



## Article

# The Distribution of Unpaid Domestic Work in Hungarian Stay-at-Home Father—Working-Mother Families

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this paper is to analyze the Hungarian stay-at-home father—working-mother families from a point of view of how the distribution of unpaid domestic work develops during the period when the father stays at home with his child(ren). It answers the question of what principles and implemented practices govern the division of household labour in these families. According to the perception of the traditional parental role, unpaid domestic work, such as family duties, routine housework, and care work are the responsibility of mothers, while fathers are responsible for the financial stability of the family. In addition to the once prevailing breadwinner father role, nowadays the egalitarian model is becoming increasingly prominent. In parallel, a new father type appears according to which a good father wants to be more involved in the everyday life of the child. An extreme case of this type of involvement is when the father stays at home with his child(ren) and becomes the primary caregiver, and the mother assumes the role of breadwinner. The ratio of such families is growing around the world, but we still know relatively little about them. Our gap-filling, qualitative research is based on semi-structured in-depth interviews with 31 Hungarian stay-at-home fathers supplemented by a short questionnaire with their partners. The data were analyzed by thematic analysis method. As a main conclusion we could identify two clearly distinguishable groups among the examined couples: families with a rather traditional approach, and families having more egalitarian values concerning gender roles. However, the findings suggest that all of these families can be characterised by egalitarian sharing practices of duties, and at the same time by undoing gender. The distribution of routine housework and care work is based on a time availability perspective, which does not specify any masculine or feminine family duty or work.



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**Keywords:** Hungarian stay-at-home fathers; housework; care work; unpaid work; doing gender; undoing gender; time availability model; exchange-bargaining model; egalitarian values; qualitative research

## 1. Introduction

According to the traditional perception of family roles, in the division of labour within the family, men fulfil the role of the breadwinner with paid work done away from the family, while unpaid work related to housekeeping and child care is primarily the responsibility of women.

In recent decades, however, it is a generally observable phenomenon that, on the one hand, the expectation towards men to become more and more involved in household tasks is increasing (Hobson 2002), and on the other hand, on behalf of men the need to pursue their role at a high level not only at work, but also at home has increased (Perrone et al. 2009; Yogman and Eppel 2022). As a result, the time fathers spend caring for children has increased (Kaufman 2013; Livingston 2014), but traditional role patterns still prevail when it comes to household work (Jaspers et al. 2022). So, for men, housework is still a matter of choice and means rather occasional work and maintenance around the house and garden, while for women, performing daily, regular routine work such as cooking, washing, and

cleaning is still an obligation and an expectation. (Bittman 1990; Latshaw 2015). Among the unpaid work, routine household work such as cleaning, home repairing, washing, ironing, emptying the garbage, or shopping and cooking are, according to previous research, among the least desirable activities and according to the members of the household, they are of lower value not only than paid work, but also than unpaid care work (Suwada 2021). Furthermore, these are the tasks that are easiest to outsource to paid workers, as many middle-class families do (Fraser 2016; Ochsner et al. 2020).

The change in family roles, the social and individual reinterpretation of father and male roles, according to which fathers must also take on an increasing role in household tasks, creates the opportunity for the father to even play the role of primary caregiver in the family, while the mother becomes the main breadwinner (Rochlen and McKelley 2009; Brandth 2012; Rushing and Sparks 2017). The ratio of such families is growing around the world (Baxter 2017; Chesley 2011; Kramer et al. 2013; Livingston 2014; Livingston and Parker 2019; Latshaw and Hale 2016; O'Brian and Wall 2017), and statistics also show that men's use of parental leave is rising on average in OECD countries (OECD 2016). However, we still know relatively little about them (O'Brian and Wall 2017), especially about the time-use of male caregivers (Latshaw and Hale 2016), and the division of labour within the family.

In our qualitative research, we are therefore looking for an answer to the question of what principles and implemented practices govern the division of household labour in Hungarian stay-at-home father—working-mother families.

In our study, we first conceptualize the notion of unpaid work, describe its distribution between men and women, and then, as a theoretical framework for our research, present the most important theoretical models that can explain the differences shown by the data. After that, we turn to the patterns of work sharing revealed in the families of stay-at-home fathers—based on previous research. After explaining the sampling and methodology of our research, we present our results and conclusions to our research questions according to the aspects outlined during the theoretical framework.

## 2. Conceptualization: The Definition of Unpaid Work

Unpaid work is separated from paid work by the absence of direct remuneration or other payment for the work, which is also explicitly stated in the name (EIGE (European Institute for Gender Equality) n.d.). In addition, the definition of unpaid work is not uniform in the literature. It can be used in a broader sense, according to which “Unpaid work is the production of goods and services by family members that are not sold on the market.” (OECD 2011, p. 10) This broad definition also includes work, the results of which are consumed by people outside the household, such as, for example, voluntary activities outside the household, or caring for the elderly and helping them, too. Other authors interpret the concept narrowly and mean only household work; a definition which excludes caring tasks that are no less important (Ochsner et al. 2020).

Most empirical research on the distribution of unpaid work within the household basically divides the analysed activities into two groups: household chores or maintenance and caring for a child or an adult (for example Jaspers et al. 2022).

In our empirical research on the division of unpaid work at home, we mean housework, work around the house, shopping, and child care performed by household members. In our definition and investigation, we have also included so-called mental labour (Robertson et al. 2019), which has only recently been included in the scope of research interests and has been invisible for a long time, the measurement and conceptualization of which is unclear due to its invisibility and cognitive nature. It often means an implicit process that even those performing mental labour themselves are not aware of as work. This includes all primarily cognitive and emotional activities beyond physical housework and caregiving tasks, which are essential for managing a family and can be just as demanding as either paid work or physical unpaid work (Robertson et al. 2019). According to another formulation “mental labour is conceptualized as the planning, organization, and management of

everyday activities” (Offer 2014, p. 916). Robertson et al. (2019) further identified mental labour with the activities of planning and strategizing, monitoring and anticipating needs, metaparenting, knowing (learning and remembering), managerial thinking (including delegating and instructing), and self-regulation.

### 3. The Distribution of Paid and Unpaid Work in the Light of the Data

The amount of paid and unpaid work and their relative proportions vary in individual countries, regions, and different social strata, differentiated according to education level and the composition of the household, but the most obvious difference is between men and women.

