

# Gender Division of Work and the Labour Market Re-entry of the Czech Women after the Parental Leave<sup>1</sup>

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**Gender Division of Work and the Labour Market Re-entry of the Czech Women after the Parental Leave.** This text takes up the question of the influence of gender roles and gender division of work in decisions of Czech women to return from parental leave to the labour market. This question stems from findings of contemporary literature, which illustrates that despite the changing gender roles in today's societies, women continue to carry the bulk of the burden of unpaid work (household chores and care). As such, the division of unpaid work between men and women is perceived as an important factor placing women at a disadvantage in the labour market, and as a factor limiting choices by women in relation to combining paid work and family. The objective of this text is to uncover what gender division of work is like in the Czech Republic as a post-communist country, what determines it, and particularly how women perceive it – whether they interpret it as an enforced division and as a barrier to a smooth (and timely) return to the labour market or whether gender division of work corresponds to their preferences and why. The analysis is based on qualitative interviews with women from different educational background since we assume to find differences between different educational groups.  
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## Introduction

Family cycle and the related burden (unpaid housework and childcare) influences men and women differently, especially as concerns their position in the labour market. This leads to differentiated participation of partners in the labour market and opens paths to unemployment or inactivity of women (more or less temporary) mainly during the time when families are raising small children.

Recently, attention has been given to the division of work between men and women mostly in studies taking up the topic of balancing paid work and family since the successful reconciliation of both spheres is considered to be an important part of the quality of life. Several models of gender division of work have been identified. (e.g. Leira 2002; Hakim 2000; Gornick – Meyers 2004; Pfau-Effinger 2004; Haas 2005, etc.) More or less fixed pattern of the gender-based division of work in any society has, however, a significant impact on the methods of combining work and family life. In this regard, Pfau-Effinger

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(2004) came up with the concept of gender culture, which implies that certain unified image of the desirable form of gender relations and of the division of work between men and women is a part of culture of each modern society. McDonald (2000: 427) following Mason (1997: 158) then sees the gender division of work as “socially constructed expectations for male and female behaviour, that are found (in variable form) in every known human society”. This gender system prescribes the division of work and responsibilities between men and women as well as guarantees them different rights and responsibilities. (McDonald 2000)

According to Duncan (2007), it is this cultural context, which is underestimated in contemporary approaches to interventions, since attaining balance between work and family is usually perceived as a matter of individual choice and practical limitations (such as costs, time and availability of services). In contrast to this, Duncan states that harmonizing work and family isn't simply a matter of choice, as indicates for example the preference theory of Catherine Hakim (2000; 2003), who made preferences the central concept of her theory, but is very strongly the product of moral and social norms. According to Duncan (2007), mothers don't have freedom of choice to simply choose an individual lifestyle according to their preferences, but on the contrary, move within firmly established social standards determining how to correctly combine work and motherhood. They rather “negotiate” with their surroundings about whether the behaviour in the given situation is correct. These standards, or gender-based moral rationalities, as Duncan terms them, then vary in different societies and environments. (Duncan 2007: 127-28)

In the Czech Republic, the labour force participation of mothers with small children continues to be a sensitive topic, and an area rife with relatively fixed gender stereotypes (about what is natural and appropriate). The current gender division of work is nevertheless the result of specific conditions, since the Czech society continues to accept the socialist pattern of gender relationships facing at the same time the challenges of the post-transitive society. In post-communist countries, including the Czech Republic, we may thus continue to observe a larger tendency to traditional value orientations – for example, a lower level of support for gender equality than there is in countries of the EU-15, or small support for inclusion of mothers with small children into the workforce. (Saxonberg – Sirovátka 2006)

In this text, we focus on the period in a women's life, when they meet with the commitment of caring for children, and the necessity or wish to have gainful employment: at the transition from parental leave to the labour market. We ask about the *influence of gender roles and gender division of work (as a part of cultural norms and expectations) upon the decision of Czech women to return from parental leave to the labour market*. The aim is to uncover what

the division of work is like, what determines it, how women perceive it and if they interpret it as a barrier to a smooth (and timely) return to the labour market, or whether gender-based division of work is the result of preference, what these preferences are and why.

We used the data from qualitative research of 21 women with various levels of attained education. Although there is no entire agreement on the influence of education on the work-family behaviour of women, we might consider education as an important criterion for differentiation of perceiving a conflict between the spheres of family and work (OECD 2002; Kuchařová et al. 2006), including division of work between men and women and differentiation in the perception of the transition from parental leave to the labour market. Education is also perceived as one of the important attributes of the concept of social classes, the importance of which was pointed out by Duncan (2005; 2007) in his research or Duncan and Irwin (2004), when they monitored the influence of social classes on how mothers perceive the relation between motherhood and gainful employment, or how they construct their discourse on how work and family should be “correctly” combined. Therefore women with university degree, secondary education and women with vocational or elementary education were included in the research.

### **Gender division of work, gender roles and welfare state**

Traditionally, unpaid work is associated with the roles of women and paid work in the formal market is associated with the roles of men. Možný (2006: 176) states that “in traditional agricultural farmsteads as in a model family production enterprise, male and female jobs were gender differentiated, but not gender stratified”. Similarly, Chaloupková and Šalamounová (2004: 32) pointed out that “traditional” division of the male and female role is a highly modern phenomenon and is tied to the origin of the modern society.

