

# Caring Masculinities and Flexibilisation of Labour Markets: Fathers in Precarious and Managerial Employment in Slovenia

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## Abstract

The starting point of this article is that the transition from breadwinning to involved fathering is not only a matter of changing men's identities, but is profoundly shaped by broader societal structures, among which labour markets appear as crucial. Given that in Slovenia flexibilisation of the labour markets is a salient issue, this qualitative study, based on explorative, in-depth, semi-structured, individual interviews with fathers in precarious and managerial employment, analyses how insecure and flexible work arrangements shape fatherhood practices, impact on chances of being an involved father and structure gender relations. Narratives of fathers in managerial positions point to the persistence of the breadwinner model of fathering with limited participation in childcare, expressed as "weekend fatherhood," but also to a more egalitarian share of childcare, mainly among young fathers in managerial positions. Though the experiences of fathers in precarious employment point to their pronounced involvement in childcare, some cases in our sample indicate that precarious working relations can also, in a perverse way, lead to the strengthening of the breadwinner model and re-traditionalisation of gender relations.

**Keywords:** men; masculinities; fathering; childcare; reconciliation of work and family; flexibilisation of work



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## **Introduction: From Breadwinning to Involved Fatherhood**

Contemporary fatherhood is established as a discursive and political terrain, in which negotiations take place about the reconstruction of modern masculinities. At the centre of these negotiations lies a redefinition of men's attitude to women, children and the family that presumes a different attitude to paid work and to the relationship between paid and care work (Crespi and Ruspini 2016; Puchert et al. 2005; Scambor et al. 2014; Williams 1998). In public debates, involved fatherhood is often considered a problem of changing men's identities and raising men's awareness about the importance of an equal division of care work for gender equality and the benefit of children. However, this often ignores the fact that the possibilities of individual changes in fatherhood practices are importantly defined by broader structures, policies and organisations that can enable, hinder or even punish individual change (Levtov et al. 2015). Feminist studies (Hobson 2002) place the establishment of norms and practices of fatherhood within the intersection of the state, the (labour) market and the family. According to Connell (2005), the state with its policies is critical for the social regulation of gender relations, especially with policies that regulate family relations, care rights and obligations, including fatherhood. Indeed, in the European Union (EU) the most targeted shift from father-breadwinners to involved fathers has been made through the social policies of de-commodification (Esping-Andersen 1990; Knijn and Ostner 2002), which liberated not only working mothers but also working fathers from labour market dependency in the early years of child rearing. Examples include a gender-neutral definition of rights towards children (parental leave); determination of the length, financial compensation and division of parental leave between partners; exercise of special paternal leave and daddy's quota; and regulation of custody in the case of divorce. However, de-commodification policies that promote involved fatherhood have run into the reality of the globalised neoliberal flexibilisation of the labour markets.

Labour markets shape the relations between employment and care, gender norms and identities, including the relations between men and women. Through the conditions of paid work, such as its length, organisation, predictability and the flexibility of working hours, the degree of workers' autonomy, the amount of income, length of paid leave, conditions of promotion, the organisational culture, and possibilities for reconciling work and private life, the labour market influences either the subordination or autonomy of private life in relation to paid work. Hanlon and Lynch (2011) say that in the contemporary labour markets the basic norm of an ideal worker presumes a self-sufficient, competitive individual who is mobile, flexible and fully available to the employer, who primarily does not have care responsibilities and is entirely focused on paid work. The global neoliberal economy strengthens the father-breadwinner model by upholding competitiveness, a culture of long working hours, the criterion of individual performance, the flexibility of working relationships and working hours, a reduction of labour costs by lowering income and eroding the rights arising from work, high unemployment, underemployment and precarity. In this context men who exercise

fathers' rights to care for children are positioned as less promising workers. Studies (Puchert et al. 2005) that reveal fathers' experiences with the glass ceiling, with professional, hierarchical and income degradation if they exercise paternal leave, the right to part-time work, leave to care for a sick child and so forth, show that men who want to become more actively involved in childcare experience similar discrimination and segregation in the labour market as women. In addition, the "punishment" of men who choose to care through economic sanctions and status devaluation represents a cultural pattern of reproducing the norm of men as focused on paid work.