In OECD countries, women between the ages of 15 and 64 spend an average of 263 min a day in unpaid work<sup>1</sup>, while men spend 136. Similar ratios can be found for Hungary: based on the latest data, Hungarian men spend an average of 162 min a day in unpaid work, while women spend 293. This basically means a difference of two hours. Moreover, although Hungarian men spend an average of one hour more per day in paid work, overall Hungarian women work an average of 1 h more per day (OECD 2022b). Time use surveys in Hungary show that gender inequalities are greater regarding household chores, namely Hungarian women spend two and a half times more time on this, while only twice as much time on caring for children (KSH (Hungarian Statistical Office) 2021). Despite the fact that in recent decades, with the spread of the dual-earner family model, the participation of women in the labour market has become significant, it is also clear from the above data that women still bear the greater burden in the division of unpaid work. This is particularly true for families with small children. According to Eurostat calculations, in the European Union in 2016, 93% of women with children under the age of 18 took care of their children on a daily basis, compared to 69% of men. The gender inequality in the case of housework is even greater: 78% of women cooked and/or did housework on a daily basis, compared to 32% of men (Eurostat 2020). According to Hungarian research about families with small children, the division of household work is most transformed by the birth of the first child, although the daily tasks necessary to maintain family functioning, such as cooking, washing dishes, shopping or cleaning, are strongly shifted towards women already during pregnancy. Men mostly take part in repairs in the apartment or house and around the house. Moreover, with the birth of the child, joint activities, such as shopping, are also reduced, although managing finances and organizing leisure time remain common activities (Cohort '18 2018). As the number of children increases, the balance of the division of tasks between the parents decreases and shifts more and more towards the woman (Veroszta et al. 2022). In the case of families with more children, childcare responsibilities also fall to a greater extent on the mother (Veroszta et al. 2022). In the case of couples raising children, an even more unequal division of work at home can be observed even among those where both partners are engaged in money-earning activities compared to childless couples (Makay and Spéder 2018). According to family sociological research on the division of labour within the family, mental labour also burdens mothers more than fathers (Robertson et al. 2019; Chung et al. 2022).

### 4. Theoretical Framework

The inequalities in the division of labour within the household described in the previous chapter can basically be explained by three main theoretical approaches: (1) the family microeconomic or time availability theory based on economic rationality; (2) the relative resources, or exchange-bargaining model which takes into account the power relations between the members of the household. Both (1) and (2) start from the socio-economic status of the household members; (3) and the third group includes theoretical models based on gender roles.

#### 4.1. Time Availability Model

The time availability model is a reworking of the classic family microeconomics approach (Becker 1981), according to which households share household tasks among themselves based on rational considerations, in order to maximize income and operate optimally. The most effective division of labour is when the roles are specialized, that is, one member specializes in paid work and focuses the energies there, while the other member focuses on housework. So, the one that is less active and useful in paid work will spend more time with housework, including tasks related to childcare. In another approach, those who spend less time on paid work have more time for unpaid work, that is, the members make the rational decision based on the time available to them. It follows from the theory that men in a more favourable labour market status, that is to say, with better income and career opportunities, do less housework (Jaspers et al. 2022). According to the rational behaviour of the family, the family time frame is used most effectively if the man ensures the financial stability of the family, while the woman creates its emotional security. This rationality corresponds to the traditional division of labour within the family.

#### 4.2. Relative Resources Perspective

According to the relative resources perspective, the division of labour within the household is determined by the relative amount of resources of the members. The members of the household have different resources according to their income, education, and employment status, and the one with relatively higher resources is therefore in a better bargaining position. According to another starting point of the approach, among the unpaid work, household work is not carried out willingly by either member, so these jobs are assigned to the one in a less favourable bargaining position (Blood and Wolfe 1960). So, based on exchange-bargaining, the member that brings more resources to the relationship will use this to reduce their daily contribution to household chores. Since men's resources are traditionally stronger, according to the perspective that takes into account power relations, more household work will fall on women (Jaspers et al. 2022). On the other hand, the tasks associated with childcare are among the more enjoyable unpaid jobs, so men take on an increasing share of it, although primarily those made up of more fun activities, such as playing together, reading, and less regular, routine tasks (Bianchi et al. 2006).

The previous two theories can be considered gender-neutral in the sense that the division of unpaid work is not explained by social norms and practices related to gender roles, but by rational considerations or by the resource-based bargaining position. It would logically follow from this that if the woman in a household does more paid work, or earns more, or has a higher education level, or is clumsier and less efficient at doing routine housework than the man, then she should do less housework. At the macro level, with the dual-earner family model becoming more common, the mass employment of women and the rise in the level of education of women (in some cases exceeding that of men), gender inequalities in the performance of household and child-rearing tasks should decrease. However, this is not what we see in practice. Men's participation in housework and child rearing has indeed increased, and indeed more housework is done in dual-earner families, but female breadwinners still do more household and care work at home than their male counterparts (Jaspers et al. 2022; Craig and Mullan 2011).

One aspect of the relative resources perspective is also contradicted by the empirical observation that higher educated men try to spend more time with their children outside of working hours (evenings and weekends) than lower educated men (Yeung et al. 2001). Fathers who have been higher educated tend to have a more balanced work schedule at home, as their children's well-being is of paramount importance to them, upon which the time spent together has a positive effect (Goodman et al. 2008).

In the course of presenting the theories explaining gender inequalities in the division of labour, we will now turn to explanations of this phenomenon that are based on gender roles.

#### 4.3. Gender Roles Perspectives

Gender roles perspectives arise from the fact that gender role related social norms and expectations arising from them exist in society, which are produced and reproduced dynamically in social interactions (West and Zimmerman 1987, 2009). These norms determine what kind of behaviour is considered feminine or masculine.

An essential component of the widespread norm of masculinity, hegemonic masculinity, is breadwinning work (Connell 1995), which has a higher value than domestic work, and is deemed feminine. This masculinity is relinquished if the man takes part in the household and child-rearing tasks that are considered exclusively women's tasks (Connell 1995; Neményi and Takács 2016; Elliott 2015). In parallel with the hegemonic male identity based on the symbolic value of paid work and career, the ideology of intensive motherhood can be identified as the norm regulating motherhood (Hays 1996). According to this, a good mother is one who spends a lot of quality time with her child, and is selflessly and absolutely available. This conception of the maternal role places a great deal of responsibility on mothers in the sense that, according to the norm, the child's future well-being primarily depends on her.

One of the visible projections of gender-related norms is the household, or the family, where these norms are also reproduced through interactions and practices. According to the "doing gender" theory, the parties in the household behave according to their gender roles, thus emphasizing and strengthening their femininity, or their masculinity. In the division of household work, this results in women doing jobs considered feminine, such as cooking, washing, cleaning, and routine work around children, while men do work around the house and in the garden, take out the trash, or play games or football with the child (Latshaw and Hale 2016). In this sense, if a man participates in raising the child or in the housework, it can be interpreted as a partial or complete surrender of his masculinity. Thus, it can be interpreted as doing gender, that is, strengthening the male role, if men are not willing to do the housework that is otherwise expected of women (Neményi and Takács 2016).