What Křížková (1999) points out as problematic is the fact that nobody doubts whether housework is work, but it isn't perceived as a productive activity since it takes place outside the labour market, and so it was degraded to inferior work (see also Oakley 1974); and further we still perceive housework as a natural part of the women's existence, mainly in marriage, and as one of the main elements of social construction of female identity in society. (Křížková 1999: 207) According to Možný (2006: 176), the gender division of work was thus legitimized in the second half of the 20th century, when after their wartime mobilization women were forced out of the labour market back into their homes.

Not even the emancipation processes in the last third of the 20th century in western societies, mainly relating to the growth in education of women and their increasing participation in the labour market, led to a more fundamental

change of the division of unpaid work between the sexes. It remained relatively unchanged despite the continuously growing support of the so-called dual-earner families in all welfare state regimes, and despite the growing efforts of European governments to redistribute unpaid work between partners. For example, many countries (Denmark, Sweden, Belgium, Austria, Finland, Norway, and Iceland, but even in relatively gender-conservative countries such as Luxembourg or Italy) introduced individualized right to take up the parental leave – to enable both parents to alternate between themselves when caring for small children. Nevertheless, the majority of care and the household still fall to women. The explanation is complex – in part due to the lasting stereotypes with regard to the expected role of men and women, in part due to economical reasons (ex. lower female wages) or due to women's personal preferences.

What also plays a role in the low acceptance of the redistribution of the unpaid work between sexes is according to Lewis (1993: 21) the low valuation of unpaid work and care, which contributes to its low status. To address this problem, European governments have for example widely introduced paid maternity leave, and several countries also paid parental leave. Nevertheless, this mostly concerns (mainly in the case of parental leave) minimal benefits, and it is a question whether they may be considered as at least partial valuation of unpaid work and care, and whether they can motivate men to (at least temporarily) leave the labour market instead of women.

According to Orloff (1993) or Lewis (1993), gender division of work has also projected into the eligibility for social protection: men derived their claims from their status as a worker paying social security, while women did so from their status of mothers or wives drawing social aid or also social security indirectly through the working status of their husbands. The welfare state thus contributed to the social stratification of society not just along the lines of social classes, but also along the line of gender. (Orloff 1993) Other authors (McDonald 1997; 2000; Lewis 1992; 1993) also perceive the gender-based division of work as institutionalized with structural impacts and with impacts on social stratification.

Today, many social rights and entitlements are individualized, and derived from the citizen status. On the other hand, welfare states tend to withdraw from the universal social security schemes founded upon citizenship (which is mainly given by growing fiscal limitations) and to tight up the eligibility criteria in the sense of conditioning them by work activity. (Lewis 1993; Goodin 2000) However, this is once again controversial for women, whose relationship to paid work remains to certain extent problematic.

## **Gender division of work in the Czech Republic as a post-communist country**

Although the participation of women in the labour market in western societies (mainly from the 1970s) brought certain changes, responsibility for family commitments and unpaid work continues to be carried mainly by women. (Künzler 2002; Rosner 2003; Lewis 1993; Borchorst 1994; McDonald 2000) In the Czech Republic (CR), the situation is analogous. (Dělba... 2001; Chaloupková 2005; Kuchařová et al. 2006) According to Valentová (2006: 196), Czech women spend around 23 hours per week doing housework while the Czech men around 15 hours (as in Austria, Poland or Flanders). Křížková and Hašková (2003) state that in the CR the development of the volume of unpaid work performed by men in various phases of the family cycle follows the volume of unpaid work performed by women, but at a much lower level and with the exception of the family phase with preschool children, where only the woman's burden sharply increases. Sirovátka and Tomešová Bartáková (2008) present even greater differences: in terms of childcare and housework men spend about one third of the time comparing to women, and in terms of playing with children, about one half thereof. Moreover, even though men slightly increased their activity in housework, they still regard it as “helping” their partners with “their” work, which essentially influences the “life choices” of Czech women. (Křížková 1999: 208)

Division of work between men and women is however influenced by the cultural specifics resulting from the political, social and economic history. Czech women for roughly three generations live in dual-earner households – even today they form 44 percent of the workforce and work almost exclusively full-time (only 8 percent of Czech women work part time (ČSÚ 2007), whereas the average in the EU-27 is 31 percent). (European Commission 2007) Nevertheless, women remained primary bearers of care and housework too. This is taken for granted not only by the Czech society and women themselves, but it is also implicitly contained in family policies implemented (or reformed) after 1989. Similarly as in some other post-communist countries, Czech family policy after 1989 laid a great emphasis on placing childcare responsibilities on families, without parallelly promoting gender equality. (Sirovátka – Tomešová Bartáková 2008) This was labelled as re-familialisation (Hantrais 2003; Saxonberg – Sirovátka 2006) and, in the Czech Republic, it is characterized by a wide network of childcare facilities for children from 3-6 years, and, most importantly, by emphasis on benefits (mainly tested benefits), and a long parental leave accompanied at the same time with a high employment rate of women. (Matějková – Palonciová 2005) This trend differs somewhat from the development seen since the 1990s in the EU-15 countries, where, despite persistent differences among these countries' family policies, the trend is

generally being established towards shifting care for children, including children under the age of three, partly away from the family and towards promoting greater gender equality in the labour market and in childcare arrangements. (Sirovátka – Tomešová Bartáková 2008)