The norm of the ideal worker strengthens the commodification of workers and the privatisation/familisation of care and reinforces the perception of paid work and care as mutually disconnected spheres of life; it fails to recognise that unpaid care work, with its daily and intergenerational reproduction of people, is the main condition of both the welfare and the economy. Among others, this disregard is seen in the lack of mechanisms for reconciling paid work and care in working organisations, which is particularly typical of masculinised sectors of work. Where possibilities of work/care reconciliation do exist, it is assumed that they are chiefly used by women as mothers, resulting in men who want to balance paid work with care facing a lack of understanding and prejudice from employers and their fellow workers. The difficulty for men to reconcile paid work and care is gradually gaining recognition in the EU (Crespi and Ruspini 2016; Scambor et al. 2014). However, policy debates often fail to see the effects of flexibilisation of the labour markets that impose numerous new forms of employment. The labour market becomes the critical structure determining fatherhood, not only due to the traditional identification of masculinity with the ideal worker (Hanlon 2012), but also because the position of men in the labour market determines their autonomy and access to the resources and the time men can dedicate to fathering, the length of paid leave, health insurance, parental benefits and so forth. Social and employment policies link social citizenship, i.e. social rights and de-commodification mechanisms, including parental ones, to a precisely defined type of employment—so-called formal standard employment—while excluding workers employed in non-standard formal employment that is becoming ever more popular (Standing 2011). Therefore, for different groups of men, fatherhood is transformed by the neoliberal labour markets in different ways: on the one hand there is an increasing number of men who are unemployed, underemployed, with insecure employment conditions, and whose position in the labour markets does not allow them to earn enough to support their families. On the other hand, some men work long hours, are totally available to their employers and work in a (masculinised) culture of "presentism" and "homosexuality" (Collinson and Hearn 2005), and who have high income and benefits, but are completely alienated from their private lives.

This article stems from the thesis that changing fathering practices needs to be observed also from the perspective of men's heterogeneous positions in the labour markets in terms of standard and non-standard forms of employment, which, in different ways, including through inclusion/exclusion from de-commodification mechanisms, enable or

hinder their capacities for involved fatherhood. On the basis of individual interviews with fathers in different employment positions in Slovenia (a post-socialist, former Yugoslav country that joined the EU in 2004), fathering practices and experiences of precariously employed fathers and fathers in management positions are analysed in order to take a critical view on the effect of labour market flexibilisation on caring masculinity and gender equality.

We begin by presenting the particularities of the Slovenian context of fatherhood and labour market flexibilisation. The article's purpose is not to highlight the national context, but to use it as one of the numerous possible locations in which global processes of labour market liberalisation and transformations of fatherhood are taking place. In the methodological section we present data collection and sample characteristics. The third and fourth sections focus on the analyses of the fathers' narratives and, in the final section, the findings are critically interpreted.

## **Fatherhood and the Flexibilisation of Work in Slovenia**

In the EU, the Slovenian context of fatherhood is specific due to the previous socialist experience of full-time employment and economic emancipation of women that has enabled the establishment in the EU of one of the most notable examples of the adult worker family model (Lister et al. 2007) in which both men and women participate in paid full-time work.<sup>1</sup> This was enabled by the high degree of de-familisation (Lister 1997) of childcare in the 1970s, by which the state not only ensures financial benefits to families, but also provides public services through establishing a high quality, subsidised and universally accessible network of preschools besides a quality scheme of parental rights. Parental leave, which is in place nowadays in Slovenia, was established in 1986 with a total duration of 365 days: 105 days of it is maternity leave, and 260 days is childcare leave, which the partners can share arbitrarily. Together with Sweden, Slovenia was one of the first European countries to define parental leave rights in a gender-neutral way where—at least symbolically—the naturalisation of motherhood was decentralised. By 2012 the maternity and parental benefit covered by the state was 100 per cent of income from labour, while after that the parental benefit was lowered to 90 per cent due to the austerity measures. During the transition from socialism to capitalism, in 2003, this leave scheme was upgraded with paid and non-transferable paternal leave, known in Scandinavian countries as “a daddy quota”, which comprises 30 days of fully paid childcare leave. Structurally, the situation of accessible public childcare provision combined with both partners' full-time employment set the

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1 According to EUROSTAT in 2015 in Slovenia, among over 80 per cent of working women between the age of 24–54 years old, only 14.8 per cent worked part time compared to the EU where the average of part-time working women was 31.5 per cent.

conditions for de-familisation of childcare, more egalitarian gender relations and involvement of men in care work.<sup>2</sup>

