Article

Hungarian Stay-at-Home Fathers: A New Alternative for Family Wellbeing

Éva Sztáray Kézdy * and Zsófia Drjenovszky

Institute of Social and Communication Sciences, Department of Sociology, Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary, 1088 Budapest, Hungary; drjenovszky.zsofia@kre.hu
* Correspondence: kezdy.eva.rita@kre.hu

Abstract: The two significant factors that influence subjective wellbeing are job and life satisfaction, so the work–life balance, that is, balancing between the two areas, is related to several wellbeing outcomes. This issue is of particular interest in those families, where, even if only temporarily, they have chosen the non-traditional sharing of roles, in which the father becomes the primary caregiver and the mother assumes the role of breadwinner. Very few Hungarian studies focus on families where the mother is the prime breadwinner and there has been no research specifically relating to stay-at-home father–working mother families. The qualitative gap filling research that we conducted was utilized to explore the relationship between achieving work-life balance and wellbeing in case of Hungarian stay-at-home father–working mother couples. A total of 31 families were examined through a semi-structured in-depth interview with the fathers and a short questionnaire with the mothers. All participants were white, heterosexual couples with one to four children. As a result of the analysis, four typical patterns in terms of the stay-at-home father and working mother family dynamics could be identified, including to what extent this non-traditional family format contributes to the father's, mother's, or both of their wellbeing.

Keywords: Hungarian stay-at-home fathers; wellbeing; work–life conflict; work–life balance; qualitative research

1. Introduction

Human wellbeing is a phenomenon that has been researched on a broad scale in recent decades and, according to international comparative research studies, there are marked differences between and within countries as for the results of wellbeing, for instance, in respect of age, gender, or school attendance (OECD 2020). Among the many indicators that specify wellbeing, the dimensions of work and family are predominant so the compatibility of the two areas, that is, the topic of work–life balance (WLB), is also in the limelight of scientific research. It is a particularly interesting issue in view of the fact that with the mass employment of women and the change in roles within families, the expectations and the demands for roles have recently doubled for both men and women: not only men but also women have to prove themselves as the breadwinner and men need to get more involved in roles traditionally seen as female roles such as household chores and childrearing duties. In addition, both genders have nurtured demand for carrying out their roles at a higher level both at work and at home.

In line with international trends, a shift from the traditional expectations related to family roles to an egalitarian family model can be seen in Hungary as well. In Hungary, like in other Central European countries, during the Soviet era, full employment was the declared policy goal (Hobson et al. 2011). Thus, the rate of female employment has increased by a greater extent compared to Western European trends (Neményi 2016) and the two-earner family model has become common in Hungary as well. In terms of parental responsibilities, however, in many cases, the traditional division of labor can still be observed (Nagy et al. 2016). Along with the norm that the father is traditionally the

breadwinner, a new type of caring father image has also appeared (Spéder 2011). Even so, compared to international data, we can observe that stay-at-home fathers (SAHF) in Hungary rarely fit even in this category (Makay and Spéder 2018). The Hungarian Family Support System provides fathers with wide possibilities of staying at home with their children, however, only a very small percentage of fathers seize these opportunities when they arise.

In our study, we focus on the latter group, the fathers who partially or completely left the labor market following the birth of at least one child and spent a minimum of 3 months at home with the child while the mother was working. With the help of in-depth interviews given by stay-at-home fathers and the questionnaire replies from mothers, we would like to answer the question of how the father's active involvement in child rearing and childcare can contribute to the establishment of a work–life balance, the softening of any emerging work–private life conflict (WLC), and therefore, the achievement of wellbeing for both parents.

In the ideological framework of our analysis, firstly, we would like to delineate the conceptual bases of the wellbeing phenomenon; then, we would like to move on to the review of the work–life balance phenomenon in the context of the changing expectations for family roles. Subsequently, based on previous literature related to our target group, we will introduce how the dimension of paid work, that is the working environment, can contribute to the work–life balance of workers with small children. Then, we will move on to the dimension of unpaid work and delineate how the division of labor at home is realized within these families. At the end of our theoretical introduction, we will review the interaction of all these aspects and their possible accumulated impacts on wellbeing. After introducing the methodology of our research, in our analysis, we will pose the question of what typical family patterns can emerge in case of the examined families according to the criteria we delineated in our theoretical framework.

A special contribution of our study is that during the examination of the stay-at-home father–working mother (SAHF-WM) pairs, although we aimed to focus on the fathers, we also managed to study the mothers' and fathers' experience in interaction with each other, since it is our conviction that the two parties' wellbeing cannot be interpreted independently as the breadwinning and caring duties in the different families are divided based on family decisions after considering many aspects and the assessment of the resulting situation also takes place in the family context.

2. Theoretical Framework

In recent decades, wellbeing has been a frequently used notion and a well sought-after research concept in scientific literature; however, partly due to its interdisciplinary nature, scientists interpret it in different ways, so it lacks a globally accepted uniform definition (Gillett-Swan and Sargeant 2015; Hogan et al. 2015; Adamou et al. 2020). While it is commonly used as a synonym for quality of life or happiness, scholars more or less agree that wellbeing is a broader concept (Glatzer 2000; Adamou et al. 2020) and it can be interpreted according to several dimensions, the interactions of which can be complex. The most frequently examined dimensions apart from the conventional health-based approach (Gillett-Swan and Sargeant 2015) are the economic—physical, social, and environmental, and the psychological aspects, all of which can contribute to human wellbeing (Pollard and Lee 2003; Rath and Harter 2010; Hogan et al. 2015; Kulcsár 2020). Furthermore, we need to differentiate between the objective and subjective approach and interpretation of wellbeing as people can react to the same situations in a different way, therefore, the objective indicators (for example, income, age, religion, gender, family status, or school attendance) can have different effects on the wellbeing of individuals (Diener et al. 1999). We will review two intensive theories of the subjective wellbeing (SWB) approach. According to the psychological theory, subjective wellbeing encompasses the easily discernible dimensions of autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance (Ryff and Keyes 1995). According to the hedonistic