Furthermore, men often interpret doing housework as helping their partner (Suwada 2021). In this perception, the implicit traditional gender-based understanding of roles appears, according to which it would be the woman's task to perform household chores anyway, and if the man takes part in this, he makes a helping gesture towards her and relieves the woman of the burden. So, for men, housework is still interpreted as a choice, while it is an expectation of women (Townsend 2002; Latshaw 2015).

In traditional male breadwinner—female caregiving families, the practice of doing gender usually prevails.

In those dual-earner families, where the woman also takes on the role of breadwinner, according to the theory, upon returning home from work both are doing gender, strengthening and reconstructing their gender roles, which explains the gender inequalities experienced in household work. It is to this phenomenon that Hochschild (1989) introduced the concept of the second shift, which indicates that after the first shift spent in paid work, the provision of household work still largely falls to women. Moreover, in those families where the woman becomes the main breadwinner, they often compensate for the traditional, that is, unequal division of household work for an attitude that does not conform to traditional role norms (Neményi and Takács 2016).

As we have seen, according to the doing gender theory, gender is not static, but can adapt and change both over time and within interactions. That is, not only doing, but also undoing gender is possible, by which we mean the social interactions that reduce gender differences (Deutsch 2007). This happens in families where the parties typically do not behave according to their traditional gender roles, namely, undoing gender.

The inequalities in the division of unpaid work are explained by the "gender deviance neutralization" theory (Greenstein 2000), which is also based on gender roles, according to which parties who deviate from traditional gender role expectations try to compensate for this difference at home. For example, a man who earns less than his wife avoids housework at home that is considered feminine and does more work that is considered masculine in order



to still meet the expected male standards (Bittman et al. 2003; Latshaw 2015). So, in such cases, the favourable bargaining position resulting from higher earnings does not necessarily prevail, from which the woman who earns more could successfully transfer the housework to the man, but on the contrary, the woman also compensates for the non-traditional gender role of being employed through doing increased housework (Lazaro et al. 2022).

The lower level of participation of men in housework and raising children can also be explained by the so-called maternal gatekeeper phenomenon (Allen and Hawkins 1999). By gatekeeper we mean the person or group who regulates and controls, or perhaps prevents others from accessing certain goods, services, or roles. In the context of this research, we therefore speak of maternal gatekeeping as when mothers obstruct fathers' access to the caring role, which also contributes to the inequality of the division of labour within the household. The extent to which mothers leave housework and caring tasks to fathers is closely related to the mothers' attitudes towards gender roles (Fischer and Anderson 2012), as gatekeeper mothers either do not consider fathers to be competent or capable of adequately handling child-rearing tasks, or they are not able to let go of traditional female patterns and the roles and tasks arising from them, even partially.

Gender-sensitive theoretical approaches therefore argue that the division of labour within the household is not necessarily determined by economic rationality or power relations within the household, but rather the explanation must be sought in gender roles.

However, the norms related to gender roles and the resulting social and internal expectations are not static, but change along with the value system behind them. Traditional gender roles focus on the differences between women and men and consequently associate different roles and behavioural norms with the two sexes. Compared to this, the increasingly widespread egalitarian concept of gender roles emphasizes equality, from which it follows that there are no typical feminine or masculine roles and tasks, that is, both parents can be breadwinners or caring parents (Johnson 2016).

Parallel to the spreading of the egalitarian approach, the traditional images of men and fathers are also changing. In addition to the theory and practice of traditional, "non-caring" masculinity, and in contrast to these, a new definition of masculinity supported by numerous empirical research experiences—and socially desirable (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005)—has been formulated in the literature in recent years (e.g., Hanlon 2012; Elliott 2015; Dermott 2003), which also outlines a new type of father image competing with hegemonic masculinity. The need for involvement in caring tasks appears in men (Hanlon 2012). Caring fathers see the relationship they have with their child as an important indicator of success and strive to participate in their children's lives as much as possible, much more than was typical for previous types of fathers. Thus, fathers with egalitarian views take on a larger share of the tasks associated with raising and caring for children than those with a traditional attitude, and they also participate more in the household work (Bianchi et al. 2000).

The egalitarian perception of gender roles and the reinterpretation of the father's role also provide an opportunity for the father to become the primary caregiver in the family by staying at home with his small child for a certain period of time, while the mother does paid work away from home. The number of such families is still small, but is increasing (Snitker 2018; Takács 2020; Sztáray Kézdy and Drjenovszky 2021a; Ranson 2012; Rushing and Sparks 2017), so they are also of interest in the social sciences.

## 5. The Sharing of Unpaid Work in the Families of Stay-at-Home Fathers—Based on Previous Research

Recently, an increasing quantity of research has been devoted to stay-at-home father—working-mother type families, yet relatively little is known about these families, their time use, their work division practices, and especially their principles (Latshaw 2015; O'Brian and Wall 2017).

In the previous chapter, we saw that according to the doing gender theory, gender is not static, but can also change, that is, not only doing, but also undoing is possible when the parties typically do not behave in accordance with their traditional gender roles.

Based on the results of the studies examining stay-at-home father—working-mother type families, we can conclude that this family structure can be interpreted as a departure from traditional gender norms, that is, as undoing gender, in the sense that caring, which is traditionally considered feminine work, in other words, the entire range of caring for the child, is taken over by the father in these families, even temporarily (Chesley 2011; Latshaw 2015; O'Brian and Wall 2017). In these families, the differences between the genders are reduced by ascribing more value to the father's involvement in childcare (Chesley 2011) and they are characterized by undoing gender, at least on weekdays during the day (Latshaw and Hale 2016). However, in the evenings and weekends, this can revert to doing gender, when the mother, compensating for her absence during the day, reverts to behaving in accordance with traditional gender roles and continues to follow traditional gender responsibilities (Latshaw and Hale 2016).

With respect to doing housework, the picture is not so clear. In her research on American stay-at-home fathers, Chesley (2011) found that, in addition to routine tasks related to child care, fathers also perform a significant part of household work, but mainly during the day (Chesley 2011). It is also natural among Finnish stay-at-home fathers, that those on parental leave are not only responsible for raising children, but also for housework (Lammi-Taskula 2017). Gislason (2017) also reported that the Swedish fathers he examined "just did what mothers and housewives do; they took care of the child or children and they did the domestic chores" (Gislason 2017, p. 158), which is similar to the research conducted by Valarino (2017) on Swiss fathers on parental leave. When examining Portuguese fathers, Wall and Leitao (2017), on the other hand, say that some of the fathers "made an effort" or "tried to build housework" (Wall and Leitao 2017, p. 56), which wording suggests that the shift regarding housework is not fully realized.