During the transition from socialism to capitalism, de-familisation of childcare has not been deconstructed as in many other Eastern European countries.<sup>3</sup> The labour markets experienced profound changes that are revealed in the flexibilisation, dualisation, intensification and precarisation of work (Ignjatović 2002). The flexibilisation of work implies a reduction in the number of standard working relations that typically involve continued open-ended contracts, full-time (8 hour) working hours where the worker has one employer and access to social rights from labour (Standing 2011; Vosko 2010), and a rise in the number of non-standard employment forms that often (although not necessarily) establish the precarisation of life: such as part-time work that does not bring enough income for survival; fixed-term work that is uncertain; self-employment and contract work that is exempt from social and labour protection. In the last decade, during the economic crises, destandardisation and flexibilisation of work became a salient public issue in Slovenia, fully discussed within the framework of precarisation. It has mainly affected young people as “new-comers” to the labour markets and potential or actual parents of young children. A 2006 study, conducted even before the economic crisis, showed that three-quarters of young people under the age of 35 were employed under fixed-term contracts (Kanjuo Mrčela and Černigoj Sadar 2007). Despite the recent growth in the employment rate, almost all new employment positions are non-standard (mostly fixed-term jobs and self-employment), meaning that employment in non-standard working relationships is not voluntary but forced. The non-standard forms most frequent in Slovenia include self-employment, contracts for copyrighted work, subcontracting, agency work, fixed-term employment and part-time employment (Kanjuo Mrčela and Ignjatović 2015).

Studies show that due to needs for work and family reconciliation, along with the feminisation of the service economy, mainly women are subjected to the flexibilisation of labour (Vosko 2010). However, in Slovenia the precarisation of labour affects both women and men, but in different ways. The feminised non-standard form of work typically refers to part-time employment, while in fixed-term employment the share of men and women is equalised (amounting to 11% of all employees in 2014) (Kanjuo Mrčela and Ignjatović 2015). Men predominate in self-employment, contract work and agency work. While fixed-term and part-time work is performed within working organisations, with employees having a proportional share of social rights and de-commodification benefits deriving from employment, self-employment and contract work belong among distinctly de-regularised, individualised jobs that are exempt from

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2 The 2014 OECD research “Balancing paid work, unpaid work and leisure” shows high levels of inclusion of men in Slovenia in childcare and domestic work, which places Slovenia on par with the Scandinavian countries.

3 For instance in Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, resulting in their current confrontation of the re-domestication of women and the return of the strong father-breadwinner model (Saxonberg 2011).

labour rights and de-commodification chances. In the case of agency work, workers are also subjected to exploitation. The increasing share of precarious employment is radically exacerbating inequality between those employed in standard and non-standard employment (Standing 2011). Precarious employment means uncertainty and instability, the performance of occasional paid work, a combination of several jobs at the same time, underemployment or over-employment that alternate with periods of unemployment, and the absence of rights or only partial inclusion in rights that apply to those with standard employment, like training and education, paid leave and sick leave, maternity, paternal and parental leave, pension, health insurance and unemployment benefits (Gherardi and Murgia 2013). These conditions establish an employee's dependency and non-autonomy in relation to their employer, a high degree of commodification and consequently the subordination of other spheres of life, including parenthood, to paid work.

Management of companies in Slovenia is almost completely masculinised: in 2015, among the largest companies that are listed on the stock exchange, men represented 93 per cent of chairmen of the board, 85 per cent of the director-generals, and 78 per cent of CEOs (European Commission 2015). Though working as a manager appears as a safe and standard job with considerable inclusion in the de-commodification mechanisms and high autonomy over work conditions, it is also a flexible employment which typically includes long working hours, frequent absence due to business travel, performing work "whenever and anywhere" (Fagan et al. 2012) and constant availability to the company. Studies show that fathers in managerial positions make use of paternal and parental leave less frequently than other groups of employed fathers (Halrynjo 2015). Presentism, irreplaceability and business performance are the key characteristics of the managerial career path. A longer absence from work is perceived by managers as a risk of degradation in professional career and reduction of the future career and promotion opportunities. This is the model of the irreplaceable worker in the company and the replaceable parent in childcare (Halrynjo 2015).

Fathers in managerial and precarious employment represent two contrasting poles of social and economic power, autonomy towards paid work and de-commodification resources. Though they are both strongly hit by labour market flexibilisation, they face different challenges in reconciliation of work and childcare and they also perceive and solve them differently. In the a later section we analyse the experiences of both groups of fathers with their paid work in relation to fatherhood.

## **Methodology: Data Collection and Sample Characteristics**

The empirical material comes from the action-research project "Fathers and Employers in Action."<sup>4</sup> The aim of the study was to analyse how precarious and managerial

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4 The project was carried out in 2015 and 2016 and was funded by Norway Financial Mechanism for Slovenia. The partnership involved the Peace Institute (coordinator), University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Sciences, the Association of Free Trade Unions Slovenia, Nicha, d.o.o. and Norway Partner

employment positions influence men’s fatherhood practices. More specifically, we were interested in mapping the problems fathers face in balancing paid and care work because of their position in the workplace. Given that the purpose of the study was not statistical generalisations but a qualitative exploration of the “how” and “why” of a phenomenon in a real-life context, the qualitative method (in-depth, semi-structured, individual interviews) was chosen as an approach which enables researchers to study phenomena related to intimacy (family, childcare, balancing work and care) by using smaller samples and to delve more deeply into the explanation of the phenomena.