approach, subjective wellbeing is a broad phenomenon dependent on the individual's perception that includes, along with the emotional answers from the people, the satisfaction of life in general and of the different areas of life (Veenhoven 2007; Diener et al. 1999). The area-specific satisfaction indicates how the individual rates the different areas of life, such as work, family, health status, financial matters, leisure activities, and so on.

There is a consensus in literature concerning the fact that one of the most important influencing factors of our wellbeing is work (Diener et al. 1999; Rath and Harter 2010; McGinnity 2021; Hamilton et al. 2021). There is an unequivocal correlation between job satisfaction, life satisfaction (Diener et al. 1999), and wellbeing (Oishi et al. 2015; Hamilton et al. 2021). That is, long-term unemployment, or in case of employees excessive working hours, stressful conditions at the workplace, position not appropriate for abilities or self-realization, and low work-engagement all have a negative impact on wellbeing (Rath and Harter 2010; Hamilton et al. 2021).

In respect of the subjective wellbeing, family life satisfaction is also a very important area. In the dual-earner family models, this wellbeing indicator has a strong correlation with the area of work as events and experience from one field can permeate into the other area of life in a positive or negative way (spillover theory) (Greenhaus and Powell 2006). We feel it very important to start by clarifying that in our research we use the extended definition of work, that is, we do not only mean paid work by this but also, in addition to unpaid housework, the unpaid care work that is often missing from the definitions (Szalma et al. 2020), as unpaid work is also an important indicator of wellbeing according to related research (OECD 2011).

With reference to the above, in our research, we will focus on two area-specific satisfaction factors in case of our target group and by using the conceptual framework of the hedonistic subjective wellbeing: satisfaction with work and family relationships. While in earlier research studies work and private life appeared as two different spheres, more recent studies show that they do not separate but interact with each other (Allard et al. 2011). This interaction between the two spheres will be grasped and examined in our analysis with the help of the work–life balance phenomenon.

2.1. Work–Life Balance of Working Parents and Parental Wellbeing

The phenomenon of balancing between work and private life has also been a well sought-after research topic recently and it is sometimes identified as work–life balance (e.g., Snitker 2018), sometimes as work–family balance (WFB) (Bell et al. 2012; Voydanoff 2005). However, both terms refer to the same resources–demands model thus the definition of work–life balance or work–family balance is "a global assessment that work and family resources are sufficient to meet work and family demands such that participation is effective in both domains" (Voydanoff 2005, p. 825). Work–life balance is connected with various wellbeing outcomes (Milkie et al. 2010), as previous research studies have shown that if the roles at work and in the family are satisfactory, that have a positive effect on mental health and on life satisfaction in case of both parents (Perrone et al. 2009).

Therefore, balancing between work and family life can affect both fathers and mothers. Notwithstanding, only a small proportion of research studies concentrate on the fathers on this subject (Eby et al. 2005; McLaughlin and Muldoon 2014). Most studies place women center-stage, however, in a great number of them the difference between mothers and fathers is examined (Gutek et al. 1991; Duxbury and Higgins 1991; Eagle et al. 1998; Hill et al. 2003). The results are not unequivocal; in some of the studies, the presence of the conflict is more significant in case of the men, in others it is the fathers who can achieve balance more easily (Hill 2005). Schwartzberg and Dytell (1996) found an equal work–life balance level in their sample of dual earner families, and Tang and Cousins (2005) detected a difference between the countries of Western and Eastern Europe (including Hungary). Several subsequent research studies focused on how much the mothers and how much the fathers are affected by work–life conflict (Winslow 2005) or on the comparison between families with children or without children. Families with children were judged to have

been able to maintain the balance with more difficulties as in their case they both need to fill the role of the parent and the worker, as well (Winslow 2005).

The incompatibilities of the different roles are often perceived as work–life conflict. The definition of the work–life conflict concept is fundamentally based on role theory in the literature. The majority of the writers on this issue (Allard et al. 2011) often start from the following definition: "a form of interrole conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect. That is, participation in the work (family) role is made more difficult by virtue of participation in the family (work) role" (Greenhaus and Beutell 1985, p. 77). Thus, this conflict has a bilateral nature (Gutek et al. 1991; Hill 2005; Winslow 2005). We talk about work-to-family conflict when work has a negative effect on family life, and the effect of the family-to-work conflict is the reverse of this (Allard et al. 2011). While both factors can have a negative effect on the other, the former is more common and more frequently researched (Carlson et al. 2000; Tang and Cousins 2005).

The interaction between work and personal life is also defined by the work-family spillover-theory. Thus, according to the theory, experiences in work can seep into private life in both positive or negative ways, and vice versa. We can differentiate between the emotional and mental seeping through of our moods and attitudes, and the instrumental seeping through, when we transmit skills acquired in one field to another field (Greenhaus and Powell 2006).

So long as we interpret work–life conflict as a conflict of roles deriving from the difficult compatibility of the different roles, in order to examine our target group, we need to become acquainted with the changing trends of parental roles and the effects these have on wellbeing.

