

A Qualitative Study of Labour Market Precarisation and Involved Fatherhood in Slovenia

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Discussions about the reconciliation of work and family are often considered to be focussing on women and middle class people with safe employments. By identifying the differences among men in their capacities to engage in involved fatherhood that stem from their positions in the labour market, this article introduces the perspective of a deprived marginalised group in the labour market and critically reflects on the impact of labour flexibilisation on caring masculinity and gender equality. Men as employees have heterogeneous positions in the labour market, which impacts their access to social – including parental – rights and possibilities for balancing work and care. Given that the precarisation of the labour market is a salient problem in Slovenia, this qualitative study based on explorative in-depth semi-structured interviews with fathers in diverse forms of precarious employments analysed how insecure and flexible work arrangements shape fatherhood practices, impact the chances for involved fatherhood and structure gender relations. The fathers' experiences showed that precarious working conditions enable fathers to be intensely involved in children's care mainly when their employment approaches standard employment in terms of stability and predictability of working hours and guaranteed workload. When work is entirely flexible and unpredictable and the employee is faced with either taking such a job or losing it, the reconciliation of work and fatherhood is aggravated as the organisation of everyday life is fully subordinated to paid work. In conclusion, precarious working relations were indicated to foster the strengthening of the breadwinner model and retraditionalisation of gender relations.

Key words: men, masculinities, fathering, reconciliation of work and family, labour precarisation, gender, child care

1. Introduction: Fatherhood between the state, the labour market and the family

In public debates, involved fatherhood is often considered to be an issue of men's identity change and of raising men's awareness about the importance of an equal division of child care between the parents for the sake of both gender equality and the children's well-being.¹ However, this notion often ignores the fact that the possibilities of individual changes in fatherhood practices are importantly defined by broader structures, policies and organisations that can enable, hinder or even punish individual change (Levtov et al., 2015). The contemporary change in fatherhood therefore needs to be understood in the context of a broader social, economic and cultural change, including, as this article claims, the key changes in the sphere of paid work.

Feminist studies of social policies (Hobson, 2002) place the establishment of norms and practices of fatherhood within the mutual co-effect of the state, the (labour) market and the family. According to Connell (2005 [1995]), the state's policies have a critical role in the process of social regulation of gender relations, especially the policies regulating family relations, care rights and obligations, including fatherhood. Indeed, the most tangible shift from the male breadwinner to the involved fatherhood model has been made through social policies such as gender-neutral definition of parental leave rights, determination of leave duration, financial compensation and division of leave between the partners, exercise of paternity leave rights and the so-called "daddy's quota" as well as custody regulation in case of divorce. However, state policies that promote involved fatherhood have run into the reality of labour market flexibilisation and destandardisation.

The relations between employment and care, gender norms and identities, including the relations between men and women, are impacted by the labour market in different ways. Through the conditions of paid work such as its duration, organisation, predictability and flexibility of working hours,

¹ The most widely accepted definition of an involved father is Michael Lamb's (2010) tripartite division of such involvement into engagement, accessibility and responsibility. Engagement refers to direct, one-on-one interactions with the child; accessibility refers to times when a parent is available for interaction with the child, but is not presently engaged in direct interaction; responsibility refers to taking ultimate responsibility for ensuring the child's welfare. The gender equality perspective on involved fatherhood also includes a notion of equal division of daily child care routine between the parents (Levtov et al., 2015; Scambor et al., 2015).

the degree of a worker's autonomy, income amount, paid leave duration, terms of promotion, organisational culture and possibilities for reconciling work and private life, the labour market promotes either subordination or autonomy of private life in relation to paid work. Hanlon and Lynch (2011) stated that in the contemporary labour markets the basic norm of an ideal worker presumes a self-sufficient, competitive individual who is mobile, flexible, fully available to the employer, primarily has no care responsibilities and is entirely focussed on paid work. The global neoliberal economy upholds competitiveness, a culture of long working hours, the criteria of individual performance, the flexibility of working relationships and working hours, labour cost reduction by lowering wages and eroding the rights arising from employment, high unemployment, underemployment and precarity. In these conditions, the norms of the ideal worker are being further strengthened, marginalising the employees who fail to conform to them. These norms position the men who exercise a father's rights to care for children as less promising workers. Studies that revealed fathers' experiences with the glass ceiling, i. e. with professional, hierarchical and income degradation if they exercise paternity leave or the right to work part-time and to leave to care for a sick child, showed that men who want to become more actively involved in child care experience similar discrimination and segregation in the labour market as women (Puchert, Gärtner and Höynig, 2005). This kind of "punishment" of men who choose alternative ways of masculinity and paid work by attempting to reconcile their professional and caring duties represents a cultural pattern of reproducing the norm of men as chiefly focussed on work and financial provision for the family, acting in the labour market through economic sanctions and status devaluation.