Latshaw (2015) also differentiates between two father types: the reluctant fathers who would rather take on more masculine duties and work, and the resolute fathers who do more housework and even approach the division of labour in a more balanced way, in terms of time and the duties of the mother.

Kvande and Brandth (2017) examined Norwegian fathers and found that previously, at the beginning of the introduction of the father quota in Norway, it often happened that the stay-at-home father only undertook child-rearing among the tasks at home, "while housework was not understood as part of the deal for fathers on the father's quota leave." (Kvande and Brandth 2017, p. 33). In recent years, they are trying to reduce the amount of housework they do by outsourcing the task or by lowering expectations regarding the quality of the work. However, they also state that nowadays for the fathers, whom they call the second-generation stay-at-home fathers, it has become natural to take over the housework during their stay at home, and typically the fathers staying at home also take over the housework from the mothers for this time (Kvande and Brandth 2017).

However, the experience can be interpreted as doing gender according to which some stay-at-home fathers remain in touch with the labour market in some way, in the form of paid part-time or remote work, or perhaps unpaid self-realization or they maintain their role in accordance with traditional male identity by undertaking community work (Doucet 2004; Doucet and Merla 2007; Tremblay and Dodeler 2017).

With regard to mental labour, Doucet (2017) found, during her research on American and Canadian stay-at-home father families, that even in these families it is primarily the women who undertake the organization and management of the life and activities of the family and children. However, in the context of the egalitarian approach, these couples typically make decisions together in matters related to family life, especially children (Fischer and Anderson 2012).

So, overall, we see that even in stay-at-home father—working-mother families, the practice of undoing gender is not fully realized, it mainly applies to tasks around the child during the week.

### *Hungarian Stay-at-Home Fathers*

For decades, the Hungarian family support system has enabled the active participation of fathers in child-rearing in an ever-expanding circle, in such a way that nowadays men can stay at home with their children under the same conditions as women until the child is three years old. The relevant value system research also shows that in Hungary there is also a growing expectation for men to take part in the tasks associated with raising children, in addition to fulfilling the traditional role of breadwinner. However, the family-centred expectation, according to which the father should also take part in child-rearing, does not mean that in some cases the father stays at home with his small child, while the mother returns to employment (Makay and Spéder 2018). This is also reflected in the statistical data on the use of family benefits, according to which men use only a fraction of child benefits, which otherwise enable fathers to stay at home with small the children (KSH (Hungarian Statistical Office) 2022; OECD 2022a; Takács 2020; Sztáray Kézdy and Drjenovszky 2021b). So, in Hungary, the stay-at-home father—working-mother family type is still very rare, although their number is gradually increasing. Thus, academic interest has only recently turned to examining the families of Hungarian stay-at-home fathers (Takács 2020; Sztáray Kézdy and Drjenovszky 2021a, 2021b), however, the division of unpaid work at home is a less frequently studied area.

In our research, we are therefore looking for an answer to the question of what principles and attitudes lie behind the distribution of unpaid domestic work observed in Hungarian stay-at-home father—working-mother families, that is, what values related to gender roles are behind it, and in what theoretical framework can we interpret our results.

## **6. Methodology and Sampling**

The target group of our qualitative research therefore consists of Hungarian families where the father at any time after the birth of their child, have stayed at home for at least three months, whether or not they have been claimed any family support in Hungary, while the mother was working.

The sample of our research was formed by non-probability purposive sampling: we recruited fathers meeting the above criteria on various thematic forums, within our wider circle of acquaintances, also using the snowball sampling method.

We conducted a semi-structured in-depth interview with the 31 fathers in our sample after taking a short sociodemographic questionnaire. In order to be able to examine the family division of labour in a family context, we also filled out a questionnaire with the partner of the interviewees, in which we could assess their principles, perceptions, and practices regarding the division of labour by answering partly open and partly closed questions.

The length of the interviews ranged from one hour to two and a half hours. With the informed consent of the subjects, audio recordings were made of the interviews, the verbatim transcripts of which formed the basis of the analysis. This was supplemented and compared with the data from the mother's questionnaires. Since the aim of this study is to explore the distribution of unpaid domestic work, in this article, we only analyze the following among the main topics of our interviews: the principles, values, and attitudes about family roles and tasks, work sharing practices before, during and after the father's stay at home, the daily routine including household chores, mental labour, and caring for the child, furthermore work division patterns brought from home. In the course of our analysis, we used the thematic analysis method of Braun and Clarke (2006): first we formed a code list from our research questions and the theoretical approach, which we inductively supplemented with the codes identified from the interview texts in the second stage of the analysis. The quotes from interviews and questionnaires were translated from Hungarian to English in our study. At the source of the quotations, the interviewees were marked with numbers (1–31), and the data suitable for identification were deleted in order to preserve the anonymity of the subjects. The age of the fathers in our non-probability sample fell between 27 and 64 years, most of them were in their thirties and forties, while the average age of the mothers was also around forty at the time of data collection. During the examined



period, two-thirds of the families lived in the capital or lived in the agglomeration, three families lived in other Hungarian cities, and another seven in other European capitals. Five-sixths of the fathers and all but one of the mothers have a higher education qualification. Regarding the labor market status of the parents, none of the interviewed parents were unemployed. Most of the fathers (17) worked as junior employees before staying at home, another seven were in senior positions, while seven had their own business. Half of the mothers worked as junior employees, a quarter in a senior position, and the rest either studied or took on occasional jobs or worked in their own business before the birth of the child. Two-thirds of them returned to their former workplace, while the rest either started in a new workplace or pursued postgraduate studies while the father was at home. So, in terms of sociodemographic background, our sample is not representative for Hungarian families. The examined families—with the exception of one adoptive couple—raised one to four biological children, most of the fathers were at home with one child, others with two or even three children. The minimum time spent at home was 3 months, the maximum was 11 years, but most of them stayed at home for 1–2 years. Mothers typically returned to work when the child was between the age of one and two.

## 7. Analysis

In our analysis, we are therefore looking for an answer to the question of how and according to which principles and attitudes unpaid work at home is shared in those Hungarian families where the father stayed at home with his child(ren) for a short or longer-term basis while the mother had a paid job. First, we briefly present how the examined couples share the tasks associated with raising children and household chores, including mental labour during the period when the father is at home with the child, or how all this changed compared to the period before staying at home. We will then turn to how the traditional and egalitarian value system outlined in the theoretical framework appears in the examined group. Finally, in the Discussion, we describe the theoretical framework in which our results can be interpreted, as well as compare them with the results of previous research.