2.2. Changing Parental Roles

According to the traditional parental role perception and expectation evolved after the industrial revolution, caring for the child and rearing the child was primarily the role of women or mothers in a family while the father provided the family with financial stability by working in the labor market separated from the family as the breadwinner. In the second half of the 20th century, due to social changes, women entered the labor market in large numbers, and in most countries, the dual-earner family model became widespread. (Johnson 2016) In this model, women are subject to a dual burden: on the one hand, they need to perform at their workplace, on the other hand, they need to cope with their previous caring tasks, that is, the social norms and expectations still persist that expresses that the 'good mother' is the one who spends as much time with her child as possible (Latshaw and Hale 2016).

At the same time, along with the traditional breadwinner father norm, the new type of caring father image also appears; in addition to the expectation of being the breadwinner, the expectation of becoming involved in the child's life also appears (Townsend 2002; Milkie et al. 2010; Allard et al. 2011; Latshaw and Hale 2016). As it can be seen from the literature, fathers are increasingly seeking for a balance between work and private life (child raising) (Tracy and Rivera 2010; Fischer and Anderson 2012). Accordingly, the definition and characteristics of fatherhood have also changed (Lamb 2000; Duckworth and Buzzanell 2009). From the traditional breadwinner and defender role, the 'good father' transforms into a more involved and active parent (McLaughlin and Muldoon 2014). Thus, today, the traditional father role is undergoing a change. Today's 'new father ideal' means that the father is not only responsible, but also nurturing, active in caregiving, and plays an involved role in the children's life (Townsend 2002; Ranson 2012; Rushing and Sparks 2017).

Thus, both genders have developed a demand for carrying out their roles at a higher level both at work and at home. (Perrone et al. 2009)

This, overall, has not shifted the breadwinner role expectation from the fathers (Daly and Palkovitz 2004), the change is less marked according to the labor market (McLaughlin and Muldoon 2014). Therefore, while the fathers are more involved in the

family responsibilities, the employers' expectations towards the fathers have not been reduced, therefore, retaining work–life balance has become a more important matter not only for the mothers, but for the fathers, too (Duckworth and Buzzanell 2009).

2.3. Wellbeing and Parental Roles

While previous research studies focused primarily on the mothers' work–life conflict (Hobson and Fahlén 2009), several authors have drawn attention to the fact that the activities of the mother and the father in the strategy of a given household cannot be separated as they mutually have an impact on each other. Both the working mother and the working father have to face problems in everyday life (Van der Lippe et al. 2006): women need to participate in larger numbers on the labor market and men need to participate more intensely in domestic responsibilities. Hobson and Fahlén (2009) and Hobson et al. (2011) highlighted in their studies how active fathers can achieve WFB while having more pressure on them.

It is of particular interest how work–life balance as well as the work–private life conflict have changed for those families, where, even if only temporarily, they have chosen the nontraditional sharing of roles, in which the father becomes the primary caregiver, traditionally a woman's role, and the mother assumes the role of breadwinner. The literature defines these fathers as the stay-at-home-fathers. Mostly two groups of stay-at-home fathers can be distinguished: in one of the groups the fathers stay at home out of some kind of a necessity (for instance, they lost their job, became ill, etc.), in the other group, it is their conscious decision as they long to be with their child (Zimmerman 2000; Doucet 2004; Merla 2008; Rochlen et al. 2008a; Chesley 2011; Kramer et al. 2013; Latshaw 2015). However, the definitions commonly express that these fathers are the primary caregivers, caretakers, or care providers, but they differ in terms of whether they can carry out a paid activity, and what, if any. According to respective research, most stay-at-home fathers have some kind of work, usually part time (Merla 2008; Doucet 2009; Latshaw 2011; Fischer and Anderson 2012; Rushing and Powell 2015), or carry out activities in local communities, or around the house (Doucet 2004).

Research studies related to the wellbeing of stay-at-home fathers primarily focus on what feedback men who take on the non-traditional role obtain from the environment and how they interpret or value themselves and their role as both of these have a demonstrable effect on wellbeing. The empirical research results present a greatly varied picture.

It could be generally concluded that the societal attitude is rather negative and there is some sort of disapproval towards those who choose the nontraditional parenting roles (Rochlen et al. 2008b; Perrone et al. 2009). These fathers are often judged by their environment (their family, friends), and several times they were dubbed lazy or not masculine (Dunn et al. 2011) which shows that the general expectations are that the man is the main breadwinner (Zimmerman 2000). Johnson (2016) also concluded that they receive less social support compared to the stay-at-home mothers or the working fathers that resulted in inner tension and lower wellbeing and also had a negative effect on role satisfaction. Equally, the mothers with a stay-at-home spouse also feel that they need to clarify the reason for their decision and their role to themselves and to their environment as their decision is not understood and is judged (Rushing and Sparks 2017).

Other studies concluded that stay-at-home fathers receive positive feedback and support from their immediate and broader environment, which made them proud in their taken role (Rushing and Sparks 2017). Rochlen et al. (2008a) also detected a higher level of wellbeing in their research within the group of stay-at-home fathers. In another work of his, Rochlen et al. (2008b) point out that even if the reaction of the broader environment might be mixed, fathers were not interested in the opinions other than of their immediate environment. Rushing and Sparks (2017) also reinforced that the fathers' decision and defining of their role is less influenced by the opinion of the broader environment, men are far more interested in the opinion of their immediate environment (family, friends).