Interviews with 23 fathers were conducted between April and May 2015. The sample included 12 fathers in precarious employment and 11 fathers in managerial positions. The rationale for selecting the respondents was to include diverse types of precarious and managerial employment and to include respondents with children under the age of 10, because of the assumption that younger children need more caring engagement.

**Table 1:** Respondents by pseudonym, employment status, age and the number of children

	<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Employment status</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Number of children</i>
1.	Viktor	Director	54	2
2.	Primož	Director	59	5
3.	Borut	Director	42	2
4.	Glavca	Director	36	1
5.	Igor	Director	35	1
6.	Ivo	Director	46	3
7.	Kristofer	Director	43	1
8.	Marjetica	Director	39	2
9.	Omas	Head of unit	38	2*(divorced; shared custody)
10.	Uroš	Director	40	2
11.	Oče 75	Head of unit	40	1
12.	Bojan	Fixed-term employment	43	2
13.	Duh	Self-employed	40	2
14.	Zvonko	Self-employed	36	2
15.	Nikolas	Self-employed	41	2
16.	Bono	Contract worker	38	2
17.	Ciril	Self-employed	40	4
18.	Daniel	Self-employed	37	2
19.	Franc	Self-employed	38	2
20.	Janko	Contract worker	51	3

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Reform: Resource Centre for Men. More information about the project is available on <http://www.mirovni-institut.si/projekti/ocetje-in-delodajalci-v-akciji-oda/>.

21.	Jure	Contract worker	26	1
22.	Mark	Fixed-term employment	46	3
23.	Matjaž	Self-employed	43	1

The sample of managers is homogenous with regard to marital status, education and type of household. Among the respondents 10 were married, while one father was divorced and shares child custody with his former partner. Seven fathers have university education, two hold a Master's degree and one has a secondary school diploma. Five interviewed fathers live in urban areas, and six fathers in small towns.

Compared to fathers in managerial positions, the sample of fathers in precarious employment is more heterogeneous with regard to their marital status, with half of the respondents being married and half living in cohabitation. The heterogeneity of the sample is also seen in the degree of education, in which six fathers have a secondary school diploma, two fathers have university education, two fathers have occupational school qualifications and one holds a PhD. Two-thirds of the respondents live in urban areas, and one-third live in small towns. Given that among men in non-standard employment we found largely predominant self-employees and that self-employment appears as the most precarious employment status (which is on the increase in Slovenia), the large share of self-employed men in the sample seemed justified.

For recruiting respondents, the snowball and the link-tracing methods were used. Managers were also recruited through trade unions and employer associations. Interviews were carried out by four researchers, which enabled engaging several social networks. With all respondents, interviewing was based on voluntary informed consent. Interviews lasted one to two hours and were conducted either at the respondents' working premises or in their homes. Before starting each interview, the respondent was asked to give consent for tape recording. They were informed that they were free not to answer individual questions or to opt out of the interview at any time. The interviews were recorded and transcribed.

The interview foci were explorative and went beyond the topic of this article. The interview schedule was divided into two parts: the first part surveyed the family life of respondents, exploring questions related to normative and lived experiences of fathering, relations with their partners and extended family, reactions from peer networks on becoming a father, and so forth. The second part was focused on employment status and explored changes in professional life after childbirth, responses from employers on becoming a father, strategies for balancing work and fathering and related problems. Apart from analysing how men experienced becoming a father from the first part of the interview schedule, in this article we are focusing on analysis of the following questions from the second part of the questionnaire: What is your employment status? How does your employment influence care for your children? What



mechanisms for balancing work and care do you have in your employment? What specific problems do you face in balancing work and care in your situation?

The principal approach used in analysis was using open and focused coding, which serves as a systematic search for similarities in broad categories (fathers as managers, fathers in different types of precarious employments) and differences between them in identifying the problems that fathers face in balancing work and care because of their positions in the work. This small and explorative study has several limitations: the sample was reduced and does not allow for generalisations; the only observed variable was employment status and its consequences for balancing work and childcare, meaning that the research design was basic and would benefit from more complex exploration (for instance with the inclusion of other demographic variables such as age, education and partner's employment status). Nevertheless, the findings indicate problems, reveal trends and provide questions for further study of how the flexibilisation of employment affects combining paid work and care for different social groups of fathers.