### 7.1. *The Practice of Division of Labour at Home*

For the families included in our research, it can generally be stated that after the mother returned to work, according to the reports of both parties, the fathers took care of all tasks around the children during the day, while the mother was away. The fathers also took over the household chores to a significant extent; during the period of being at home they cleaned, tidied up, did the shopping, washed up the dishes, et cetera. Moreover, they also consider this natural: "Now I have to clean here, because I can't expect her to do it, and it was such a good feeling that I was serving ourselves with this. Not for her, not for the children, but for all of us, it's my job to clean." (31).

Examining the division of mental labour, we found that parents are also equally involved in indirect childcaring tasks, such as planning and scheduling, organization, handling of relations (for example with the doctor). Because actions are needed during the day, the execution is the responsibility of the father while it is still controlled by the mother through intensive communication. "I'm getting lists of what I still have to do, I'm getting those, lists, lots of them." (13). Most mothers also let go of these tasks, while it was hard to transfer these or let them go by some other mothers: "with these types of things, if she could solve it, she stepped in, if she couldn't solve it, then we were in constant contact, and I let her know ( . . . ) what was happening." (25).

In the same way, when analysing the arrangement of family programmes, we found that this is also mutually decided.

During the period spent at home, we could therefore observe a mostly balanced performance of tasks in terms of domestic unpaid work: "It's difficult to say that something is done exclusively by one of us or exclusively by the other" (12). The division of tasks—both in terms of housework and tasks around the children—was primarily determined by

who had more time to complete the given task, which was expressed by our interviewees as follows: "It went smoothly with us, so that the one who was available did the task." (28); "So, we don't have a division of roles, and today you do this and I do that, but rather like who is faced with which task." (17); "if I got somewhere first, I did it by definition" (6); "So, the one who has the time hangs out the clothes, who is there does the washing up, we usually discuss who cooks because it's easier to organize, but even that's flexible." (14). For others, practicality also determined the division of tasks, which depended on who liked which activity more or which one they were more experienced in: "some kind of a division of labour was established like she preferred to do this kind of bathroom cleaning, while I preferred tidying up the living room. Then, when there was this deep cleaning, we obviously did it together, because I'm tall enough to be able to take down the curtains, or reach the upper shelves, or something like that." (30).

In our previous article, we already partially discussed the division of labour practices in Hungarian stay-at-home father—working-mother families in the context of family well-being. In this study, however, we specifically focused on a deeper understanding of this topic and our goal is to reveal the value system behind the division of labour practices.

## 7.2. *The Value System behind the Practice of Sharing Work at Home*

In the previous subsection, we saw that in the families of the Hungarian stay-at-home fathers included in our non-probability sample a balanced division of labour can be observed in terms of household chores, the examined fathers took over a significant part of the household and child-rearing tasks during the stay-at-home period. However, we observed differences between the interviewees, behind which, based on our analysis, the parents' different values regarding gender roles might lie. Both traditional and egalitarian attitudes appear in the examined sample, so the examined couples can be classified into two clearly distinguishable groups.

### 7.2.1. *Families with a Traditional Approach*

We identified a smaller part of the families (8 out of 31) as having a traditional approach, because their attitude to working at home and raising children can be considered traditional. According to how they describe it, "our world view is quite conservative in that we imagined that I'd always be the one working and my wife would be the one who sometimes doesn't." (4). Before the birth of the child, these families followed a kind of traditional division of roles, and as a result, the fact that the father stayed at home with the child created a new situation for them, which they had to learn to adapt to. "As for household chores, I took as much as I could." (3).

It is characteristic of families with a traditional approach that they emphasize the differences between women and men in their perception of roles and consequently associate different roles and behavioural norms with the two sexes. Basically, they believe that there is a division of tasks between the father and the mother, that there is such a thing as women's and men's work. "I think there's something related to gender roles ( . . . ) such a basic characteristic that I simply couldn't manage so many things in parallel in the apartment or in the household." (3). In addition to doing housework, taking care of work around the child has always been considered a female task, which is not only an external expectation, but also stems from the mothers' internal needs. As one father aptly put it, "actually, my wife can spend less time with them than she'd prefer. I need to do more time with them than I want." (4). Despite this and regardless of their previous work sharing practices, or different from that, these fathers—due to their situation—during the time spent at home definitely performed more tasks during the day than before and completed almost all tasks thanks to the more time available to them. "The result was pretty much that these things that took time were left with me." (25).

In addition, it can also be experienced in the daily routine that there are tasks that remain with the mother, who performs them on weekday evenings after work or at weekends. One father reported that when the mother appeared, the dynamic changed: "the

emphasis was definitely on her.” (21). So, a strong compensatory intention can be felt in the case of many mothers, in that they do not want to let go of their maternal duties, since according to their values, raising children or housework is primarily a woman’s task. Thus, on weekday evenings and at weekends, these mothers tried to catch up with what they “missed” doing during the day, both for the child and for the household. Moreover, what they cannot do, they try to keep under strong control, that is, in families with a traditional approach, the phenomenon of the maternal gatekeeping can be perceived in many cases. “She turned execution into control. Mostly. So that she wanted to learn more about the things that she thought she had to carry out primarily, or that she could carry out better, so she became more involved in them. She let go of some things, so obviously after, say, half a year, I could really manage the cooking alone, we didn’t have to consult about it anymore.” (25). The same father stated that the mental labour is traditionally the mother’s task, in which the father helps his partner while at home. “The conclusion is not that we can be replaced with each other without limit, because that’s obviously not the case, so that the division of roles is still traditional to the extent that the directions and the dynamics of the family’s functioning are primarily determined by my wife.” (25).

In families with a traditional approach, a kind of attachment to the classic role of breadwinner, which they do not want to give up even during their time at home, can be observed on the part of several fathers. They considered it important to preserve the traditional money earner and caring roles. “A classic male role worked for me by working and earning money ( . . . ) my wife was also comfortable in the classic female role, because she cooks, she organizes the holiday ( . . . ) she sews the patch on the edge of the blanket, in which she takes the child to kindergarten.” (8). For them, it is important to carry out their previous work while staying at home, as a university lecturer put it: “the majority of my publications therefore fell in that period.” (21).

Besides, there was someone for whom the period spent at home was a real challenge, and he wanted to prove that he could stand up to the role of a woman and a mother as a man. “I wanted to make sure in particular that when my wife got home, everything was always in order. For me it was a bit like that I wanted her to see that things worked out” (8).

