, car cleaning and maintenance, major purchases, payment of bills and garbage collection. The other household tasks are carried out predominantly by their female partners, especially ironing, window cleaning, hanging up and collecting laundry and linen change.

In the paper, we confirmed both hypotheses we tested. The results show that fathers who consider participation in care and upbringing of children as a relevant aspect of a responsible father more frequently do housekeeping, washing the dishes (washing and stacking), garbage collection and hanging up and collecting laundry (confirmed H1).

Fathers who consider financial support as a relevant aspect of a responsible father more frequently pay the bills but less frequently do the food preparation, hanging up and collecting laundry and ironing and change of linen (confirmed H2). That is even more evident for respondents working in leadership positions. They agree that a mother is considered to be much more burdened with regard to unpaid work than a father.

Even though men are more involved in household tasks and childcare, results show that equality between men and women has not been achieved. To support these results with qualitative studies (i.e. interviews) and to find out what men and women think should be done to achieve gender equality in the field of childcare and household tasks, we are planning to make a survey among couples in further research.

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## **Sažetak**

### **SUDJELOVANJE OČEVA U SKRBI ZA DJECU I KUĆANSKIM POSLOVIMA**

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*U radu se predstavljaju rezultati istraživanja o sudjelovanju očeva u skrbi za djecu i kućanskim poslovima te o njihovom shvaćanju uloge oca u obitelji. Cilj rada je istražiti što očevi smatraju »odgovornim ponašanjem« i kako je njihovo poimanje istog povezano s njihovim angažmanom i ulogom u kućanstvu. Stoga smo proveli istraživanje među zaposlenim i samozaposlenim muškarcima koji žive u istom kućanstvu sa svojim partnericama i djecom. Istraživanje je provedeno u rujnu 2019. godine u srednjoeuropskoj zemlji (Sloveniji). Rezultati istraživanja podupiru stereotipnu klasifikaciju kućanskih poslova s obzirom na spol. Očevi koji smatraju sudjelovanje u skrbi za djecu i odgoju djece važnim aspektom odgovornog očinstva češće održavaju dom, peru suđe (pranje i slaganje suđa), iznose smeće, vješaju i pospremaju opranu odjeću. Očevi koji smatraju financijsku potporu važnim aspektom odgovornog očinstva češće plaćaju račune; i oni se slažu da je majka opterećenija neplaćenim poslom nego što je to otac.*

**Ključne riječi:** skrb za djecu, kućanski posao, majka, otac, usklađivanje privatnog i poslovnog života.