The norm of the ideal worker also reinforces the perception of production and reproduction as mutually disconnected spheres of life. It fails in the recognition that unpaid care with its daily and intergenerational reproduction of people is the main condition for both the welfare and the economy. This disregard can be observed in the lack of mechanisms for the reconciliation of paid work and care in labour organisations, which is particularly typical of masculinised sectors of labour. Where possibilities of work/care reconciliation do exist, they are assumed to be chiefly used by women as mothers, while men who want to use reconciliation mechanisms often face a lack of understanding and prejudice among employers and their fellow workers. The lack of the possibility for men to reconcile

paid work and care is gradually gaining recognition in the European Union (Scambor et al., 2015; Crespi and Ruspini, 2016), but debates still often fail to account for the effects of labour market flexibilisation imposed by numerous new forms of employment. The labour market reveals itself as the critical structure determining fatherhood, not only due to the traditional identification of masculinity with paid work (Hanlon, 2012), but also because the position of men in the labour market importantly determines their access to employment that provides the resources and time they can dedicate to fathering, duration of paid leave, health insurance, parental benefit etc. Social and employment policies link social citizenship, i.e. social rights, including the parental ones, to a precisely defined type of employment – the so-called standard employment – while excluding from these rights the workers in the non-standard employments that are becoming ever more frequent (Kalleberg, 2011).

This article aims to provide more insight into the way fathers' precarious positions in the labour market structure their possibilities for involved fathering and access to parental rights. In the following part, the importance of loosening the father–breadwinner model for constructing masculinity and gender relations is pointed to through the historical perspective of a wider social, economic and cultural change along with a brief overview of the existing research. Next, the particularities of the Slovenian context of fatherhood and labour precarisation are presented. The study's purpose was not to highlight the national context – it is instead used as one of the numerous possible locations in which global processes of labour market liberalisation and fatherhood transformations are taking place. The later parts of the article present the qualitative study and its results, followed by a critical interpretation of the narratives of fathers working in precarious employments.

2. Eroding the breadwinner model

The social organisation of gender relations is closely linked to the mode of production. The model of a father–breadwinner responsible for financially supporting his wife and children through his paid work was established in Europe with the rise of industrial capitalism in the 19th century (Williams, 1998). Women were assigned a separate, seemingly complementary role of a caregiver. They were limited to the private sphere of unpaid, domestic, emotional and childrearing work. The nuclear heterosexual family model, where the man is the breadwinner and the woman is the caregiver, estab-

lished the economic relations of power and dependency in which men are in charge of protection and provision for women and children, and which also legitimised men's legal and informal control over women and children. The model was based on the assumed biological nature of fatherhood, and guaranteed by marriage through which the economic, legal and social rights constituting fatherhood were established. For men, the breadwinner imperative (Hanlon and Lynch, 2011) meant their obligations and rights to their children were mainly defined as financial – a good father needed to be a good worker since a good father was mostly a financial breadwinner, which in turn absolved him of being included in everyday care and emotional involvement. These conditions through which the traditional idea of fatherhood was constructed have been ideologically perceived as natural (in the same way as women's caregiver role was naturalised) and represent the dominant gender norms of masculinity defined through work and support of the family as well as through power, authority and control over the wife and children. The father–breadwinner model was in fact short-lived and never fully implemented. Wars, high male mortality rate, economic migrations and poverty brought about single-parent families and female breadwinners, reconstructing families so that women had to be included in paid work as well. The importance of the father–breadwinner family model is nonetheless that it functioned as a norm and an ideal.

In the second half of the 20th century, the social, economic and cultural conditions that had constituted fatherhood as breadwinning began to change in different countries, with various dynamics and in multiple ways. This involved two key changes in the labour market. First, the decline of industrial production and the growth of service economy and non-standard jobs increased male unemployment and reduced men's capacity to act as breadwinners (Haywood and Mac an Ghail, 2003). Second, the rise of welfare systems, within which the state partly took over the provision of care services, enabled women's mass inclusion in paid work and reduced men's economic supremacy (Lewis, 1992). In the European Union, the normative family model of male breadwinner – female carer has been replaced by the adult-worker family model since the 1990s, but that model is contradictory in its impact (Lister et al., 2007; Daly, 2011). It offers women a place in the labour market, which is critical to full citizenship in contemporary workfare social states. On the policy level, the model is framed as a solution to the problems of demographic change, economic competitiveness

and future pension entitlements (Giullari and Lewis, 2005). Yet, because it pays insufficient attention to the care gap to which it contributes, the adult-worker model poses as many problems as solutions. It involves not only a rebalancing of paid work between men and women, but a complicated rebalancing of unpaid work between the market, state, men and women. The state's provision of public, good quality and universally accessible care services as well as men's equal share of care work are crucial in this respect. It also poses a question of how far it is possible to defamilialise and commodify care (Daly, 2011).

Apart from the changes to the labour market, the father–breadwinner model's decline was also influenced by a broader social and cultural change. Women's demands for autonomy (along with the possibility of maintaining a single-parent household with welfare state support, the possibility of divorce, reproductive rights etc.) and shifts towards the democratisation of parent–children relations loosened the assumption about the natural moral authority of men over women and children. Public awareness of the issues of domestic violence and sexual abuse in the family has cast a shadow over the representations of the father as family protector. Reproductive technologies have enabled the separation of sexuality not only from reproduction, but also from fatherhood, as the father was no longer necessarily present when conceiving the child (Williams, 1998). New cultural representations of fathers as active, participating and equal partners in children's care that emerged from the Scandinavian countries permitted a transformation of the traditional image of a physically present–emotionally absent breadwinner (Hobson, 2002). All these processes have destabilised the image and meaning of a breadwinning father that lies at the core of traditional masculinity. The “crisis of fatherhood” concept can be understood in the very context of this loosening of the breadwinning father model and the absence of new referential frameworks to which men could attach different ways of fatherhood and family life. Theories (e.g., Williams, 1998; Hanlon, 2012) pointed out that fatherhood is established as a discursive and political terrain, in which negotiations take place about the reconstruction of the modern man's identity. In the centre of these negotiations lies a redefinition of men's attitude to women, children and the family that also presumes a different attitude to paid work and to the relationship between work and care.