## **Fathers in Managerial Positions**

In terms of their workload, fathers in managerial positions share their working schedule, which often exceeds a 40-hour working week, and a high degree of autonomy in the organisation of their working time. The long working hours of most of the interviewed fathers remained unchanged when their children were born, with some of the fathers even starting to work slightly longer. The working week ranges on average between 50 and 60 hours, but a period of up to 80 hours per week was also found.

Frequent work in the evenings, when children go to bed or over the weekend, and constant accessibility to the company are characteristic of fathers in managerial positions. The interviewed fathers limit themselves in taking, for example, paternal and parental leave due to the belief that longer absence would negatively affect their work performance. They justify their limited role in early childcare by a traditional view that during their first year a child needs his/her mother the most. Even when taking paternal leave, they still performed work duties.

The interviews with fathers in managerial positions exposed two models of relations between paid work and fathering: a modified version of the father-breadwinner and a more egalitarian model of fathering.

The first model includes fathers who have devoted their lives to a professional career, and their partners, often employed in part-time jobs, who devoted their lives to family life and childcare. This group of fathers in managerial positions considers paid work as a “hobby,” “pleasure,” “challenge,” or “mission” that also brings the major part of the earnings to the family budget. As one of the interviewed fathers pointed out, he and his wife agreed on dividing the caring and household work according to the criterion of how much each of them contributed to supporting the family financially. With his

monthly earnings representing the major part of the family budget, they agreed that caring duties in the family, such as taking leave to care for the sick child, fell completely in his partner's domain. Frequently, the female partners started to work with shortened working hours after childbirth, while the fathers did not change their working hours, or in some cases even started to work longer. They had never even thought of working shorter working hours, considering it to be in opposition with their career. Their partners' reducing their working hours or even abandoning their careers enables men full inclusion in paid work that, in turn, influences their share of participation in family life, which is mainly squeezed into the frame of "weekend fathering." Their everyday life is subordinated to paid work, that takes between 10 and 14 hours a day, limiting their time for family and fathering to early mornings, late afternoons and evenings, and primarily to weekends, holidays and vacations. Since they are largely absent from home, they are also less involved in family life and everyday caring routines, as pointed out by one of the interviewed fathers: "More or less my wife spends time with our daughter, doing homework, afternoon activities, managing the schedules, and so on. I mean, I know what is going on, but it is surely because I am not at home so much, that I'm not so present in all these activities" (Kristofer 43, 1).<sup>5</sup>

The second model is typical of fathers belonging primarily to younger generations, which in the interviews showed a more pronounced shift to involved fatherhood. This type of relationship approaches the model of dual earner/dual carer family model (Leira 2006). Changes in fatherhood most often happened in the sphere of home, where the interviewed men share their childcare duties with their partners, which results in the balance between paid work and childcare becoming the concern of both partners: women and men. The primary reasons for changes towards the involved fatherhood arise within specific circumstances because of the female partner's employment position. From the interviews it became clear that the female partner's job position was the main reason for the father to take on more caring duties. One of the interviewed fathers pointed out that both he and his female partner occupy managerial positions, which was the reason for dividing childcare equally. Their system of balancing paid work and childcare is based on a careful organisation of time and division of family duties, which includes occasionally asking for help from grandparents.

My partner has a similarly demanding job as I do, at the roughly similar, demanding level in terms of job and career, and we simply ended up in being quite equal in childcare, since we are already completely equal in positions at work. So, we are actually very well organised, I'd say. Meaning that one of us leaves earlier for work, and the other leaves work earlier to fetch the child, or the other way round. If there are meetings, one attends the meeting and the other minds the child ... we mainly make arrangements as it happens, almost a week ahead, whose turn it is to take a business trip, while also engaging grandparents, when necessary.(Oče 40, 1)

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5 Fathers' names are pseudonyms; the numbers represent the father's age and the number of children.

Fathering practices, perceived in the interviews with a younger generation of fathers, include a larger engagement in childcare, both in terms of being emotionally connected with the child and in sharing care work with their partner. Fathers' increased participation in childcare, which also involves availability in terms of time, leads to the understanding that balancing paid work and childcare concerns both men and women.

### **Reconciliation of Paid Work and Care for Children as a Non-Issue**

If most of the interviewed fathers in managerial positions do not experience the reconciliation of work and childcare as a problem, the opposite applies to their female partners. The latter take on the major part of childcare and, in turn, the burden of reconciling professional and family duties. Most often, fathers' reconciliation of paid work and childcare depends on their female partners' reconciliation possibilities. Besides their female partners playing the key role in childcare, help is frequently provided by grandparents who, by minding grandchildren, enable the interviewed fathers' continuity in doing paid work, which was pointed out by one father: "I don't take it [sick child leave], because we have the granny-service. So that work doesn't suffer, we leave them at granny's to take care of them" (Uroš 40, 2). Apart from the informal childcare done by grandparents, some parents also make use of paid childcare and household help.