Other fathers experienced this arrangement as a complete change in roles, which soon became natural and which they took on proudly. “There was a complete change of roles, I became the backup, so I cooked, because, let’s say, she really didn’t have the time, or she was with the baby, or dozed off, or she was tired, or just, let’s say, took on horse riding occasionally.” (26).

Overall, it can be said about families with a traditional approach that the period of the father’s stay at home, which most of them experienced as a special, temporary situation, resulted in a significant change compared to the previous practice of division of labour. However, when the father returned to work, in most cases the previous division of labour was restored, but with the experience of both parties that the performance of tasks according to traditional role expectations is not the exclusive responsibility of one or the other gender, and that the gender-independent division of tasks can be effective from the point of view of the functioning of the family. “The original order was restored. Rather when things are related to competence and management do I involve the other person in the decision and does the woman feel that everything is ultimately her responsibility, and that if something is forgotten, then it’s her fault, and the other person cannot be involved in this ( . . . ), so I actually feel some changes in them. ( . . . ) that when she has periods when she needs help with these, she needs stronger support, or she makes the decision to hand over competencies, then this works much better” (25).

#### 7.2.2. Families with an Egalitarian Approach

We identified the majority of families of stay-at-home fathers as having egalitarian values. According to the egalitarian conception of gender roles, there are no typical feminine or masculine roles and tasks, that is, both parents can take the breadwinner or the caregiver role. “Both my wife and I practically lived according to such values throughout our adult

lives that it seemed natural to have equality as much as possible. We accept that there are gender roles that cannot be replaced, for example breastfeeding, but what can be done should be done" (14). Our interviewees also explicitly stated that the division of labour is not based on which jobs are considered traditionally feminine or masculine: "I think it's very easy to see that there's nothing in changing diapers that's genetically determined as to who can do it. Moreover, it's obviously a very unpleasant job, from the point of view that it stinks ( . . . ) I think there's definitely a division of labour, but it didn't seem to me that it was based on who belongs to what sex." (30). So, in the case of the families with egalitarian values that we examined, we could not identify housework considered typically feminine or masculine, which one or the other party does not perform because it is considered gender nonconforming. "There were no such assigned roles between us, that this is yours, this is mine. If there are, then rather, there are these classic female roles and classic male roles, and then I take more classic female roles. And then, recently, my wife took the car to have the tyres changed." (17). Based on our analysis, it can be said that in these cases, the egalitarian approach is very deeply rooted and characterizes not only the division of labour, but also the perceptions related to gender roles as a whole. "No, there is no such thing, such thing like, oh no, not this. So, I cannot imagine anything like that. I changed the children's nappies, bathed them, I did the dishes if necessary, I love to cook, so now tell me something that's typically feminine." (31).

In the case of egalitarian fathers, intensive work at home during the stay-at-home period is not considered temporary or exceptional.

For fathers with an egalitarian approach, it was therefore completely natural to do household tasks, such as tasks around the children and housework. "Absolutely, I think it goes without saying that men do their part in raising children, and changing diapers as well." (7). Their basic values show that it is natural for them to take on all family tasks together, be it housework or raising children "So, she made a good choice, or it turned out well, that we're by each other's side, because she expects us to bear the burden together" (16). Thus, even before the birth of the child, couples with an egalitarian approach participated equally in the care of household tasks, and several reported that they had discussed this with each other already at the beginning of their relationship. Thus, it was natural to follow these principles after the birth of the child, both regarding housework and tasks related to the child: "we agreed from the beginning that we would do everything together" (30); "With us, there were no such things as you always do this, I always do that, but whoever was there at the time. Let's do the shopping, do you have time? Then take a bag with you!" (17). Based on their previous attitude, these fathers already fit into the image of caring fathers who want to mind their children. In other words, according to how they actually described it, they participated more intensively in tasks even before the birth of their previous child, so they were active even before they stayed at home with their child. "The way I see parents with small children, compared to the average, for us, the set-up originally was that ( . . . ) I took on a little more of this type of task per se." (16). "We had this already with the first child, when that wasn't an issue if I'd had to stay at home; we already had this workflow." (7). In addition, several fathers reported that "I lived alone for a few years, and this way, almost always alone, the impression that formulated in me was that there's work that I do, and work that if I don't do, then it's not done." (30); " . . . very soon I was forced to be independent. So, I cooked, did the washing, the ironing, so these things are still a matter of course for me to this day." (1).

Compared to families with a traditional approach, one of the differences therefore that can be observed is that in families with an egalitarian approach, the family functioned in a similar way before, so there was no significant change in the division of tasks compared to the period before living at home: "I was at home a lot even when our child was born. So, it wasn't completely unknown" (14); "I was at home before and during having the children, I was happy to do all such things related to the child and the household ( . . . ) so I did the same things as before." (28); "The household chores ( . . . ) was done by the two of us from the beginning" (17).

Similar to the previous type, during the time spent at home, the father does most of the household tasks, since he has more time for all of this. “We tried to schedule things normally, to make the schedule efficient . . . after all, there are the two of us, let’s divide the tasks and then it takes half as much time.” (15). There was no change in the principles behind the division of labour, only a quantitative shift in the direction of the father can be observed as a result of the father’s having more time on his hands. “It was like that before, like, I don’t know, when no one had the time to do the washing during the week, it was done at the weekend. Now I was at home, and it was good from the respect that there was more time and more opportunities to do the laundry on weekdays, and then I took care of that ( . . . ) I could do more since I was at home, but ( . . . ) new tasks, they didn’t come in the picture.” (28).

So, on weekdays during the day in families with an egalitarian approach, it was quite natural that the fathers did all the tasks at home. However, the situation changes when the mother comes home in the evenings and at the weekends. Here, three typical types of behaviour can be observed: during weekday evenings and at weekends, the parents do everything, or mostly everything, together, that is, they physically do everything together; or they practically divide the tasks in order to finish them sooner; or the mother takes over part of the tasks, mainly tasks around the child. While in families with traditional values, we saw that the mother wants to compensate for her absence during the day by taking over the tasks in the evenings and at the weekends, in families with egalitarian values, it is a question of the father consciously stepping back in order to give the mother space, not to push her out—due to lack of time—from home life. In other words, the goal is to strengthen the balanced presence. “ . . . so, there was bathing and then we tried to have her read the story. But not because I don’t do it well, or I shouldn’t do it, but more so that she has a kind of bond with the girls.” (5).