Following the evidence collected in the Europe-wide research *The Role of Men in Gender Equality* (Scambor et al., 2015), key insights have been

gained on the emergence of “caring masculinities”. Men’s share of unpaid work at home did not increase much in Europe in the 1990s. What happened instead was mainly that women’s increasing labour market participation reduced their time for caring and consequently men’s proportion increased. In the early 2000s, however, studies began to show that a larger proportion of men were performing a larger proportion of care, but important differences among men were observed. Although it should not be over-emphasised, a class variation in family care sharing was detected. The typical (neo)traditional male provider forms existed among the working class but also at the top, among the business elite. Men with higher education were a third more likely to do a large share of child care, compared to men with lower education. Job-related success seems to hinder men’s share in care provision, because men with high incomes are less likely to share equally, especially if their partners have lower incomes. The study confirmed a pronounced correlation with equally shared decision-making among couples. Men with gender-equal norms showed a higher probability of participation in care, compared to men with less gender-equal norms. Equal balance was stronger among younger compared to older couples. The birth of a child usually increased the imbalance in sharing care in most European countries, and adjustments mainly affected women, considering that they are those who leave the labour market, and also taking more responsibility for domestic tasks.

Important contribution highlighting the involvement of men in children’s care has also been made by the “involved fatherhood studies” that focussed on the use of parental and paternity leave, and the changing meanings and perceptions of “new fatherhood” (Loren and Rob, 2004; Brannen and Nilsen, 2006; Crespi and Ruspini, 2016). While analysing the psychological consequences of different types of fathering a child, Lamb (2010), for instance, pointed to the significance of social support and institutional practices for involved fatherhood. There is a consensus in fatherhood studies that “new fathers” confront the contrasting expectations to perform well as fathers and as “ideal, care-free workers” and breadwinners at the same time (Kaufman, 2013; Scambor et al., 2015; Hanlon, 2012). The potential benefits of active fatherhood for men have been analysed by Holter (2007) and they include better quality of life and health and better relationships with partners (less probability of conflict and violence). Additionally, men’s care leave may be good for increased social innovation at the workplace, as

suggested by Nordic studies (Eydal and Rostgaard, 2015). Since the mid-2000s, fathering and fatherhood studies started taking into account the pluralisation and diversity of families, involving issues like the decline of the father's patriarchal authority, trends of emotional work of "new fathers", absent fathers, fathering after divorce and fathering within re-organised, transnational and gay families (Dermott, 2008; Renner et al., 2008; Pleck 2010). Yet, the research has so far not tackled the issue of the impact of labour precarisation on fatherhood.

3. Fatherhood and labour precarisation in Slovenia

In the context of European Union states, the Slovenian context of fatherhood is somewhat specific mainly due to the socialist-era experience of full-time employment and economic emancipation of women. That has enabled the establishment of one of the most notable European Union examples of the weak breadwinner model (Lewis, 1992) or adult worker model (Lister et al., 2007) in which both men and women participate in full-time paid work.² This was enabled by the state, which became considerably involved in children's care in the 1970s by establishing a public, subsidised and widely accessible network of preschools and a quality scheme of parental rights (Leskošek, 2015; Burcar, 2015). Parental leave scheme, which is presently in place in Slovenia, was established in 1986 with the total duration of 365 days, of which 105 days constitute maternity leave while 260 days constitute child care leave which the partners can share arbitrarily. Together with Sweden, Slovenia was one of the first European countries in the 1980s to define parental leave rights in a gender-neutral way which, in theory, enabled parents to share the parental leave, whereby the naturalisation of motherhood was decentralised, at least at the symbolic level (Hrženjak, 2016). By 2012 maternity and parental benefits covered by the state amounted to 100% of labour income, while after 2012 it was lowered to 90% due to austerity policies.

In 2003, during the political and economic transition, the child care leave scheme was upgraded with paid and non-transferable paternity leave for fathers, known from the Scandinavian countries as "the daddy quota". Paternity leave comprises 90 days, with the first 20 days being used by

² According to EUROSTAT's Labour market and Labour force survey (LFS) statistics (Eurostat, 2015), in 2015 among over 80% of working women (and 6% of men) between the ages of 24 – 54 14.8% worked part time compared to the EU28 average of 31.5%.

the father during the first six months after the child's birth and being fully paid, and the remaining 70 days, which he can use during the first three years after the child's birth, are unpaid with the state covering the costs of social security contributions on the minimum wage (Humer, 2017). Structurally, the situation of both partners' full-time employment combined with accessible public childcare provision set the conditions for more egalitarian gender relations and involvement of men in care work.³

While during the post-socialist transition the public child care system and paternity leave scheme have not been deconstructed as in many other Eastern European countries,⁴ the labour market experienced deep changes that are revealed in the destandardisation and flexibilisation of labour (Ignjatović, 2002). It implies a reduction in the number of standard working relations that typically involve continued open-ended contracts, full-time (eight hour) working hours where the worker has one employer and access to social rights arising from employment (Vosko, 2010) and a rise in the number of non-standard employment forms that not necessarily but often establish the precarisation of labour. In Slovenia, during the 2008 economic crises, destandardisation and flexibilisation of labour became a salient public issue fully discussed within the framework of precarisation. It has mainly affected young people as "new-comers" to the labour market and the potential or actual parents of young children. A 2006 study, conducted even before the economic crisis, showed that three-quarters of young people under the age of 35 were employed under fixed-term contracts (Kanjuro Mrčela and Černigoj Sadar, 2007). Despite a recent growth in employment rate, almost no new standard employments are available in the general labour market, meaning that employment in non-standard working relationships is not voluntary but forced (Bembič and Stanojević, 2016).