The different experiences can be explained by a substantial aspect that can be seen in further studies. It is important how a man relates to the traditional male role because if they consider their assumed non-traditional role comfortable, they are confident, they are more balanced, and this can have a positive impact on their life satisfaction (Rochlen et al. 2008a; Rochlen and McKelley 2009; Rushing and Sparks 2017). Therefore, those fathers who made the decision themselves to stay at home with their child and were not forced by some kind of an external factor, those who have no problems with being the primary caretaker proved to be far more satisfied. (Fischer and Anderson 2012).

In the following, based on previous respective studies, we would like to explain in detail how the wellbeing of the stay-at-home father–working mother family model is affected by working environments and expectations, and the division of labor within the household, as well as the impact these have on work and private life satisfaction, that is, on the subjective wellbeing for both partners.

2.3.1. Paid Work and the Working Environment

Work organizations and workplace culture have a significant impact on work–life balance and these, as we have previously seen, have an impact on work and private life and on the satisfaction with these, in cumulated terms, on the wellbeing. Among the impacts of conflicts between the roles at work and at home, we can differentiate between work-related outcomes (job or career satisfaction and performance), non-work-related outcomes (leisure, life or family satisfaction, and performance) and stress related outcomes (psychological strain, stress, or burnout) (Allen et al. 2000). Employers, when recognizing its significance, for instance, the possibility of a valuable employee leaving the family-unfriendly workplace because of this (Allard et al. 2011), have recently paid more attention to make sure the employees can balance their private life with the expectations of the workplace (Perrone et al. 2009), and there is also growing scientific interest.

Several studies focus on workplace aspects regarding work–life balance (Eby et al. 2005). One of the aspects considered to be a priority is the effect of the number of working hours (Hill 2005; Gregory and Milner 2009; Halrynjo 2009; McLaughlin and Muldoon 2014; Hamilton et al. 2021).

Research studies are engaged in examining three types of families with respect to the parents' labor market activity. Milkie et al. (2010) examine the issue in case of dual-earner families in relation to the time being spent with the child. Their findings are that if somebody works many hours a day at the workplace, it enhances the work–family imbalance so those who can spend less time with their child feel less successful with regards to work–life balance. Other studies expressly concentrate on working fathers (Hill et al. 2003; Hill 2005; Holter 2007; Duckworth and Buzzanell 2009; Ranson 2012). Ranson (2012) came to the conclusion that, while the theory that the fathers' only main task is to be the breadwinner is declining (and from this respect they are getting closer to the working mothers), in case of the organizations, the traditional gender values are still very deeply embedded and there is little support for the fathers. The new type of man and the new circumstances (for instance, labor flexibility, self-employment, number and nature of working hours, etc.) as a whole contribute to the explanation of change in the work–life balance. The third type of the family is where beside the working mother, the father takes on the domestic duties. Dunn et al. (2011) examine the status of women in case of this scenario. They found that, though these families face extraordinary challenges, despite the difficulties, women gave account of several advantages: they have become more confident and assertive, they could pursue their career.

There is a relatively low number of studies where they ask the fathers as well in this reverse line-up (Brandth and Kvande 2019). Shirani et al. (2012) concluded in their results that the fathers in focus received negative feedback from the workplace when they announced that they would stay at home just as in the findings of Rushing and Powell (2015). Holter (2007) straightforwardly expresses that the caring fathers are discriminated against at their workplace. Several studies show that even if the employees enjoy legal

protection when taking parental leave and after for a certain period, the main obstacle to obtaining child-raising allowances for European men is the perceived workplace resistance (Brandth and Kvande 2019). However, according to Brandth and Kvande, "Nordic policy regimes, using Norway as an example, contribute to workplace cultures that promote active fathering. Findings show that (Norwegian) fathers do not encounter much opposition to their parental leave use but rather enjoy considerable support at their places of work." (Brandth and Kvande 2019, p. 54)

Hobson et al. (2011) in their comparative study, they also found that the organizational culture of a workplace strongly influences capabilities to achieve a work–life balance, therefore, we consider it important to examine the work environment within our target group.

2.3.2. Unpaid Work

While in work–private life conflict work unequivocally refers to physical work done in the labor market, private life, beyond free time, involves all unpaid work that can be interpreted as family duty, routine housework, and care work (OECD 2020). Several studies have pointed out what burdens paid work and home duties can impose on work–life balance and what influence they have (Perrons 2003; Milkie et al. 2010). In case of the caregiver father–working mother scenario, Chesley (2011) highlighted as a positive aspect that these fathers support mothers in their work by removing the burden of child raising and housework from them and this way they help achieve a work–life balance. Therefore, we think it is important to present how the division of duties at home is shaped in the stay-at-home father–working mother family models.

Despite the fact that fathers are becoming more involved in child-raising (Snitker 2018), and that we can witness a growing number of stay-at-home fathers (Chesley 2011; Kramer et al. 2013), hardly any literature addresses the time-use of these families and how the division of labor is formed when the mother is the breadwinner. In Hungary, indeed, this has not yet been the subject of any surveys.

Latshaw (2015) conducted an in-depth investigation on time use in case of the stay-at-home fathers and found that they spent the most time on making food and mopping. We can differentiate between two father types based on the summary of the duties carried out at home: the reluctant fathers who would rather take on more masculine duties and work less, and the resolute fathers who do more housework and even the division of labor is more balanced in terms of time and the duties of the mother. Rushing and Powell (2015) found that mothers can take part in the domestic duties in the morning and evening hours and can spend quality time with their family in the evenings and at the weekends, which reduces the tension deriving from work–life conflict. Based on their results, eating was the central activity. Chesley (2011) explains this by the fact that these fathers practically ensure the opportunity for the mother to be with her child after spending the whole day away. In another research, Latshaw and Hale (2016) put the emphasis on examining the evenings and the weekends when many things can fall back on the mother. They paint a more nuanced picture and have allocated three different explanations: either the father 'steps back' to give 'us time' to the mother and child alone, or the father needs free time, or it is an opportunity for the mother to alleviate guilt for not being with her child long enough and therefore she being unable to live up to the expectation of being a 'good mother'.