Hašková (2005) states that the re-familisation tendencies of the Czech family policy (mainly the sharp drop in childcare facilities) reflect a certain gender conservatism of the Czech society concerning parenthood and work-family harmonization. Havelková (1996) interprets the gradual changes to gender conservatism as a reaction to the previous twenty years of communist practice of “emancipating” women by their participation in paid employment. Nobody was against the conservative steps taken after 1989, apparently also because they were presented and articulated as anti-communist. Re-familiarization tendencies thus did not face any resistance amongst either the Czech public or women themselves. Also, while in the conditions of socialist Czechoslovakia (where everybody was employed but work productivity was very low and wage did not depend upon performance) it was easier for women to carry out their “dual role”, in the market economy, performance of “dual role” along with still relatively rigid gendered division of work and along with full-time employment of women is very difficult. Thus women usually withdraw from the labour market during a period of caring for small children.

Typical are therefore female careers marked by relatively long breaks: 3-4 years per one child, in the case of more consecutive children 5-6 years outside the labour market. Only 1-2 percent of women stay at home for the minimum period of time (until the child is about half a year old), which largely applies to highly qualified women. (Křížková et al. 2005) The relatively high employment rate of Czech women, which for women without children reaches levels of Scandinavian countries and for all women on average reaches values of conservative-corporative countries, is influenced by the extremely low level of employment of women with small children. Relatively long career break may be then interpreted as a cause, but also as a consequence of the disadvantaged position of women in the Czech labour market. (Bartáková 2006)

Different Czech studies however indicate that both sexes would welcome changes towards greater equality. According to Chaloupková (2005), mainly women require greater activity of men in the housework (77 percent of women and 44 percent of men) and in childcare (81 percent of women and 54 percent of men). Significant requirements for increased men’s involvement in housework and childcare indicates also Valentová (2006) using the ISSP 2002 data. This greater gender equality is gradually being realized in a certain part of the population: mainly in households of younger and more educated individuals. (Dělba... 2001; Sirovátka – Tomešová Bartáková 2008)

## Research methodology

In this text, gendered division of work was studied as a part of a wider research, the aim of which was to monitor a relatively wide spectrum of macro and micro-level factors influencing the return of Czech women to the work after the parental leave. We focused on the subjective perception of women since it enables us to understand what *meaning* women ascribe to division of work with regard to their behaviour after parental leave. We therefore opted for qualitative interview. In the first phase, we used the episodic interview (Hendl 2005), where we invited women to speak openly about their transition from parental leave to the labour market, which was followed by more structured questioning.

We mainly observed the division of work and care between the partners, its determinants, women's satisfaction with the current division of work and opinions on its fairness. We further turned to women's value orientations and attitudes towards social roles of men and women<sup>3</sup> as well as to women's preferences in the area of combining work and family. Last but not least, we examined whether women reflect the cultural norms with respect to gender roles and the influence of these norms on their behaviour. As Venturini (2006) puts it, the individual level never stems only from an individual him/herself, but is bound to the environment (objects, norms, values, other individuals), which influence human behaviour and *filtered through mental processes*, enters the area of individual everyday life.

To construct the research sample, the intentional selection and snow-ball sampling technique was used. Women were chosen according to the following criteria: living with a husband or partner (which enables observation of division of work, influence of partner's attitudes), currently in the period of transition (or shortly after) from parental leave to the labour market, and both previously working and never entering the labour market prior to becoming mothers. Another condition was the presence of the youngest child in preschool age. The number of children was not important – it didn't have to be the first parental leave for women<sup>4</sup>.

A crucial criterion for selection into the sample was however the level of education, since it has varying influence on women's preferences. For first, Hakim's (2000, 2003) hypotheses about differentiating life style preferences among women, concerning the dimensions 'family – work', have been

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<sup>3</sup> We have been examining women's personal values in relation to motherhood, family, children, work, attitudes towards the roles of men and women including the question of a potential exchange of roles and opinions of women regarding who are a "good mother" and a "good father".

<sup>4</sup> It is possible to summarize that four types of women were included into the sample: 1) women who have already returned to the formal labour market; 2) women who were still on the parental leave; 3) those already after parental leave, but further receiving parental benefits and staying at home until their child was four; and finally 4) those belonging to either group 2) or 3), but also making money on the formal or informal labour market.

confirmed in the strong correlation to their education in the Czech Republic. (Rabušic – Chromková-Manea 2007) For second, education has an influence on the overall position of women in the labour market, but also on the return strategies after the parental leave. In this context, Kuchařová et al. (2006) argues that the period spent on parental leave in the Czech Republic truly depends on the education of mother: the higher her education, the shorter period she remains on parental leave (or at least does not attempt to prolong it), and mainly if the level of investment into preparation for the given profession was high, if prior to parental leave they built a certain job position or if the qualification demands of their profession are high. Matějková (2005) also confirmed certain differences in the length of parental leave according to education level.