The fact that the rights linked to non-standard employment statuses are not equal to those arising from standard employment relationships, but are reduced further, justifies a synonymous use of the terms of non-standard and precarious employments. The non-standard forms most frequent in Slovenia include self-employment, contracts for copyrighted work, subcontracting,

³ The OECD research *Balancing paid work, unpaid work and leisure* (OECD, 2014) showed a high level of inclusion of men in Slovenia in the care for children and domestic work, which places Slovenia alongside the Scandinavian countries.

⁴ For instance in Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, resulting in the redomestication of women and the return of the strong father–breadwinner model (Saxenberg, 2011).

agency work, fixed-term employment, student employment and part-time employment (Kanjuo Mrčela and Ignjatović, 2015). Fixed-term contracts became very widespread as they offer more flexibility to the employers. As Bembič and Stanojević (2016) recently showed, a bulk of vacancies advertised (some 80% according to the National Employment Office data) offer only a fixed-term employment contract even though the law limits such contracts only to situations when – due to its specific nature – work is limited to a given period of time (e.g. in the case of a replacement for a temporarily absent permanent worker or project work or seasonal work). For workers, such flexibility brings a high level of job insecurity. Further, Bembič and Stanojević argued that even if part time employment contract (as another example of atypical work form) legally represents a modality of the standard employment contract as it differs from the latter only with respect to the working time, it nevertheless pushes part time workers into precarity because such working arrangement do not ensure sufficient income and do not allow for reaching the full period of pensionable service required for old-age pension.

Bembič and Stanojević (2016), as well as Rajgelj (2015), pointed to student employment as one of the most flexible working arrangement on the Slovenian labour market. It used to be accessible only to the pupils and students, but it became widespread in the years of transition as a form of occasional work and virtually the only available working arrangement for the unemployed youth. Employers use it due to its favourable tax treatment and extremely high flexibility given that only the minimal protection of labour rights applies and that the law provides for no job security whatsoever. Another (potentially) precarious group are the self-employed, for which Bembič and Stanojević (2016: 13) stated: “Although in its legal form self-employment is intended for the conduct of entrepreneurial activity, it is often used as a way of masking dependent employment in an entrepreneurial legal form in order to evade the labour rights associated with a regular employment contract and to gain on flexibility. [...] The self-employed pay their own social security contributions. The law provides for minimum job security and income level comparable to employees performing similar work in similar conditions, but not also for the rights associated with working time, paid holidays, sick leave etc.”. Self-employment appears to be one of the most insecure and fast-growing forms of work in Slovenia. Finally, temporary agency work, as presented

by Bembič and Stanojević (2016), is performed under special employment contract between the worker and the agency which provides work to another company (the so-called user company). The user companies tend to abuse this employment arrangement to gain on external numerical flexibility, some obligations associated to labour law and the costs of recruiting workers. Although agency workers are entitled to a wage according to the going rate and to other benefits enjoyed by workers directly employed with the user firm, they face the same difficulties with respect to social rights as workers on fixed-term contracts because the duration of employment with an agency is typically shorter than open-ended employment.

Studies showed that due to needs for work and family reconciliation, along with the feminisation of the service economy, women are the ones mainly subjected to labour flexibilisation (Vosko 2010). In Slovenia, however, the precarisation of labour affects both women and men, but in different ways. The feminised non-standard form of work typically refers to part-time employment, while in employment under fixed-term contracts the share of men and women is equalised (amounting to 11% of all employees in 2014) (Kanjuo Mrčela and Ignjatović, 2015). Men predominate in self-employment, contract work and agency work. The difference is that fixed-term and part-time work is performed within the company, with those employed having a proportional share of social rights deriving from labour, while self-employment and contract work belong to distinctly deregularised, individualised jobs that are exempt from labour rights and, in the case of agency work, also subject to downright exploitation. The increasing share of precarious employment is exacerbating inequality between those in standard and those in non-standard employments (Standing, 2011). Precarious employment involves uncertainty and instability, the performance of occasional paid work, a combination of several jobs at the same time, underemployment or overemployment that is exchanged with periods of unemployment, and the absence of rights or only partial entitlement to the rights applying to those with standard employment (for instance, trainings and education, paid leave and sick leave, maternity, paternity and parental leave, pension and health insurance and unemployment benefits) (Gherardi and Murgia, 2013). These conditions establish the employee's dependency and non-autonomy in relation to their employer, and the subordination of other spheres of life, including parenthood, to paid work.