It is important to notice that the practices observed during the father's stay at home do not only prevail with respect to the division of duties in the given period: some of the couples were already characterized by a less traditional gender role attitude that resulted in an egalitarian type of relationship and balanced conditions from the beginnings (Fischer and Anderson 2012). In several families, they tried to share childcare equally with the previous child as well (e.g., when the father arrived home), and in most cases, even after the father returned back to the labor market, the equal division of labor related to unpaid work remained. However, among the duties at home, indirect childcaring tasks, such as

planning and scheduling are also separated and, in these, even the stay-at-home fathers are less involved (Doucet 2009).

2.3.3. Job Satisfaction and Life Satisfaction

In the last chapter of the theoretical framework of our study, we would like to describe, based on previous studies, how the job and life satisfaction of the mother and the father change in the stay-at-home father–working mother family models. Rushing and Powell (2015) point out that the non-traditional division of roles might have negative and positive consequences. Gender role conflict primarily appears in case of the role played in conflicts with their own role convictions. Thus, for those whose role is not consistent with the values it shares, this scenario might lead to stress and they cannot fulfil the role with an appropriate degree of quality (Voydanoff 2005; Perrone et al. 2009). An additional problem is the pressure that appears when this conflicts with the expectations related to the traditional masculine role.

Nevertheless, taking on multiple roles has several positive effects on both men and women. On the one hand, both parties have the opportunity to achieve success in the other gender's role as well, so self-complexity increases. On the other hand, women appreciate working roles and men appreciate care giving roles more (Chesley 2011). This way, both parties can shift from the traditional division of roles towards a more balanced role perception. Therefore, those whose values and beliefs are in line with this role engagement are more satisfied. These men feel less financial pressure on them and receive more freedom in their family roles (Rushing and Powell 2015).

In this scenario, however, a dual expectation towards the fathers appears, that is, alongside fulfilling the traditional feminine role, they should not give up the masculine expectation of providing their family with financial stability (Snitker 2018). In the research Chesley (2011) carried out, half of the stay-at-home fathers questioned declared that they struggle with the traditional breadwinner male image, but, at the same time, they consider the division of parental responsibility far more balanced. Merla (2008) and Rochlen et al. (2008b), however, concluded that these fathers are satisfied with their situation and enjoy their role; they believe that this is in the best interest of their family (in addition to caring for the child, they also support the mother in her work). They are even proud that they can fulfil a new, masculine role. What is more, some reported that it is more masculine way to support the family in a direct way than only financially. They appreciate their emotional existence better and they are not worried about being worse fathers than they would be if they met the traditional expectations. Merla (2008) compared her Belgian interview research findings with the international results and concluded that these fathers are perfectly satisfied with their 'non-compliant' decision they made individually to do the best for their family. These fathers considered it important to see their child grow up and have a rich and intimate relationship with the child, which was their priority compared to anything else. In this way they became the fathers they wanted to be, the type they were prevented from being because of their breadwinner role. Thus, in spite of the fact that they received minimal support from the outside world, they could list several reasons why it was good for them to stay at home. Additionally, Chesley (2011) stated that in this way these fathers can improve the parental attributes similar to that of their partners, which they could not have done previously (for example, communications capabilities).

Examining the opinion of the mothers is also the subject of several studies (Perrone et al. 2009; Meisenbach 2010; Dunn et al. 2011; Fischer and Anderson 2012), however, the picture is a lot more mixed in their case. Meisenbach (2010) pointed out that, even if they can appreciate their independence and the fact that they can pursue their career, it is difficult to find the work–life balance, there is enhanced stress and worry, and the feeling of guilt also appears. Rushing and Sparks (2017) concluded in their results that this very reverse setting resulted in achieving the work–family life balance for most of them. After asking the mothers, 70% of them answered that they feel their caregiving and, just as importantly, their working woman role had become balanced this way. This setting helped "establish better boundaries in their roles" (Rushing and Sparks 2017, p. 6). This is in

line with the results from Paré and Dillaway (2005), suggesting that "women are showing success in negotiating boundaries for the roles of motherhood and paid work" (Rushing and Sparks 2017, p. 6) that helps them in maintaining both of their social roles.

Several studies describe the effect of the non-traditional division of roles that influences the satisfaction with the relationship. Decision making ability, division of labor, and consideration of each other are fundamental aspects of spousal satisfaction when the roles change. Those couples who discuss these topics and find an appropriate solution enjoy a more satisfactory relationship (Rushing and Sparks 2017), therefore, communication contributes greatly to spousal equality and satisfaction. Perrone et al. (2009) are also of the opinion that change in working roles often leads to the change of spousal roles. The objective time spent working and on child care in itself often seems to be less important than how the parties believe the division of work to be fair. Hence, the perceived equality is an important aspect of spousal satisfaction in the dual-earner families. Rochlen et al. (2008b) described mutual satisfaction and support from the partner that, on the whole, also increased the satisfaction with the relationship. Chesley (2011) results show a mixed picture from this respect. Although the fact that these fathers support the mothers by taking over the household burdens has a positive effect on wellbeing, she reports on, for instance, jealousy that has a negative effect on marriage. For this reason, she becomes far more critical of the parental abilities of the man, which also creates conflict in the relationship.