According to Kuchařová et al. (2006), a quicker return of female university graduates further depends on the level of their need for self-fulfilment and on their wage level. Education also influences the return to their former employer: Czech university educated women return much more frequently to the former employer (80%) as opposed to women with lower education (43%). (Kuchařová et al. 2006) Highly qualified women in responsible positions are also less expected to take advantage of the parental leave and more expected to return fast to work. (Hatt 1997)

Women with different level of education are also differently influenced by existing policies. It doesn't apply only to the length of parental leave, but also to the usage of the childcare facilities and take up of parental benefit, which in combination with other family-related benefits represents an acceptable alternative for those women in particular who do not have greatly above-average incomes. (Sirovátka – Tomešová Bartáková 2008)

With respect to the differences listed above we interviewed university graduates (9), secondary school graduates (6) and women with vocational or elementary education (6)<sup>5</sup>. Thus a total of 21 in-depth interviews were conducted in 2007. The aim was not to form a statistically representative group, but to examine the contexts of the life situation of women with varying education, since the attained educational level not only opens various chances and aspirations, but also means various risks in the labour market, and as such co-creates a different context for deciding on and realizing the division of work

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<sup>5</sup> The age of the university educated women varied from 32 to 37, of women with secondary education from 32 to 39 and in the lowest educational group from 26 to 35. Women always had from 1 to 3 children. They were always married and usually came from the educationally homogeneous marriage. When comparing with their partners, an obvious gender labour market segmentation or the gender segmentation in the field of study was noticed. Two secondary educated women were self-employed. The mean age at the first birth was 29.5 among women with university degree, 25.8 among those with secondary education and 22.5 among women from lowest educational group. Career break was from 3 to 6 years long among university educated women, from 1 (self-employed) to 12 years among women with secondary education (mostly 6-7 years long break due to two following parental leaves) and from 3 to 13 among women from the lowest educational group (usually 5-6 due to the same reason).

and the return to the labour market after parental leave. The ATLAS.ti was used for analysis<sup>6</sup>.

Certain limits of our choice concerning the research sample might be caused by the inevitable self-selection as well as by the sampling techniques (snow-ball) itself since it might be influenced by the social networks of interviewees. Another limits might be seen in the suppression of other possible selection criteria than mentioned, such as age of women (which however turned to be similar in all cases since the aim of the research was to interview women with young children), rural vs. urban setting (finally, women from both environment were represented in the sample and this characteristic would definitely have deserved deeper insight) or education or social status of the partner (we nevertheless usually found the educational homogeneity in the couple). Nonetheless, as we stated above, the aim was not to form a statistically representative sample and to control for all possible independent variables, but to examine the contexts of the life situation of women according to selected characteristics, mainly according to their education level.

## Research Findings

### *Women with university education*

The fundamental factor influencing the decision of university-educated women regarding returning to the labour market after the parental leave is their *preferences*. It is important to what level a woman finds satisfaction rather in the long-term care of a child at home or to what level is she also oriented towards a “non-family world” – the world of paid work/career. Based on that, some women wanted to return sooner to the labour market<sup>7</sup> and some even realized it; others perceived an early return to work as unsuitable, especially in the very early stage of child’s development<sup>8</sup>.

Highly qualified women typically aspire to fulfil the role of mother and worker at the same time, however, simultaneously they often fear that it is not possible to sufficiently fulfil both roles, mainly in the early child’s age. Nevertheless, the stronger the need for self-fulfilment in paid employment (need for self-realization, independence, building a career, “social overlap”, “personal overlap”, participation in the society, etc.) the faster the return to the labour market. We may thus speak about the process of long-term creation of a relationship between paid and unpaid work, where however the child’s needs are consistently given the highest value.

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<sup>6</sup> This software allows analysis of the interviews by text coding, which further enables relatively sophisticated analysis including searching for relationships between expected and newly surfacing concepts.

<sup>7</sup> Sooner than in the child’s third year, when parental leave with the job guarantee ends.

<sup>8</sup> Women more or less agreed that from the age of two (but rather three) the working activity is already more compatible with motherhood.

An important circumstance having significant influence on the speed and form of return to the labour market is the *gendered division of work* within the household. The research showed that the development of the gender roles is dynamic: prior to the women's first maternity/parental leave the division of work was usually slightly more balanced between the partners, whereas with the arrival of children the more distinct gender roles division occurred – women handle the decisive majority of housework and childcare. Men spend time with children rather “after work” or during weekends and they are generally more willing to take part in “gender-neutral” housework (ex. “sweeping, cleaning floors, washing providing there's an instruction manual, shopping”) than in the so-called “women's work” (ex. ironing, washing dishes, cooking, laundry), which they perform rather exceptionally. After woman returns to work, the roles equal out a little, nevertheless, gender-specific roles during and after the parental leave seem to be much clearer than prior to it.

Specific division of housework in individual households undoubtedly depends on *how a woman interpret her own and her partner's social role* in relation to the family and to paid work, *how the partner/husband understands them, and what roles both of them accept*. Images of these roles and their acceptance are individual in each couple and develop over time, similarly as do the division of work itself.