4. Fathers in precarious employment in Slovenia – a qualitative study

4.1. Study aims and analytical approach

The main aim of the study was to analyse how precarious employment influences men's fatherhood practices and their active inclusion in children's care. More specifically, we were interested in mapping the problems fathers face in balancing paid work and children's care because of their employment status. As the purpose of the study was not to make statistical generalisations but to explore the "how" and "why" of a phenomenon in a real-life context, a qualitative method of in-depth semi-structured individual interviews was chosen as an approach which enables to study hard-to-reach social groups such as precarious workers and intimacy-related phenomena such as family, children's care and work and care balance by using smaller samples as well as to delve more deeply into the examination of the phenomena. Difficulties in reaching fathers in precarious employments were related to their employment status which is unfavourable and men often hide their marginalised position at the labour market. Also, the issue of children's care and intimacy is constructed as a feminised topic which sometimes diverts men from engaging in such conversations.

4.2. Methodology

Interviews with 12 fathers employed in precarious working conditions were conducted in the spring of 2015 within the framework of the Fathers and Employers in Action (ODA) project.⁵ The project was devoted to raising awareness of the importance of involved fatherhood among employers and men and to the pilot testing of organisational measures for balancing work and fatherhood in four selected companies. Only scant financial resources and timeframe were assigned to qualitative research within the project, which represented the main barrier for developing a larger sample in this study. However, as Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006) indicated, some preliminary theme saturation may occur even within the first twelve inter-

⁵ The project was carried out in 2015 and 2016 and was funded by the Norwegian Financial Mechanism for Slovenia. The partnership involved the Peace Institute (the study coordinator), the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Ljubljana, the Association of Free Trade Unions Slovenia, Nicha d.o.o. and the Norwegian partner Reform – Resource Center for Men. More information about the project is available at <http://www.mirovni-institut.si/en/projects/fathers-and-employers-in-action-oda/>.

views, and some basic elements for metathemes can be reached as early as within six interviews.

The sample included men who were fathers working in different forms of precarious employment: fix-term employment (two participants), self-employment (seven), contract work (one), student employment (one) and working via recruiting agency (one). The youngest participant was 26 and the oldest 51 years old, with the average age of 43. The selection criteria were to include diverse types of precarious employments. However, given that men largely predominate in self-employment compared to women and that, besides student employment, self-employment appears to be the most precarious employment status and is on the rise in Slovenia, the largest share of self-employed men in the sample seemed justified. Two participants had occupational education, six participants finished secondary school, three participants achieved a university degree and one held a doctorate. Another criterion for participant selection was to include men who are fathers of children under the age of 10 because of the assumption that younger children need more caring engagement. While two participants had one child, seven participants had two children, two participants had three children and one participant had four children. Eight participants lived in an urban area and four in smaller settlements.

Snowball and the link-tracing methods of participant recruitment were used. Interviews were carried out by three researchers, which helped engage a wider range of personal social networks. A major drawback of both recruiting methods is that they may fail to locate isolated individuals who are not members of social networks or belong to small, tightly closed networks. In our sampling this happened with agency workers who proved extremely hard to reach.

All participants provided informed consent. Prior to the interview the participants were given detailed information about the project, entailing the name and address of the institutions conducting it, the contact details of the team, the funding of the research and the project's obligation to make the data anonymous. The interviews took between one and two hours to complete and were conducted either at the participants working premises or in their homes. Before starting the interview the participants were asked to give their consent for tape recording. They were informed that they were free not to answer any individual question and to end the interview at any point. The interviews were recorded and transcribed.

The interview foci were explorative and went beyond the topic of this article. The list of themes was divided in two parts. The first part asked about the participants' family life, exploring the questions related to normative and lived experiences of fathering, relations with the partner and extended family, reactions from peer networks to becoming a father etc. The second part focussed on the employment status and explored changes in professional life after the childbirth, responses from employers to becoming a father, strategies for balancing work and fathering and the related issues. Apart from analysing how men experienced becoming a father, in this article we are focussing on the analysis of the following themes: What is your employment status? How does your employment influence on the care for children? What mechanisms for balancing work and care are at place in your employment? What specific problems do you face in balancing work and care?

The principal approach used in the analysis was inspired by grounded theory, using open and focussed coding, which serves for a systematic search for similarities in broad categories and developing its sub-categories (Strauss, 1996 [1987]). Unlike quantitative research using empirical data to verify hypotheses which are deduced from theories, grounded theory approach moves in the opposite direction, using data to formulate a hypothesis and contribute to the development of a theory. This approach seemed reasonable because the issue of fathers' in precarious employments reconciliation of work and care is largely under-researched.

4.3. Study limitations

As mentioned or implied previously, there are several principal limitations to this small-scale and explorative study. The sample size does not allow for any generalisations. Due to the time and resource constrains, the interview transcripts were analysed only by one of the three researchers (the author of this paper). Because of the overrepresentation of the self-employed in the sample, the findings may be biased in relation to other non-standard employment statuses. Further, the average age of the participants was 43, meaning that the study included young people – who are the hardest hit by labour market precarisation– only to a limited extent. Lastly, the study focussed on the employment status and its consequences for balancing work and child care, meaning that the research design would benefit from a more complex exploration (for instance, with the inclusion of other demographic variables such as education and the partner's employment status).

In spite of the limitations, the findings of the study indicated many important issues and trends presented and discussed in the following sections of the article and provided hypothesis for further investigations of how destandardisation of employments affects the combining of paid work and child care for different social groups.

4.4. Results

4.4.1. Experiencing fatherhood

The experiences of fathers in precarious employments showed that men in our sample have generally already made an attitudinal and behavioural shift from the breadwinning to the involved fatherhood model as their statements point to their emotional and intimate connection with their children and their significant involvement in everyday routines and child care practices.