Examining the mothers’ side, we came to the conclusion that in families with an egalitarian approach, the majority of mothers readily entrusted the household tasks to the fathers. On the one hand, this was due to the fact that in the first place these are women who did not want or could not meet the social expectations related to gender roles, either in the field of housework or child care: “my wife’s not very domestic after all” (7), “She imagines the children as if they were a dog, that you can tell a dog to stay and then it lies down, and stays.” (19). However, others were also able to easily let go of their household tasks, since they knew that the father could also do them. Moreover, many of them specifically expressed pride in their partner. “We’re proud of everything, so is she, and part of it is that she’s proud that her husband was at home for a year and a half.” (16). In most cases, mental labour or the “smart housework”, as it was mentioned by one of our interviewees (deadlines, when to go to the doctor, remembering dates of family birthdays, shopping list, lunch payments) was also transferred to the father, since he followed the everyday matters. Only in some cases was the organization of the programmes left to the mother: “So, she’s the one who organizes programmes, family events, she’s a great organizer.” (18), but in the end they made the decision together. Just as egalitarian couples typically make all other decisions together. “It bothers me when I have to decide on something alone. It gives me security, it’s good for me, it’s convenient for me that we discussed these things, and it bothers me when they decide on something without me. So, I like it if they involve me. This is relatively mutual.” (17).

In egalitarian families, therefore, the maternal gatekeeping phenomenon can hardly be detected, only in one or two cases did the fathers report that the mother wanted to control the processes even in her absence, but this was rather a burden for the father, since he knew that he could cope with the things to do. “She went to the parents’ meeting at the very beginning, and I gently hinted on it afterwards that ‘hey, actually, I can go to the parents’ meeting too, I know that this is natural for you,’ so I think it was still in her mind that it was her job, ( . . . ) or when we’re going to the physiotherapist, sometimes, even now, she writes to me that ‘So, you’re going to the physiotherapist this morning, right?’ . . . and I



write back to her that ‘Yes Sir, Sergeant Major Sir, we are going to the physiotherapist, Sir, what time should we leave Sir?’” (22).

Overall, it can be seen that these couples already had a deep-rooted egalitarian approach before having children, so their attitude is characterized by a balanced performance of tasks both in terms of housework and child-rearing, which is determined more by practicality than by female or male roles.

## 8. Discussion

In the following, we discuss our results and present how they can be interpreted from the perspective of theories explaining the division of household labour and previous studies.

According to the microeconomic approach based on economic rationality (Davis and Greenstein 2020; Jaspers et al. 2022), the time availability model (Carlson Daniel 2021; Becker 1981), which explains the division of labour within the household, those who spend less time on paid work have more time for unpaid work, that is, the division of labour at home is determined by the time available to the parties in the first place. This model, this kind of rationality, is clearly valid in the case of the families we examined and even appears as one of the main explanatory factors. In other words, in the case of both identified family types, it can be seen that both household work and child-rearing tasks are mainly shifted to the father, and the fathers clearly explain this with the extra time available to them, which is completely rational, since they are at home on weekdays. The interviews thus support the rational decision that, in order for the family to function optimally, the one who spends less time at home should take on fewer tasks. In our case, this means that mothers returning to work are less burdened with household tasks. However, in the evenings and at weekends, mothers want to participate in family activities, which fathers consciously allow, similar to the results of Chesley (2011). Thus, during these periods, most tasks are performed together or more or less equally divided between them. In the group with a traditional attitude, it can be observed that the mothers take back certain activities and insist on them.

In addition, according to the relative resource theory (Blood and Wolfe 1960), which is based on the socio-economic status of the household members, the one with more resources based on their income, education, or employment status uses this better bargaining position to do less housework. In our case, the mothers are definitely in a better bargaining position than their partners in terms of their income and employment status, however, during our analysis, we did not find anywhere that the mothers would use the unequal distribution of resources to bargain down their participation in household tasks. Although previous research (Latshaw and Hale 2016) has come to the conclusion that those stay-at-home fathers who perform some kind of money-making activity while at home use their existing earnings to negotiate down their work at home, which falls to them to a greater extent, we did not encounter this attitude in the present research.

Our sample typically included couples with the same level of education, so in their case a better bargaining position resulting from having a higher education cannot arise, but in the few families where the mother had a higher education, this did not explain the development of the division of labour either.

Our results therefore show that, in terms of rationality, only time availability plays a role in the division of labour of stay-at-home father—working-mother families.

However, the division of housework is not only the result of a rational decision, but can also be traced back to the symbolic revelation of gender roles. In addition, according to previous research (Bianchi et al. 2000), a more balanced division of household work can be observed in the case of couples characterized by egalitarian gender roles, and these fathers also take a better part in the work around the children. This may explain the fact that our non-representative sample included mostly fathers who already had egalitarian values.

Among the theoretical models based on gender roles (Bünning 2020; Jaspers et al. 2022; Sánchez-Mira 2021), according to the doing gender theory (Pinho and Gaunt 2019), social norms related to gender roles are reflected in the division of labour at home. The members also behave according to their gender roles within the family, thus emphasizing

and strengthening their femininity, or their masculinity. However, according to our results, similar to those formulated in Chesley's (2011) study, they show that in the case of stay-at-home father—working-mother families, gender differences are reduced or may even be reversed, that is, undoing gender typically prevails in these families. The examined families are clearly undoing gender in the period when the father takes on the task of staying at home, because during this period the mother becomes the main breadwinner, while the father is the main caregiver, which means that they do not behave according to their traditional gender roles. This is true for both types of families we identified as egalitarian and traditional. As stated in the theoretical introduction, gender is not static, but can change over time (Latshaw and Hale 2016). This dynamic also emerges from the interviews. In the case of stay-at-home father—working-mother families, therefore, undoing gender prevails everywhere during the week, which can change—and it does in most cases—to doing gender in the evenings and at weekends, so the mothers take over tasks corresponding to traditional female roles. In egalitarian couples, the motivation for this is that the father gives space to the mother, so that she also feels good, that she also participates equally in the tasks at home, while in traditional couples, taking over feminine tasks, that is, following traditional gender responsibilities, strengthens the mother in her femininity.

However, the changes in the appearance of doing and undoing gender over time were not only examined during the period of the father's stay at home, but also whether there was a change between the periods preceding and following it. In the case of egalitarian couples, neither from before nor from after did the interviewees report any substantial change in the division of labour. As we presented in the analysis, there are several possible reasons for this: the father had lived alone for a long time earlier; they have done housework together since the beginning of their marriage; the father has also been taking an active part in child care from the time the child was born. At most, they needed time to get used to the larger number of activities at home resulting from the situation. However, for couples with traditional values, the new life situation was a sharp change, with a lot to learn, and these changes were resolved when the father returned to work.