A typical phenomenon is women's (and men's) conviction regarding the existence of “natural” roles of men and women, mainly of the greater suitability of women for the function of caretaker. Women thus automatically take on the role of caretaker, which is related to birth and the period of breastfeeding, when the male-partner really cannot substitute for the woman. On the other hand, roles don't normally become “switched” (ex. man on parental leave) or division doesn't become more balanced even in the moment when it is “biologically” feasible. An exchange of roles is sometimes refused by the man (ex. because of “male prestige”), but it isn't usually realized mainly due to the financial reasons or it is the wish of woman to be home with her children. Thus, in certain households, the intentional dominance of woman in the sphere of home occurs, which may relate to the effort to maintain an arena of influence; in other words, to maintain her “expert” position in the non-employment sphere (so-called “maternal gate-keeping”), thus maintaining an “equal” position with the man, who dominates in the employment sphere. The emotional aspect plays a role too – some women would not exchange the period of up to three years of child for work, nor would they want to share this period with their partners. Furthermore, the societal expectations are not in favour of fathers on parental leave as well as they do perceive the early period of maternity as a unique time in the life of a woman, which shouldn't be

interrupted by paid work. The exchange of roles thus occurs only limitedly as is illustrated by the following citation.

*For first, it wouldn't have been financially contributing and for second, I'm, with regard to my nature, little bit afraid to go against the stream and against others' opinion since it is not quite common here that the father is on parental leave. I'm not afraid that he wouldn't manage it, not at all. I have an experience that when I'm not at the disposal, he manages it perfectly. But I'm little bit afraid of opinion of the others' and of the society about the father being at home and mother doing the career. (Petra)*

Most women thus accept the complementary arrangement of female and male roles, but, at the same time, their own ideal image of man's role in the family mostly differs from the implemented model. They do agree on the importance of the man's breadwinner role especially for the temporary period of parental leave, but what is crucial for women is the psychological and emotional support of the man (that he prioritizes the family as the most fundamental part of his life) and they mainly require as balanced division of care for children as possible. The overall lesser engagement of men in housework and care is however finally accepted: although after a while thinking about it, most women found the current arrangement of the division of unpaid work to be unjust, they often expressed the conviction that their partner does the maximum (employment won't let him do more). Thus, without regard to what division of work women prefer, in the end most accept a double role and adjust their strategy for returning to the labour market to these responsibilities of "theirs".

What also plays a significant role in the decision about labour market re-entry and its timing is women's image of who is a *good mother*. It is however difficult to identify to which level are the personal images influenced by the cultural norms. Women, if they were capable to identify any societal influences, usually pointed out the "traditional" image of mother, sometimes in the extreme position of the woman self-sacrificing for her children. Women themselves identified these images as stereotypical, as an unachievable ideal. On the other hand, mentioning inaccessibility of such ideal may indicate women's awareness of being compared to this ideal by their surroundings. Mainly those women who intended to return to the labour market earlier sometimes mentioned feelings of "guiltiness", especially if they did not feel themselves utterly fulfilled by motherhood. Women also expressed the opinion that a working mother is not automatically a bad mother, or that there doesn't exist any correlation between these two phenomena.

Aside from social norms related to motherhood, a crucial factor influencing the division of work is the wage gap between men and women. Despite the fact that the women had a high level of education, they have been a secondary

earner to the family budget. This position even strengthened after parental leave. Acceptance of gender division of work is thus commonly the result of a rational economic calculation, where oftentimes it is truly more advantageous if the man stays in the labour market<sup>9</sup>.

Thus, if the partner engages only limitedly (and the grandparents are not available or they are not willing to help out with the care) and in combination with the existing *public childcare* in the Czech Republic<sup>10</sup>, this means that women are well blocked from realizing their early return to the labour market. This leads to the complex strategies and to a relatively heterogeneous solution in the group of observed university-educated women.

### *Women with secondary education*

In comparison with university-educated women, those with secondary education are relatively unanimous in their preferences. They are fully identified with the role of mother; motherhood is understood as the most important attribute of a woman, providing a deep feeling of accomplishment and self-fulfilment. The opinion that the child should be with the mother till the age of three or even four if it is in the interests of child, is dominant. Return to the labour market is sometimes perceived as a “loss of child” and as a great self-denial. When children are small, the roles of mother and employee are perceived as much less compatible as in the case of the university-educated women<sup>11</sup>.

Contrary to women with university education they did not aspire to achieve a certain social and personal overlap through employment, but they also do not view their employment as just a source of income. Rather they are gaining a certain feeling of satisfaction, contact with people and new information from their employment. In line with that, they usually do not aspire for the fast return to the labour market or for a permanent career in one field. This probably relates to the fact that the investments into education and opportunity costs during the parental leave are lower comparing to university-educated women.

The desire to return to work then appears individually in different time periods. However, it most frequently occurs at the time when the child becomes more independent and in the opinion of women doesn't need mother as much

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<sup>9</sup> There was just one couple where a woman had a higher income than her husband – he was the only one man (among the partners/husbands of our women in sample) taking up parental leave.

<sup>10</sup> Nursery schools (for children aged six months to 3 years of age) are almost nonexistent. Moreover, it may be problematic to place a child in kindergarten as well (for children 3 to 6 years of age): not just a child younger than three (a child may attend kindergarten who is under the age of three, but not younger than two, a maximum of five days per month, otherwise it results in loss of the parental benefits), but also child aged three to four, mainly because the current demand for places in kindergartens exceeds the offer.

<sup>11</sup> Self-employed women form an exception. These return to active work very quickly (when the child is a year old or even younger), which is mainly facilitated by the high flexibility of the self-employment. However, they significantly reduce their work hours to be able to spend more time with their children.

anymore. Hence beside the role of mother, room is gradually opening up for other roles as well.