Conflict is more likely to appear in the family than in the working environment, as fathers give priority to paid work and their career. Difficulties with reconciliation of paid work and childcare are faced by fathers in managerial positions who participate in family life to a large extent and share family duties and childcare with their female partners. As pointed out by Oče (40, 1): "Sometimes I wish I was not so nervous" at work, mainly due to unforeseen obligations at work or when work intensifies due to deadlines. In these situations it becomes difficult to reconcile paid work and childcare if the fathers want to be involved in everyday childcare and other family obligations. Also, fathers who are more involved in childcare rarely adapted their paid work to childcare and other family obligations.

Fathers estimated that paid work is influencing family dynamics to a much greater extent than vice versa. However, long working hours, constant availability to the company and being present whenever needed, are perceived by fathers as an integral part of organisational culture and their careers, around which other parts of life are organised—and not as obstacles limiting their fatherhood to "weekend fathering." Flexible work time, referring to the flexibility of arrival and departure from work, including the possibility to work "whenever and anywhere," were the most frequently mentioned factors that enable the interviewed fathers in managerial positions to take over childcare obligations. The flexibility of working hours is perceived as positive in that there is no specified timeframe when the individual should be present at work, which gives a sense of autonomy and self-organisation of work and family life. There is a pronounced emphasis on self-regulation in performing the work and a high sense of

work commitment, including a need for over-achievement, which is not reflected by fathers in managerial positions as having negative impacts on their fathering practices.

## **Fathers in Precarious Working Relations**

### **A Heterogeneity of Precarious Work Forms in Relation to Fathering Practices**

Fathers in precarious employment are not a homogeneous group—they face diverse working conditions, workloads, degrees of autonomy vis-à-vis employers/customers, various forms of flexibilisation and degrees of uncertainty. In our sample, three distinctly different types of relations between precarious work and fathering can be identified.

The first type involves fathers who take on every order they receive, regardless of family obligations and plans. They are always accessible, their work is not measured by hours, but by completed orders, the work must be finished by specific deadlines and cannot be done from home. These workers do not have much autonomy when it comes to organising their work time—when there are orders they must work, and when there are no orders they can be with their children. This group includes mainly self-employees and contract workers, but also employees in micro-enterprises where the absence of one employee in the company poses a problem of replacement. The problems experienced by these workers are primarily economic coercion to be 100 per cent available to customers and employers, the unpredictability of work with simultaneous inflexible timeframes for the execution of work, and their irreplaceability at work.

The second type can be defined as including fixed-term and self-employed workers with a stable contract with one company. These fathers work in less flexible forms of employment with a relatively predictable workload and timeframe. In their narratives, fathers in these forms of employment—which are, in fact, very close to standard employment patterns—express satisfaction with their possibilities to reconcile work and involved fatherhood. The key characteristics of less flexible precarious jobs are the stability and predictability of work time, and the certainty that work is guaranteed by the employer, not by the employee himself. However, fathers who only have a fixed-term contract expressed high concerns about whether the employer will extend their contracts. As a consequence, they are very careful in using leave of absence, sick leave and paternal leave because they fear their employer will not extend their contract if they don't fit the norm of an ideal worker who is free of responsibilities.

The third type could be named a “reversal of roles” and includes fathers who are not employed, those who perform occasional work under contracts for copyrighted work and subcontracts, or identify themselves highly with their work, although their workload determines them as underemployed. Considering their working, economic and social position, the underemployed, who represent a growing part of the young intellectual precariat, are much closer to the unemployed than the employed. They do not have social and workers' rights from labour, they work less time than they would want to, for

a lower payment than needed for survival, and in jobs in which they do not use the education they have achieved (Kanjuro Mrčela and Ignjatović 2015). If their partners are engaged in standard employment, the traditional model of the male breadwinner/female carer is reversed. In such partnerships, the partners establish a strong alliance that aims to preserve at any cost the female partner's standard employment, because it enables the survival of the family. In these cases, fathers take on most of the domestic work besides full childcare:

My partner is in full-time employment, I adapt to her work time. There is not a thing that I do not do. (Zvonko, 36, 2)

She brings the money home, which is why I adapt to the maximum because I am the one who only pays half the contributions, because I only have a 20-hour working week. First, I adapt to the family, because my wife brings in the money, and only then to the business, so the business suffers. (Franc, 38, 2)

Fathers in this group strive hard to stay in business, but since they have taken on the responsibility for domestic and care work, they are quite limited in the time they can devote to work:

I work when my child is asleep in the afternoon for one and a half hours, and from half past ten in the evening to three in the morning. Three to five hours daily. (Duh, 40, 2)

I work five to six hours a day, on the weekends, from 22:00 to 01:00, when the children have gone to bed. (Zvonko, 36, 2)

In these forms of work fathers are placed in the role that is traditionally taken on by women as mothers; they totally subordinate their work to their children's care needs and their partners' career demands, putting their own careers on hold.