The fathers in our sample attributed great importance to their experience of fatherhood and the relationship with their children: “The best thing” (Bojan, 43, 2); “It is great to be a father” (Zvonko, 36, 2); “Something most beautiful, the essence of life” (Franc, 38, 2); “This is the biggest achievement of my life” (Matjaž, 43, 1).⁶ Fathers responded that fatherhood involves much more than just economic provision for children and point to the time spent with children as the key element of good fathering: “An ideal father is the one who dedicates time, attention, his energy and, of course, material things” (Jure, 26, 2). Therefore, the time fathers spend with their children is the key category in their self-assessment of how good they are as fathers: “I really should spend more time with the children” (Bojan, 43, 2); “I would like to spend more time with my daughters, to gain more energy” (Nikolas, 40, 2); “I wish I could spend more time with the kids and have a less packed schedule” (Bono, 38, 2).

As opposed to the general opinion that after the child is born mothers’ lives change radically rather than fathers’, it is obvious from the fathers’ experiences in our sample that the birth of a child represented a fundamental life change for fathers as well: a new schedule, less sleep, less time for oneself, altered planning and organisation of everyday life, changed relationship with one’s partner, less association with friends and a changed attitude to paid work. This implies shifts from distanced, absent fathering to engaged, involved and intimate fathering in which fathers attribute great

⁶ All names were changed to allow for anonymity. The figures following a name indicate the age and the number of children.

significance to being close to their child, emotionally connected with them and present in their everyday care. As one father said: “I would be offended if I were not allowed to change nappies. To me it is a part of it. I want to be a part of it” (Jure, 26, 2).

4.4.2. Heterogeneity of precarious work forms in relation to fathering practices

The question pursued in the analysis of the interviews was how the participants’ precarious employment positions enable them to realise their caring masculinities and involved fatherhood. In our sample, fathers in precarious employment were not a homogeneous group – they face varying working conditions, workloads, degrees of autonomy vis-à-vis employers/customers, various forms of flexibilisation and degrees of uncertainty. Some are underemployed and only obtain occasional jobs, but have to be fully available at all times and “stay in business”. Others have many engagements that sometimes require long absences and working on weekends, with tasks coming unpredictably, while the worker cannot influence the timeframes for carrying out the work. Periods of a large workload are followed by periods without work and the stress related to financial survival. Some have a relatively stable workload and timeframes, but only have fixed-term employment, which presents uncertainty concerning whether the employer will extend their contract. Many face a work schedule that is outside the standard eight-hour workday.

In our sample three distinctly different types of relations between precarious work and fathering could be identified. The first type involves fathers who take on every work order they receive regardless of family obligations and plans. They are always accessible, their work is not measured by the hours but by completed orders, the work must be finished within certain deadlines and cannot be done from home. These workers do not have much autonomy when it comes to organising their work time – when there are orders they must work, and when there are no orders they can be with their child. This group includes mainly the self-employed and contract workers, but also employees in micro enterprises where the absence of each employee in the company poses a problem of replacement. Those employed in small businesses are often mutually connected and have good mutual relationships. However, that can entail emotional pressure of having to be loyal to their fellow workers. As one interviewee said with regard to parental leave:

“We are a small business – the manager, two women in administration and myself are running everything. If I leave, there’s a problem. Since we’re all very considerate, I did not want to make problems. You don’t take paternity leave in order not to fall into disfavour, the more so nowadays, when jobs are so precious. The job means even more if you have a child, exactly because it is not only me who depends on the pay” (Nikolas, 40, 2).

The problems shown with these workers are primarily economic pressures to be fully available to customers and employers, the unpredictability of work with simultaneous inflexible timeframes for the execution of work, and their irreplaceability at work.

The second type can be defined as including fixed-term and self-employed workers having a stable contract with one company who work in less flexible forms of precarious employment with a relatively predictable workload and timeframes. These forms of employment are in fact quite close to standard employment. In their narratives, fathers who fit into this type express their satisfaction with their possibilities to reconcile work and involved fatherhood:

“Because of my daughter, my professional life has changed 100%. Previously I worked 12 to 16 hours, I was away, irregular schedules, weekends, holidays, nights. I’ve found a job from 6 AM to 3 PM, so that I have the afternoon for myself and my child. I work until 15:00, go to preschool to pick up the child, and spend the afternoon at the playground. This was a conscious decision to change jobs. I work for a salary half the amount of the previous one, to spend the maximum time with my child and to have some time off” (Mark, 46, 3).

The key characteristics of less flexible precarious jobs are the stability and predictability of working hours and the certainty that work is guaranteed by the employer. However, fathers who only have a fixed-term contract expressed high concerns over whether the employer will continue their engagement. As a consequence, they were very careful in using leaves of absence, sick leave and paternity leave because they fear their employer will not extend their contract if they do not fit into the norm of the ideal, fully available worker.

The third type could be named “role reversal” and includes fathers who are not employed, perform occasional work under contracts for copyrighted work and subcontracts, and identify themselves highly with their work although their workload deems them underemployed. Considering

their working, economic and social position, the underemployed are much closer to the unemployed than the employed. Contract workers do not have social security rights derived from standard employment, they work less time than they would want, for a salary lower than needed for survival, and in jobs in which they do not use the education they have achieved (Kanjua Mrčela and Ignjatović, 2015). If their partners are engaged in standard employment, the traditional model of the male breadwinner–female carer gets reversed. In such partnerships, the partners establish a strong alliance that aims to preserve the female partner’s standard employment at any cost because it secures the financial survival of the family. In these cases, fathers take on most of the domestic work alongside full children’s care: “My partner is in full-time employment, I adapt to her work time. There is not a thing that I do not do” (Zvonko, 36, 2); “She brings the money home, which is why I adapt to the maximum because I am the one who only pays half the contributions, because I only have a 20-hour working week. First, I adapt to the family, because my wife brings in the money, and only then to the business, so the business suffers” (Franc, 38, 2).