*Division of "male" and "female" roles* is relatively strictly defined. Women consider men to be the main breadwinner and see own role in childcare and housework, especially if the children are young. As children grow, women plan for expanding paid-work activity, but still they don't perceive it as equal to the paid-work activity of man. The crucial role here plays the *gender wage differences*: income of women with secondary education is mostly supplementary, although it is not an exception that the partners had similar incomes prior to the first parental leave<sup>12</sup>. Women's take up of the parental leave (rather than men's) as well as the clear division of gender roles is thus often a result of not only preferences but especially a rational calculation, which applies even stronger than in the case of university-educated women.

Women usually accept such division of work, understanding it as functional. They usually don't consider an *"exchange of roles"* for complex reasons. In part, they do not perceive themselves as someone who could, in the first place, financially provide for the family, nor do they aspire to do so. In part, the level of financial compensation for parental leave does not allow the exchange of roles since for men it is still very low. And finally, in the opinion of these women, the equal division of work with a partner would mean to partly give up their "exclusive" maternal and caring skills and to "leave" part of the emotional ties to the child to their partner, which they are not willing to<sup>13</sup>.

The relatively strictly separated roles of men and women have negative consequences for women returning to the labour market. These mainly meet with limited engagement of partners in everyday routine care for children as a consequence of the scope of their work activity or their unwillingness to engage. Men's engagement is also differently requested depending on the importance of his role of breadwinner. Men themselves better accept a childcare, since it is more a matter of sharing common values of children and home rather than a division of routine housework.

Separated roles of men and women are relatively widely accepted:

*I think that the men are not yet ready for the true emancipation. What I see around, what prevail is: I go to work, I will devote my time to them [to children], but you will have cleaned up and cooked....It still prevails around me, when I talk to my female friends that the men are like I'm the one who's going to work...that the women today still submit to it, my generation... (Renata)*

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<sup>12</sup> However, men's income usually grows continuously, whereas women's income stagnates or even decrease after the parental leave.

<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, women are in relative agreement that the man can take care of the child just as well as the woman, especially if it is his voluntary choice. But similarly to university-educated women, they fear whether the partner would psychologically sustain takeover of the role of his female partner over the long term.

*Acceptance* of mostly clearly separated gender roles to significant level stem from the high value of maternity in women's life and from the image of women as primary mother, respectively good mothers, to which is also related the responsibility for care of the household. As opposed to the university-educated women, who reflected on certain *cultural norms*, women with secondary education did not reflect on them at all. Despite this, they relatively consistently defined a certain cultural ideal of a *good mother* as fully dedicating her life to her children<sup>14</sup>. They somewhat agreed that woman only have the "right" to self-fulfilment (ex. education, paid work, hobbies, entertainment) when the child is fully cared for, and is in no way suffering because of such self-fulfilment of mother. What also seems to be culturally shared ideal is that three years of child's age is the lowest acceptable limit for mother's return to work. However, as the parental *benefits* has been prolonged from three to up to four years of child's age (since 1995), the consensus concerning the appropriateness of women's return to work has also shifted. Thus, the question of conditionality of such opinion by the existing institutional setting stems here. Nevertheless, the complex of these facts supports the long withdrawal of the Czech women from the labour market (3-4 years), even despite the fact that if a woman stays home with the child for longer than three years (when parental leave expires), she may lose her job guarantee.

As concerns a concept of a *good father*, women mostly conceptualized him as a man who provides the family with financial security, has a good and active relationship with children (where for women it is sufficient when the man spends time with the children in the evenings and during weekends), who understands the difficulties in the role of woman (as a mother and caretaker of the household), and also perceives the role of woman-mother as equal to the role of man-breadwinner. This last requirement reflects certain ambivalent feelings and experiences concerning equality of the role of caretaker and the role of breadwinner. The most dissatisfied the women are with the men who emphasize their role of breadwinner and take part in caring for the child only limitedly<sup>15</sup>.

Gender-based division of work is nevertheless considered without any great hesitation as just. On the other hand, women to certain level reflected on the unequal division of work as disadvantageous for women in the labour market, which places men into the role of a more advantageous workforce, which is documented by the following citation.

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<sup>14</sup> A good mother should praise her children and be well-balanced. She should be in a harmonic relationship with the child, be its emotional support, know how to communicate with children, fully dedicate herself to them, makes other spheres of life subordinate to them.

<sup>15</sup> According to certain women, the opinion of Czech society on the character of maternity/parental leave as truly a vacation, where the woman does not do anything, contributes to certain inequality in perceiving the importance of the role of men and women in the household.

*So, they have it easier, the men. If we were searching for the job, both of us, nobody would ask him: do you have children, who will look after them? They ask the woman, not the man. This is for first. And for second, men don't have that career break as I have. They can also stay at home, but they rarely do so since they're usually breadwinners and in 90 % have higher income than the woman. So, they stay at work and don't lose the contact...I think, there is a lot of differences. (Iva)*

This further meets up with the opinion that women may catch up with men in the labour market only later in their so-called "second careers".