In order to explore the parental wellbeing in family context, in our research, we examined the mothers' and fathers' experiences in relation with each other and, based on these, created a typology that outlines typical family patterns regarding both parties' work–life balance and wellbeing.

3. Methodology and Sampling

In our research, we carried out interviews with Hungarian fathers who, at any time after the birth of their child, have stayed at home for at least 3 months while the mother was working.

What made finding the interviewees difficult in the first place was that the number of stay-at-home fathers is relatively low in Hungary (OECD 2019; Takács 2020). In order to find potential interviewees who meet the criteria, we contacted Hungarian father clubs, father bloggers, father forums and groups on the internet, district nurses, companies where there is an extra reduction for fathers, editors of journals connected to this area, and we also worked with snowball sampling starting from our acquaintances.

In total, 31 semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted by the authors from 2018 to 2020, which lasted about one to two and a half hours and were preceded by a short sociodemographic questionnaire. Our research is aimed at the complete disclosure of stay-at-home father–working mother family model from many aspects, however, in our present article, from the topics of the interview guideline we would like to analyze the following: the interviewee's attitudes and experiences related to work, the interviewee's reactions related to the decisions of his workplace, attitudes related to domestic work, housework, and childcaring, work sharing practices realized in the family, perceptions related to family roles, the question of balancing between work and private life and the conflicts emerging related to this, and the general assessment of the time period spent at home.

The majority of the fathers were in their thirties or forties, the youngest was 27, the oldest was 64 years old at the time of the data collection. During parental leave, 21 of them were living in the capital city, Budapest, or in the agglomeration, 3 of them in other Hungarian cities, and 7 interviewees in other European capital cities. The fathers in the sample have one to four children and most of them stayed at home with one, others with two or three children. The length of staying at home was 1 to 2 years in most of the cases, the shortest period was 3 months and the longest 11 years. Similarly to our Norwegian colleagues (Brandth and Kvande 2019), we also made considerable efforts to

reach interviewees with lower educational achievement, so finally one-sixth of our sample has no higher education qualification.

Despite the fact that we focused on the fathers in our research, we regard it as especially important to hear the mothers' opinion as well so that we could better understand the results in the family context. For this purpose, we asked the interviewees' partners also to fill in a short questionnaire. In closed questions, we asked the mothers about their attitudes and perceptions related to family roles and about the division of domestic work. In open questions, we wanted to know how their work–life balance changed when returning to their workplace and how they evaluated this situation on the whole, and how satisfied they were. During the analysis we compared these questionnaires with the answers from the fathers so that we could see the opinions of both sides about the same life situation.

Each interviewee provided informed consent. In our present article, the quotations taken from the interviews were translated from Hungarian to English and in order to ensure the anonymity of interviewees, we assigned figures (1–31) to the respondents.

4. Analysis

Further in this study we would like to present the results we received for the following research questions: How does the working environment relate to the decision of employees who follow the stay-at-home father–working mother family model. What are the attitudes and motivation of these parents related to work and career? What are their attitudes and practices related to unpaid work, housework, and care work? What family role perceptions lie behind all these? Finally, as the most important result of our research, we will describe how the work–life balance of the parents under examination evolved on these grounds, and what family patterns can be identified in relation to wellbeing.

Given the exploratory nature of our research, in the analysis we chose an inductive, data-driven thematic approach (Braun and Clarke 2006). In the first phase we read and re-read the recorded transcripts in order to identify themes and analytical aspects concerning the above mentioned questions. In the second phase we created a codebook into which all transcripts were transformed. In the next stage of analysis, we interpreted the coded data by finding similarities and differences in order to identify typical workplace attitudes, gender role perceptions, and practices; furthermore, the characteristic family patterns according to the wellbeing evolved among the families under examination. In parallel to the interview analyses with the fathers, we coded the mothers' answers from the questionnaires in a similar way so that we could examine the phenomenon by analyzing the opinion of both parties in relation to each other.

4.1. Paid Work: Environment and Attitudes

First, we focus on the working environment of stay-at-home fathers and working mothers as this aspect received limited attention in relevant studies despite the fact that, based on our experience, work organizations and workplace culture can contribute to constructing fathering practices (Brandth and Kvande 2019) and to the wellbeing of employees. In terms of organizational culture, we examined the reactions in the levels of senior management, direct leaders, and colleagues (Johnson 2016).

Even if the employees enjoy legal protection when taking parental leave and after for a certain period, several studies show that the main obstacle to claiming child raising allowances for European men is the perceived workplace resistance (Brandth and Kvande 2019). Among the interviewees, those who had employment status were mainly worried about reactions at the workplace, especially those whose occupation is strongly influenced by career logic (e.g., financial sector). These concerns are not primarily related to the fear of losing the workplace but rather with future advancement, promotion, and pay rise. Several of them reported that during job interviews they concealed such plans or were afraid of the consequences of the announcement because, among other things, it had never happened before at that specific workplace.

The most frequent reaction our interviewees reported was "nothing special" or "well, I am really sorry, but I understand, and that is that" (1). Several of them said that the explanation could be that the employers are aware of fathers' rights and therefore they accept that the father will take certain days of leave: "egulated environment, and they take a very rigorous approach to regulations (. . .) the management wants to (protect themselves) in this legal environment" (14). Thus, the majority of the male workers who took parental leave mainly met neutral, acknowledging attitudes that comply with legal regulations.