Fathers in this group strive hard to stay in business, but since they have taken on the responsibility for everyday domestic and care work, they are quite limited in the time they can devote to work: “I work when my child is asleep in the afternoon for one and a half hours, and from half past ten in the evening to three in the morning. Up to five hours daily” (Duh, 40, 2); “I work five to six hours a day, on weekends, from 10 PM to 1 AM, when the children have gone to bed” (Zvonko, 36, 2). In these forms of work fathers are put in the role that is traditionally taken on by women as mothers – i.e. they fully subordinate their work to their children’s care needs and the partner’s career demands, putting their own careers on hold.

4.4.3. The problems of reconciling work and fatherhood in precarious employments

In our sample of fathers in precarious employments, one of the distinctive characteristics of precarious employment that hits the self-employed and contract workers particularly hard is the worker’s full availability and accessibility to the employer or customer. That loosens the boundaries between private and professional lives in favour of the latter as there is no work and thus income if the worker is not available. This pressure has been particularly strong given the high unemployment rates experienced

in Slovenia following the outbreak of the 2008 global economic crisis (according to the National Employment Office /2015/, unemployment was at 11.2 % in 2015). In precarious employments, the borderlines between private and professional lives are also being loosened by the location of the workplace. For many precarious workers it is their own home where work is performed at any time, often at night or on weekends. While the possibility of occasional work from home and the possibility for the worker to organise their own work time are important strategies for reconciling paid work and the care for children, they can have numerous negative effects in a situation where constant availability is required.

Working outside standard hours, such as on weekends, holidays, at night, in the evening, and on afternoons, is an important feature of precarious employment that makes the reconciliation of paid work and the care for children more difficult. It generates child care problems as the public network of preschools is organised to cater for parents holding standard employment that starts during the morning and lasts for eight hours. This may be a particularly difficult issue to resolve when both partners hold non-standard employments, which was the case with several fathers and their partners in our sample. Such a situation makes parents dependent on grandparents and informal help with the care for the children, given that these possibilities are available to them in the first place: “Neighbours, my mother-in-law, my parents help take care of him” (Franc, 38, 2); “When the children were little we had a nanny three times a week so that I could do some work. Financially, it did not pay off, but this way you stay in business. Nannies are expensive” (Zvonko, 36, 2). When informal forms of child care are not accessible, parents find themselves in great distress and often endure extra costs for child care because they have to pay for an (unsubsidised) nanny. While child care for employees in standard employments is a public concern, for precarious workers child care turns into a private issue. This situation is further exacerbated by the unpredictability of the workload due to which it is impossible to plan work tasks, obligations and timeframes, making it impossible for families to plan their free time together and giving them sudden and unexpected problems with providing care for children.

Some forms of precarious work are distinctively seasonal, meaning that in certain periods work is excessively intense and makes it impossible for fathers to be involved in caring for their children. Due to economic pressures, the season needs to be fully exploited because it is followed by “dry

periods” when there is no work. These concerns affect the whole family: “Flexibility negatively affects the whole family due to uncertainty, which puts pressure on the parents, and the children also feel it” (Daniel, 37, 2). “When there is a hole, when there is no work, it is stressful, due to worries, finances” (Matjaž, 43, 1).

Self-employed fathers estimate that, in principle, they do not receive paternity, parental and sick leave allowance to care for a sick child even if they have to pay social security contributions in those months when they have no income. They think that for people with non-standard employment taking leave to care for a sick child, for example, is linked to so much bureaucracy that they prefer to stay at home without compensation and do their work at home: “If the child is sick, I am at home, but I work from home” (Matjaž, 43, 1). Due to the pressure of being fully available to the employer and the customers, fathers in precarious employment in our sample are generally very reserved about all forms of leave to which workers employed in standard employment are entitled. They estimate that they cannot afford them because they would lose either their jobs or their customer or this would threaten the extension of their contract. A self-employed father whose partner is also a self-employed worker said: “For me or her there is no sick leave, holiday allowance and holiday leave. When both children had chickenpox, this meant staying at home twice for two weeks, so we were nearly broke by the end of the month” (Nikolas, 40, 2).

5. Conclusion: The labour market as a factor of retraditionalisation of gender relations

In Slovenia, the state encourages involved fatherhood with its policies. The narratives of fathers in our sample showed that at the individual level – in their standpoints and values as well as practical actions – men have already made the shift from the father–breadwinner model to caring, emotional and intimate fatherhood, and to their involvement in everyday routines of children’s care. However, things get difficult when fatherhood is related to the labour market, where intensification, flexibilisation, precarisation and the erosion of workers’ rights causes considerable uncertainty and non-autonomy. Uncertainty and dependence on the labour market, particularly in the context of (permanent) economic crisis and high unemployment rates, are even more stressful for parents who must provide for their children with their income from work. This impacts parenting in such ways that the time

and care for children become fully subordinated to the labour market's dictates and is understood only as a private responsibility.