#### *Women with vocational and elementary education*

For women with vocational or with only an elementary education, family and children are the essential *life value*, and the role of mother is their life ambition. The meaning of employment as opposed to this is relatively low, and is practically limited to the financial benefit and to chances to spend time in a social environment. The concept of *self-fulfilment* in employment was never mentioned by any of these women during the interviews. This is partly understandable with regard to the level of their education: often low pay and sometimes tiring and dissatisfying work is always a worse alternative to staying home with the children. Furthermore, women themselves implicitly expect that they can only fill *low (to inferior) positions in the labour market*; the more they have children, the more they feel this. Thus for many women, the high value of motherhood over paid work is not only driven by the personal preference but it is also a rational choice.

These women start to consider returning to work more or less at the time when the child is four years of age<sup>16</sup>. Sometimes they feel that they should return to work earlier for financial reasons, but they express fear from the negative impacts on the child's psychical health: they shared the opinion that children suffer when mother goes to work earlier than when they turn three, but also even when they turn four.

*I wouldn't go to work earlier than my children reach four, definitely not. Not even if my employer would accommodate to me. I didn't have children to put them in the nursery when they were two years old. I have them to be with them. (Barbora)*

At the age of four, however, women usually place their children in the kindergartens, by which their daily schedule changes: work in the household is handled much faster, followed by a feeling of boredom and the stereotype that

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<sup>16</sup> The loss of human capital during a long career break is not strong for these women in any way because their human capital is generally low, as is their chance for a quality job. As opposed to the university and secondary school educated women, they did not spontaneously express any fears from losing skills prior to returning to the labour market.

they want to fulfil by paid work. Moreover, when children are at this age, women recognize a certain social pressure to return to work. Here it is also clear to distinguish a link to the *institutional context* – parental benefits terminates when the child is aged four.

Male partners mostly welcome that woman stays home up until their child is four years old, which pays off financially for the household with regard to the amount of the parental benefits comparing to usually very low wages of these women in the labour market. Sometimes return even meant a financial loss for the household while bringing further opportunity costs (unpleasant work, undesirable hours, travel costs, kindergarten costs, food, etc.). It however changed in 2007, when the parental benefits were cut for the fourth year of child's age. Furthermore, the loss of job guarantee also did not seem to be a serious incentive for women to return to the labour market prior to the child turning four.

Balancing work and family thus leads to the *clear preference of the family sphere*. Such strategy is also determined by clearly outlined *division of work* between men and women, which is the most traditional in this education group. *I don't do career. I have a husband, who's able to take care of us....I'm a type of the old-fashioned mother: a man have to earn money and a mother have to keep family together. When doing so, I feel great fulfilment. (Lucie)*

The woman handles the vast majority of housework and childcare, man remains in the role of main breadwinner also after the woman returns to work<sup>17</sup>. It has no meaning for the family (from financial reasons) to interfere with the man's work and the "career" breaks are made by woman. Women have also only limited expectations as concerns the men's engagement in childcare and housework, but still, male partners remain an important source of help for coordinating combination of work and family. Nevertheless, the scope of their engagement often depends on their work schedule, work flexibility and of course on their interest.

*Exchanging* roles is then practically unacceptable for these women. Similarly as with women with secondary education, they are aware of their incapacity of providing for the family financially due to the significantly lower wages in comparison with their partners. Gender pay differences in this education category are relatively dramatic (men sometimes make twice the pay as women). It is possible, drawing from the interviews, to identify a discrimination basis of such established wages. Women then perceive income from their work activity as "supplementary", although this mostly concerns full-time employment. Finally, women are not willing to give up or even limit

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<sup>17</sup> Men typically do not perform the routine housework, or do it as an exception to the rule. Women then speak of their partner as "helping out", which clearly indicates that they consider housework to be women's task.

their primary role in caring for children, even if they were capable to financially secure the family. They consider man as capable of caring for a child just as well as a woman, which in their opinion should lead to just as strong emotional bonds of the child with the father as with the mother, but it is right this very intimacy of the relationship with a child that these women usually want to keep for themselves and dominate in this sphere over the partner.

Women thus regard the gender-based division of work as *just* and fully accept it. They do not doubt that gender separation of roles is correctly established, they do not allow the discussion on it and they do not see a reason to question it in any way. It is then reflected in women's concept of a *good mother* or a *good father*. There is no disagreement at all on the man's primary role as a breadwinner, but it is also important for these women, similarly as for women with university and secondary education, that the man take part in childcare and that he actively spend time with family. And again, a *good father* does not act superior as a breadwinner and does not underestimate (unpaid) work performed by women. Women again brought up the negative experiences with the opinions of Czech men that a woman on maternity/parental leave "doesn't do anything".

The image of a *good mother* does not differ from the image of a mother fully and lovingly dedicated to her children. These women most strongly regard the role of mother and professional work as diametrically opposed – they consider work activity as practically incompatible with bringing up young children up to the age of four. They express a negative stance towards women who return to work sooner than when their children are three years old and judge other women critically who in their opinion are devoted to their career. On the other hand, they understand that a working mother may not necessarily be a bad mother, but they see achieving harmony between these two roles as very complicated.

Some women also realized a link between gendered division of work and structural disadvantages in the labour market. In their opinion, general stereotypes bound to the expected roles of men and women are reflected in the better position of men in the labour market (men have more advantageous job positions and employers trust them more). Although women also realize that in this regard certain society-wide changes appeared (ex. women in atypical jobs or growing number of women in management positions), they quite realistically reflect their own worse position in the labour market (ex. they are clearly aware of their wage handicap). They however accept this position as a given and their resignation to any positive changes in the foreseeable future is unfortunately all too clear.