We have not experienced such general workplace support in the Hungarian sample that the Norwegian fathers with young children have (Brandth and Kvande 2019). Some of our interviewees reported expressly supportive workplace reactions, three of them highlighted that the leader "was so happy that such fathers exist and that it is an example to be followed . . . And that they had always supported family related things" (9). In two cases, regardless of the leave, they even got promoted.

However, extremely negative reaction at the workplace (Holter 2007; Shirani et al. 2012; Rushing and Powell 2015) occurred only in one case where the employer "could not understand, while he considered himself to be a family-focused man, how this could be done as a man, and he thought it was silly . . . ", but "this confirmed to me that I was working for the wrong company" (19).

Overall, the quotations below are good illustration of the attitude that our interviewees find it natural to stay at home with their child for some time, and they know that they are protected by law. Furthermore, they consider this the normal pattern, however, they are still worried about reactions at their workplace or in their wider environment. "So, obviously, they were flexible, I mean not obviously but luckily they were flexible at my workplace as well" (20). At the same time, even in case of those who took a possible risk they were so determined that they said, "even losing my workplace wouldn't have discouraged me. (. . .) I had to go in and then I said to myself, if he says 'you're stupid' or 'no' or 'oh, come on', then I would have had to say 'Sorry, you didn't get it, I will claim childcare allowance anyway, I might lose my position though'" (23).

Those fathers who were self-employed before taking parental leave had to face completely different reactions. In their case, they had to make the changed situation acceptable for the clients meaning that in the future they would only be available in a defined period of time restricted by childcare duties: "I ask all my clients that when they recommend me to other people, explain that (. . .) if there is anything wrong with the family, I immediately stop working" (24).

Although our research basically focuses on the fathers, due to the complexity of the situation, we also analyzed the working environment and reactions of the mothers, as we assumed that in this context a mother with a younger child needs to overcome a dual challenge. On the one hand, she needs to face the penalty of motherhood expressed by many studies (Nagy et al. 2016), on the other hand, she also needs to face the increasingly appearing 'career girl, not a good mother' stigmatization, in a society with traditional perception of roles (Blaskó 2005): "I could feel that they think that the children's place is by their mother's side" (5's wife).

In such cases, the attitude was especially positive, where the returning mothers had in-demand jobs within a certain sector or where they would have left a leading position behind, and they could not have returned after a longer period of time. "They were actually happy that she went back. They have just asked when she was coming back" (11). The two distinctly negative workplace attitudes related to the return of the mother were mentioned by the fathers whose wives took a longer (minimum two years) maternity leave.

In order to understand the working milieu in more complexity, we need to examine the reactions in the level of colleagues within the organization (Johnson 2016). The decision for the father to stay at home and the mother to return to work triggered surprise, worry, or even some kind of support mingled with envy from the colleagues: "Well, the colleagues are envious of her and think how lucky she is" (12); "the female colleagues always had positive reaction, so they actually considered this as a positive and appealing attitude

towards the child and that the daddy also bears a fair share of the burden, especially the burden usually mothers suffer from. The guys . . . that was funny, . . . they had a big mouth how they envied me, . . . what is more, some of those who had already experienced this with younger children said that this was such a good thing and he also would have liked to spend some time at home, maybe . . . " (16).

In our research, apart from the analysis of the working milieu, particular attention was given to both parents' attitude and strategies related to work, workplace, and career and to the relations between these. One of the lessons to be learnt from the questionnaire the mothers filled in is that the interviewee's partner can also be clearly characterized by an egalitarian work–life approach. In most cases, we could observe an egalitarian approach on the fathers' part as well that was explained most emphatically by one of the respondents: "We had very similar career development paths and there was no reason for her achieving less than me regarding to what she could achieve in this field as a lawyer or a lawyer dealing with cases like this" (21). In other cases, the mother "clearly, has always been more ambitious" (20) than the father or could not cope with staying at home. In several cases, however, we identified the father's career crisis, his desire for freedom, burn-out, or the fact that he had enough at his workplace and wanted to change anyway. We will return to all these in Section 4.3.

4.2. Unpaid Work: Attitudes and Practices

In addition to paid work, housework and the division of the duties within the family can also be important components of human wellbeing; therefore, in the following part of our study we would like to show how the division of domestic work between the parents were shaped in our target group. According to Makay and Spéder (2018), in Hungary, the division of duties at home seems to be more balanced between the partners before planning children; however, in most cases, after childbirth, this changes back to the traditional division (and remains like that even after returning back to the labor market). The authors also highlight that this ratio is characteristic of other countries, as well.

In terms of duties at home (including housework and childcare duties, as well), a more or less balanced performing of the tasks is common. For the fathers it is natural to perform these, as one of them described: "It is a lot easier to say that it is a woman's role and I just put my feet up. It would be a lot easier for me, but I cannot do it. And she cannot do it either. She feels inconvenienced if I do not do anything and I feel inconvenienced if she does not" (15). In case of the examined couples, a woman's or a man's job cannot be defined specifically, as "there is no difference between a drill and an iron—one of them is pushed, the other is pressed . . . " (31).

Several fathers said that "everybody did whatever had to be done . . . " (4), or "we did not have things like you always do this and I always do that; whoever was there just did it . . . " (15). In other words, "whoever held the baby in the arm, changed the nappy as well" (23).

Where there was a division of duties, this was rather based on either who better or less likes to do what, or on practicality. "It was not defined specifically that this is yours or mine, maybe one or more tasks emphasized like the washing up was fixed as mine simply because she does not like doing it . . . " (5).