If studies from the early 2000s (Puchert, Gärtner and Höynig, 2005) were testing the optimistic thesis that the flexibilisation of labour and establishment of new, flexible forms of employment that include shorter working hours, greater autonomy in work organisation, working from home, occasional exits from the labour market due to caring for children and the like could "free up" male life courses from subordination to work and allow them larger involvement in intimate relationships, it is becoming more and more clear that labour flexibilisation has not developed in the direction of flexicurity but rather towards the precarisation of work and life. The interviews with fathers in precarious, that is, flexible employments showed that, paradoxically, flexibilisation enables greater autonomy mainly for those whose employment comes close to the standard, non-flexible employment model in which work is provided by the employer, organised in standard, predictable working hours and is guaranteed relative permanence. Individualised employment positions, such as self-employment and contract work, put workers in a position of complete dependence on the labour market, the employer or the customer. Through the individualisation of labour, the worker becomes the motivating force of production along with the disciplining processes that lead to constant accessibility, availability, long working hours, and subordination of personal life to labour market demands (Kvande, 2012). Moreover, with social rights largely being linked to standard employment, the workers in individualised employment such as self-employment and contract work are excluded from or only partly included in parental social rights such as paid paternity leave, allowance for sick child care leave, paid annual holidays and holiday allowance. This establishes legalised inequalities and represents a structural obstacle for men holding precarious employments to engage in involved fatherhood.

In the flexible work conditions, the traditional pattern of men's complete involvement in the work sphere for reasons of economic and financial survival actually becomes strengthened. The norms of ideal workers – a self-sufficient, competitive, independent individual who is mobile, flexible, fully available and focussed on paid work and, above all, without caring responsibilities – are turning into a dominant norm in the neoliberal labour markets and hit men in individualised contract employments, agency or self-employed jobs very hard. In the families where both partners are pre-

carious workers, the pressure of breadwinning for men is becoming even stronger. However, the situations in which underemployed men take full responsibility for the care in the family to help their partners retain their standard employment could also be seen as a case of traditionalisation of the gender relations. Although traditional male–female roles in those relations are reversed, a surplus of responsibility for unpaid care work and economic dependence on one of the partners still represents a traditional pattern of relation between care and paid work as well as partner relations. In such partnerships men are not sharing equally but are forced into taking up full responsibility for the domestic and care work, meaning that men and women are becoming more equal but in disadvantages, not in advantages. These re-traditionalised positions are no longer legitimised by gender ideologies and norms. They need to be identified as an anomaly of the labour market that stretches (mainly young) people between too much and not enough work and reproduces or subverts traditional gender norms. Gender equality in care work would mean that both partners can be engaged in paid labour, equally share care duties and do not depend on each other economically. Social valuation of care implies that there is a genuine rather than forced option to freely choose to care. Such a situation would demand not just men’s equal involvement in care but also a fair share of the state and employers in facilitating the work/care balance. This is well captured in the vision of a “caring society” as defined by Niall Hanlon (2012: 219): “A caring society is one which appreciates the social construction of care and understands that private care experiences are also public issues. It is also a society which legitimates caring masculinities as valued identities for men and recognises that care and masculinity need not be mutually exclusive. It is a society that socialises care as a common concern”.

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Kvalitativno istraživanje prekarizacije tržišta rada i angažiranog očinstva u Sloveniji

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Često se smatra da su rasprave o usklađivanju posla i obitelji usredotočene na žene i ljude iz srednje klase sa sigurnim radnim mjestom. Utvrđivanjem razlika među muškarcima u pogledu mogućnosti za angažirano očinstvo koje proizlaze iz njihova položaja na tržištu rada, u ovom članku predstavlja se perspektiva marginalizirane skupine na tržištu rada lišene privilegija, kao i kritički osvrt na utjecaj fleksibilizacije rada na skrbnički maskulinitet i rodnu ravnopravnost. Muškarci kao zaposlenici zauzimaju različite položaje na tržištu rada, a to utječe na njihov pristup socijalnim pravima, uključujući roditeljska prava, te mogućnosti za usklađivanje posla i skrbi. Budući da je prekarizacija tržišta rada istaknut problem u Sloveniji, ovim kvalitativnim istraživanjem, koje se temelji na istraživačkim dubinskim polustrukturiranim intervjuima s očevima zaposlenima u različitim oblicima prekarnog rada, analizirano je kako nesigurni i fleksibilni oblici rada oblikuju prakse očinstva, utječu na mogućnosti za angažirano očinstvo i strukturiraju rodne odnose. Iskustva očeva pokazala su da uvjeti prekarnog rada očevima omogućuju intenzivnu uključenost u skrb za djecu uglavnom u slučajevima kad je njihov posao blizak standardnom obliku rada u pogledu stabilnosti i predvidljivosti radnog vremena i zajamčenog opsega posla. Ako je posao potpuno fleksibilan i nepredvidljiv, a zaposlenik se nalazi u situaciji u kojoj takav posao može prihvatiti ili ga izgubiti, usklađivanje posla i očinstva otežano je jer je organizacija svakodnevnog života potpuno podređena plaćenom radu. Zaključno, pokazalo se da se prekarnim radnim odnosima potiču jačanje modela hranitelja i retradicionalizacija rodnih odnosa.

Ključne riječi: muškarci, maskuliniteti, očinstvo, usklađivanje posla i obitelji, prekarizacija rada, rod, skrb za djecu