### **The Problems of Reconciling Work and Fatherhood in Precarious Employments**

A distinctive characteristic of precarious employment is the worker's 100 per cent availability and accessibility to the employer or customer. This leads to loosening the boundaries between home and work towards the adaptation of private life to work, under the pressure of not getting any work and thus income if the worker is not available. This pressure has been particularly strong given the high unemployment (11.2% in 2015) experienced in Slovenia for the past 10 years. In precarious employment, the borderlines between home and work are also being loosened by the location of the workplace: for many precarious workers this is in their own home where work is performed at any time, often at night or on weekends. While the possibility of occasional work from home and the possibility that the worker organises their own work time are important strategies for reconciling paid work and care for children, they can have numerous negative effects in the situation where 24/7 availability is required.

Work outside standard hours—that is, work on weekends, holidays, at night, in the evening, and in the afternoons—is an important feature of precarious employment that makes the reconciliation of paid work and care for children more difficult. This produces childcare problems, as the public network of preschools is organised to cater for parents holding standard employment that starts in the morning and lasts for eight hours. This turns out to be particularly complicated in situations when both partners are employed in non-standard employment, which was the case for several couples in our sample. Such a situation makes parents dependent on their own parents and informal help to care for the children if these possibilities are available to them in the first place:

Neighbours, my mother-in-law, my parents help take care of him. (Franc, 38, 2)

When the children were little we had a nanny three times a week so that I could do some work. Financially, it did not pay off, but this way you stay in business. Nannies are expensive. (Zvonko, 36, 2)

When informal forms of childcare are not accessible, parents find themselves in great distress and often endure extra costs for childcare because they have to pay for an (unsubsidised) nanny. While childcare for employees in standard employments is de-familised and considered a public concern, for precarious workers childcare turns into a private issue for the family. This situation is exacerbated by the unpredictability of the workload, due to which it is impossible to plan orders, work obligations and timeframes, making it impossible for families to plan their mutual leisure time and giving them sudden and unexpected problems with providing care for their children.

Some forms of precarious work are distinctively seasonal, so that in certain periods work is extremely intense, making it completely impossible for fathers to be involved in caring for the children. Due to economic pressures, the season needs to be fully exploited because it is followed by “dry periods” when there is no work, and with workers facing uncertainty as to whether they will receive new orders and how they will survive through periods of not having work. These worries affect the whole family:

Flexibility negatively affects the whole family due to uncertainty, which puts pressure on the parents, and the children also feel it. (Daniel, 37, 2)

When there is a hole, when there is no work, it is stressful, due to worries, finances. (Matjaž, 43, 1)

Self-employed fathers estimate that, in principle, they do not receive paternal, parental and sick leave allowance to care for a sick child (meaning that they have different and limited access to de-commodification mechanisms compared to standard employees) even if they have to pay social security contributions in those months when they have no income. They think that for people with non-standard employment, taking leave to care for a sick child is linked to so much bureaucracy that they prefer to stay at home without compensation and do their work at home: “If the child is sick, I am at home, but

I work from home” (Matjaž, 43, 1). Due to pressure of being 100 per cent available to the employer and the customers, fathers in precarious employment in our sample are generally very reserved about all forms of leave to which workers employed in standard employment are entitled. They estimate that they cannot afford them because they would lose either their jobs or their customers, or this would threaten the extension of their contract. A self-employed father whose partner is also a self-employee says:

For me or her there is no sick leave, holiday allowance and holiday leave. When both children had chickenpox, this meant staying at home twice for two weeks; we were nearly broke by the end of the month. (Nikolas, 40, 2)

It means that fathers in precarious employment have less autonomy and limited access to de-commodification mechanisms for childcare compared to standard employees.