In their research on stay-at-home fathers, several authors (Doucet 2004; Doucet and Merla 2007; Tremblay and Dodeler 2017) interpreted the practice of fathers doing paid work while at home as doing gender. Some of the fathers in our sample also worked in some form while staying at home. However, according to our analysis, this was mainly for practical reasons (for example, keeping a connection with the labour market; filling the free period at home), it was by no means aimed at strengthening the bargaining position according to the relative resource theory, and in the case of egalitarian couples, this cannot even be interpreted as doing gender. In traditional families, on the other hand, fathers engaged in earning activity really tried to strengthen masculinity and the father's position as a breadwinner, that is, doing gender. In these cases, the hegemonic masculinity formulated by Connell (1995) yet appears, since one of its main components is bread-winning work, which these fathers do not give up in addition to increased housework and child-rearing.

In terms of gender theories (Ochsner et al. 2020), it can therefore be concluded that stay-at-home father—working-mother families are characterized by undoing gender during the day on weekdays. While for egalitarian couples there are no female or male jobs, it is not typical for men considered traditional to reject any job seen as feminine just because it is feminine. Rather, because—although due to the foregoing—they have less practice in it, and they feel that they cannot learn it. Therefore, what Gough and Killewald (2011) formulates does not occur, that is, notwithstanding the fact that these fathers do more housework, they reject feminine jobs as much as possible in order to strengthen their traditional role by taking on men's jobs more prominently. Accordingly, it was not possible to identify the reluctant fathers presented in the study of Latshaw (2015), who undertook fewer and rather more masculine tasks, but not really feminine ones. In the case of the present research, the fathers clearly appeared as resolute fathers, who do more housework, so the division of

labour is more balanced both in terms of time and tasks between the parties, so the undoing gender prevails (supplemented by the previously mentioned temporal dynamics).

Accordingly, gender deviance neutralization is much less apparent (Greenstein 2000), according to which the father's stay at home can be interpreted as a kind of gender deviance, so these fathers are less able to meet the male norms expected by the environment. This deviation needs to be compensated for, namely by doing more men's work on the one hand, and on the other hand, typically rejecting traditionally female housework. Latshaw (2015) also came to the conclusion that financial dependence on the mother can also be interpreted as a compensatory deviance, which is done in such a way that—although they are happy to be at home and do more household tasks—they still prefer masculine tasks. Based on our analysis, however, it can be established that in our research the families with egalitarian values, since they believe in the equality of gender roles, do not interpret the working-mother—caring father setup as gender deviance; therefore, we were not able to identify the phenomenon of gender deviance neutralization in their case. In families with traditional values, on the other hand, we can interpret the father's paid work and the mother's insistence on some household tasks as compensation for behaviour that deviates from gender roles.

To conclude the discussion of our results, it is necessary to note that due to the non-probability sampling, we consider the limited statistical generalizability of our research results to be a limitation of our research. Although we tried to select families with as diverse a socio-demographic background as possible in our sample through expert sampling, similar to previous research on stay-at-home fathers (for example O'Brian and Wall 2017; Brandth and Kvande 2019), in the end, mostly fathers from cities with higher education were included in our sample. Since we do not have statistical data on Hungarian stay-at-home fathers, we do not know whether this is a bias resulting from the sampling, or whether men holding higher educational qualifications primarily stay at home with their children. Although our current results cannot be considered representative of fathers at home, during our qualitative research we were able to validly explore the possible division of labour patterns and the values behind the practices in families of the stay-at-home father—working-mother type.

## 9. Conclusions

The aim of our qualitative research was to examine how the division of unpaid work at home is developed in Hungarian stay-at-home father—working-mother families, and what value system related to gender roles lies behind the division of labour practices.

It can be concluded that in the examined families, during the father's stay at home, the fathers took on a significant part of the child-rearing tasks and household chores, regardless of their previous practice. A deeper examination that lies behind the division of labour that appears during the father's time at home showed that the traditional and egalitarian values presented in the literature are also present in these couples, and thus they form two clearly distinguishable groups of families. The majority of the couples shared egalitarian values even before the birth of the child, the period we examined was nothing new in terms of the division of labour at home, female and male tasks cannot be identified at all, and they all fit into the image of a caring father, that is, they are active participants in the tasks around the child from the very beginning. In addition to the daily tasks, most of them also take over the mental labour, which is typically associated with mothers, in contrast to parents with a traditional attitude, where it is often difficult for the mother to hand over the tasks to the father. On the one hand, this is due to the fact that, as a gatekeeper, she still wants to control the processes. On the other hand, for fathers with a traditional approach, the new life situation is also a challenge, with many difficulties, which are basically of a temporary nature; after the examined period, the division of tasks is restored to the traditional operation typical of the past.

Overall, therefore, the family microeconomic or time availability theory based on economic rationality, or based on the relative resources or exchange-bargaining model,

which takes into account the power relations between the members of the household, the examined stay-at-home fathers—compared their wives returning to work—have to take care of more activities at home (Latshaw 2015). They have more time and bring less resources in the household as well. Our investigation also confirms the higher proportion of working at home, but in our case only the effect of the extra time prevails, not the possible bargaining position resulting from the difference in resources (income and education). At the same time, based on gender role theories, the opposite effect to the first two theories should prevail: a stay-at-home father's masculinity is impaired by not being able to meet the expectations of hegemonic masculinity. However, our results contradict this expected effect: in the case of the fathers we examined, the compulsion to compensate occurs in a very small proportion, but typically undoing gender prevails, which in the larger group of the examined families does not mean a change over time compared to earlier and later life stages. In their case, fatherhood is rather reinterpreted, and care does not appear exclusively as a female task. (Sztáray Kézdy and Drjenovszky 2021b).

With our study, we contributed to the understanding of the daily functioning and division of labour practices of a family type that has been less researched to date, and presented a possible and well-functioning alternative of the dual-earner family with young children model. Based on our results, we are convinced that the father's stay at home and his active participation in the care of young children can contribute to the reduction in gender inequalities on a family and social level. With our research, we can confirm the statements previously made by other scholars, according to which undoing gender can promote the process of gender equality (Chesley 2011) and “could signal a movement away from the performance of traditionally masculine or feminine behaviours” (Latshaw and Hale 2016, p. 100).

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**Data Availability Statement:** The data are not publicly available due to confidentiality protection for study participants and the language of the transcripts which is Hungarian.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Time spent in unpaid work includes: routine housework, shopping, care for household members, child care, adult care, care for non-household members, volunteering, travel related to household activities, other unpaid activities. (OECD 2022b, <https://stats.oecd.org/index.aspx?queryid=54757> accessed on 14 December 2022).

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