## Discussion

The analysis showed that the division of work in the Czech households is significantly differentiated by gender, and almost exclusively leads to discontinuation of the professional careers of women. Their relatively long stay on the parental leave further contributes to gender roles separation. Czech women however more or less accept such division of work (with biggest dissatisfaction amongst university-educated women), and adjust their career development to this “negotiated” gender role model. We may however ask, together with McDonald (2000), whether if redistribution of the burden of unpaid work were to occur (institutionally or by redistribution among the partner, or other persons), would this lead to a faster return of women to the labour market after the birth? In other words, is motherhood and unpaid work in the household truly a burden preventing women from fast return to the labour market, or is this a matter of (even just temporary) preferences of leaving the labour market at the time when the children are very young<sup>18</sup>, bound to the high value of children and motherhood?

As research has shown, this question is undoubtedly relevant, and its answer is complex. Personal values and preferences linked to the family and paid work truly play a key role in women's behaviour. However, whatever the preferences happen to be, they do not seem to be entirely independent, but rather are modified in correlation to the “opportunity costs”. The higher the opportunity costs maternity has in relation to the labour market (decrease in human capital, devaluation of skills, threat of getting a worse job, but also financial difficulties of the household, etc.), the greater the effort for a faster return to the labour market.

In general, university-educated women prefer the fastest return, but at the same time their preferences are the most heterogeneous. This partially supports Hakim's (2000) assumptions regarding the heterogeneous preferences within the education groups. Nevertheless, we suggest that in the Czech environment it is possible to partially explain these heterogeneous preferences by the role of education as a filter of structural conditions/pressures. Women with higher education are better equipped to the labour market adaptation and have greater potential to maintain/gain a higher-quality job, which brings greater “independence” of their preferences on the structural context. Moreover, university-educated women have the most equal potential to men in terms of being the breadwinner (or earn more than man), which influences their opinions and ambitions, or even the actual division of roles within their households. As a consequence, they have greater space for realizing diverse

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<sup>18</sup> In the Czech environment, the term “very young” might apply to children younger than three or even younger than four years of age.

preferences. Generally, the higher the qualification women had, the greater the emphasis on modernizing gender relationships. Contrary to that, the lower the education, the greater acceptance of complementary gender roles.

In line with this, the preferences of women with secondary education and mainly of women with vocational or elementary education lead clearly towards the role of mother and the sphere of home. However, these preferences seem to be strengthened by the institutional setting (long parental leave, long period of parental benefits and severe lack of childcare facilities for children under three), and by structural conditions: mainly by gender wage gap and generally worse position of these women with children in the labour market. According to Duncan (2007), in today's campaigns approaching the problem of work-life balance, the simple fact is however forgotten: that work is not always fulfilling, especially for women with low qualifications, where for many of them work is – without access to a “career” – rather a necessity than an opportunity (Duncan 2007, 128) or a choice. Similarly, the so-called gender identities stay often apart the discussion – for example, the fact that mothers feel a social commitment to take care of their children themselves and fully identify with this commitment. (Duncan 2007) In the Czech environment, it is difficult to estimate to what extent the women's preferences and family-work behaviour can be understood as a reflection of the full identification with the existing relatively gender-rigid cultural norms, or to what extent women actually take advantage of these cultural norms to justify their incapability (in consequence of discrimination and low education) or their unwillingness to participate in the labour market when their children are small. It probably concerns both: the interaction of internalized cultural norms and structural (and institutional) conditions.

Gendered division of work is thus not an isolated factor and the cultural ideals and values that are an inherent part of the major society and its institutions (Duncan 2005; 2007) play a crucial role. This perhaps does not differentiate Czech women significantly from the majority of “western” or other “central European” women, but what is specific in the Czech post-transitive society is the already mentioned role of the educational level. It serves as a tool for dealing with the conditions in the labour market (including the gender-discriminatory behaviour of employers) as well as it strengthens/weakens the woman's position when negotiating the division of work in the micro-level of the household.

In the end, however, whatever the education level and correlated preferences are they often end up colliding with the institutional setting, which continues to adhere more to the traditional preferences in the division of work. (See Rabušic – Chromková-Manea 2007; Sirovátka – Tomešová Bartáková 2008) We may thus ask whether the declared dissatisfaction of women and

awareness of men (e.g. Chaloupková 2005; Sirovátka –Tomešová Bartáková 2008) will lead to the real changes in the division of unpaid work under the conditions, where the gendered cultural norms are clearly demonstrated and further strengthened by the governmental decisions in the field of family policy. It is not clear whether the Czech family policy will continue its gender conservative trend or whether it will more and really reflects on changing values and preferences in the society. Currently, it rather helps to keep the gendered cultural expectations and together with lasting gender segmentation of the labour market (and significant gender wage differences) and the lack of quality part-time jobs contributes to the maintaining of the unequal gendered division of work in the households and the worse position of the women in the workforce.

The potential shift in gendered division of work is thus not realized due to complex relations between the cultural and structural conditions (including institutional ones), where these further interact with the level of education, the individuality of each woman (including their preferences) and with her individual life-course situation.

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