## **Conclusion: Flexibilisation of Work as a Factor of the Re-Traditionalisation of Gender Relations**

In Slovenia, the state encourages involved fatherhood through its mechanisms of de-commodification (parental leave scheme) and de-familisation (public childcare services). However, complications arise concerning the relation to labour markets where flexibilisation and precarisation cause considerable commodification and non-autonomy of workers in relation to employers. This impacts on parenting in terms of time and care for children as it is subordinate to labour market forces and understood as a private issue. If a decade ago studies (Puchert et al. 2005) were testing the optimistic view that aspects such as: the flexibilisation of work; the establishment of new, flexible forms of employment that include shorter working hours; greater autonomy in the organisation of work; working from home; and occasional exits from the labour market due to caring for children could “free up” male life courses from total subordination to work and allow them larger involvement in intimate relationships, it is clear today that the flexibilisation of work did not develop in the direction of flexicurity but towards the precarisation of work and life. The group of fathers in managerial positions in our sample solve this contradiction by continuing to pursue the model of father-breadwinner with limited participation in childcare. Frequently their female partners gave up their careers after childbirth, started working part-time, and took over primary responsibility for childcare. This enabled their male partners to pursue their careers without interruption. Only the interviews with young fathers in managerial positions with partners in similar occupations show a shift towards involved fatherhood and an egalitarian model of sharing paid and care work between the partners. Changes happen solely at home, with fathers taking on more care duties, not in the employment sphere by adapting working hours to care. Reconciliation of paid work and childcare is not perceived as a problematic issue by most of the interviewed managers, since the main responsibility for family obligations is on their female partners. Flexibility of work shapes the manager’s fathering practices towards “weekend fathering” and fosters the traditional division of gender roles into the male breadwinner and female carer model.

The individual efforts of those fathers in managerial positions, who are already practising involved fatherhood and experience work-life balance problems, are important to learn about, because they can influence the organisational culture towards a family- and individual-friendly environment. On the one hand, the managements of companies determine the companies' policies regarding the reconciliation of work and family and have the possibility to introduce and implement practices of an employee-friendly organisational culture. On the other hand, men in leading positions with a considerable degree of autonomy in paid work are largely absent from the caring relations. The pattern of irreplaceable workers in the company and replaceable parents in the family (Halrynjo 2015) is distinctive of managerial positions in Slovenia. Compared to precarious workers, managers have standard employment and together with top leadership positions they enjoy high levels of autonomy and full access to de-commodification mechanisms (parental and paternal leave, sick leave to take care of the child) enabling them for involved fatherhood. Flexibility of work as shown by interviewed managers is an aspect of autonomy, which, however, is not exercised in greater involvement of managers in childcare and family duties, but merely in shaping intimate family life to their careers.

Compared to managers, precarious workers are hit much harder by the flexibilisation of labour markets. Interviews with fathers in precarious, that is flexible, employment show that, paradoxically, flexibilisation enables greater autonomy mainly for those whose employment comes close to the standard, non-flexible employment model in which work is provided by the employer, organised in standard, predictable working hours and is guaranteed relative permanence. Individualised employment positions, such as self-employment and contract work, put workers in a position of complete dependence on the labour market, the employer or the customer. Through the individualisation of labour, the worker becomes the motivating force of production along with the disciplining processes that lead to constant accessibility, availability, long working hours, and subordination of personal life to labour market demands (Kvande 2012). Moreover, with de-commodification and defamilialistic mechanisms largely being linked to standard employment patterns, those workers employed in individualised employment, such as self-employment and contract work, are excluded from or only partly included in parental rights such as paid paternal leave, allowance for sick child care leave, paid annual holidays, holiday allowance, accessibility to public-subsidised childcare and so forth. This establishes legalised inequalities and represents a structural obstacle for men holding precarious employment to engage in involved fatherhood.

In the flexible conditions of work, the traditional pattern of men's complete involvement in the work sphere for reasons of survival is actually strengthened. The norm of the ideal worker, fully available and without caring responsibilities, is turning into a dominant norm in the neoliberal labour markets and hits men in individualised contract, agency or self-employed jobs hard. In families where both partners are precarious workers, the pressure of breadwinning for men is becoming stronger. But also the situations where, due to their underemployment, men take full responsibility for care to enable their



partners to retain their standard employment and provide for their families' survival, could be seen as a traditionalisation of the gender relations. Although traditional male-female roles in those relations are reversed, from the point of view of professional fulfilment, a surplus of responsibility for unpaid care work and economic dependence of one of the partners still represent a traditional pattern of gendered care. In such partnerships men are not sharing equally but they are forced to take up full responsibility for domestic and care work, meaning that men and women are becoming more equal but in disadvantages, not in advantages. However, today these re-traditionalised positions are no longer legitimised by gender ideologies and norms—they need to be identified as an anomaly of the labour market that spreads (mainly young) people between too much and not enough work, and reproduces or subverts traditional gender norms.

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