The initially evolved routine did not change after the birth of the child in most families. The only difference was that, as he spent most of the day at home, the father had more time to perform these duties. "When I stayed at home, the situation was almost the same. Anything I could do, I did. What I could not do with the child around or did not have time for it, she did. Or when she came home, she got the child and I did it" (5).

The only divisive task was cooking as some of the fathers did it as a must while they were at home, or if they really could not cope, found another solution; others already did the cooking beforehand and enjoyed feeling fulfilled.

Several fathers said that they lived alone for a long time when they were younger so they alone carried the burden of housework anyway. This way of performing domestic

work was natural for them even before staying at home: "I was forced to become self-dependent from an early age. So, I cooked for myself, did the washing, ironed—these things are natural for me even today" (1).

Couples where the father stayed at home with the second or third child typically had gone through a "training process" with the first or first few children from this respect. (e.g., the father checked on the baby during the night). In case of the first child, after the birth, the father was also at home more intensively with the mother. "Theoretically, I have nothing against this, nowadays do not have either, that men change nappies, carry babies, feed them, and take them for walks. We had it with the first child already, when we did not talk about me staying at home, we already had this division of duties" (6).

Therefore, our interviewees can be categorized as the resolute type of fathers according to Latshaw (2015); in their group, the reluctant type of father, who would rather takes on masculine tasks, is not very common.

We met fathers who were looking forward to staying at home with the child and were consciously preparing for the related duties: "Well, basically . . . we agreed from the beginning that we would do everything together, and one of the reasons for this was that I am becoming forty this year so it is a bit late for me to have a child and I was looking forward to having one once, so it is interesting. So we deliberately organized many things in a way that it would not create a problem . . . I think it is very easy to see that changing the nappy is nothing like it is genetically determined who can actually do it" (25).

The answers in the questionnaires we received back from the mothers basically confirmed the fathers' reports about the balanced division of duties. There were only three occasions when it could be perceived that the mother and the father saw this period slightly differently. In all three cases, the father felt that the majority of duties at home burdened him while the mother also reported about too many tasks that she needed to perform at home besides doing her job.

It can be said in general that performing these duties (cleaning, changing nappies, feeding, playing, walking, going to the playground, liaising with others like the GP, or logistics like going the gym) shifted towards the father after the mother returned back to work. This is an obvious consequence of the fact that the father spent more time at home than the mother. It is interesting that duties like washing and ironing mainly remained the mothers' task even in this case (both parents reported). Nevertheless, it seems that in the area of domestic work there are fewer changes than in case of childcare duties. The reason for this is that while domestic work was present in the couple's life before the birth of the child, in many cases, the duties around the newborn baby were usually performed by the mother (as she was at home at that time) before the father took over.

An exception from the above is bathing, which is commonly the father's task (or they do it together), and shifted a bit towards the mother in the examined period. In relation to this, putting the baby to sleep, which is considered mainly as a maternal task, shifted towards the fathers only to a very limited extent. This, based on the interviews, can be explained by the fact that after work, mothers try to spend quality time with their family as much as possible to recover the time with their child so they (or rather they) were willing to do the evening duties like they did before. All three explanations of Latshaw and Hale (2016) can be detected in giving the evening tasks to the mothers. Firstly, the father 'steps back' to give 'us time' to the mother: "Practically when she could, which means from when she arrived, she basically took over the child and started to look after it." (20). Secondly, this time period is an opportunity for the mother to reduce occurrent guilt: "She asked if it was a horrible thing that she went to work in the morning. She was not with the children, (. . .) So, mainly, only the bath time remained for her." (4). Thirdly, the father also needs some free time at the end of the day.

All in all, most of the couples under examination can be characterized by having an egalitarian gender role attitude from the beginning of their relationship, and in most cases, even after the father returns to the labor market, the even division of labor remains with regard to unpaid work. Thus, these fathers undertake traditional female roles from many

respects, as opposed to the common view, which says that a good father is a father that "helps" (Rushing and Sparks 2017). For this description implies that it is the mother's job to perform these tasks. It would be an exaggeration to identify paternal or maternal responsibilities during the paternal leave, however, a phenomenon seems to emerge, that is, fathers mainly do the shopping and domestic work, while mothers, in this case, still organize family issues and programs or look after the older children. Therefore, among the duties at home, indirect childcaring tasks such as planning and scheduling are also separated in case of the families under examination and the fathers are less involved (Doucet 2009).

4.3. Emerging Patterns of Parents' Wellbeing

The alignment of parents' household duties, burdens of paid labor, and career plans are the result of family decision based on many considerations. The success of all these is an important component of the subjective wellbeing of parents with young children. Previous studies have shown that if a father stays at home with his younger child for a certain amount of time, it can facilitate the development of the work–family life balance for the mothers (Paré and Dillaway 2005; Rushing and Sparks 2017), however, stress related to the alignment of roles might increase and guilt might occur (Meisenbach 2010). In the same way, fathers might run into a conflict of roles because of the dual internal and external expectations (Hobson et al. 2011). Nevertheless, if they consider their assumed non-traditional role as comfortable, this can have a positive impact on their life satisfaction (Rochlen et al. 2008a; Rochlen and McKelley 2009; Fischer and Anderson 2012).

Based on the analysis of the interviews, we found that in the stay-at-home father–working mother family model, how mothers and fathers judge the evolved situation can be quite varied, however, certain typical patterns are outlined: this family model might offer a solution to the mother's situation, but it can also provide the father, or both of them, with an alternative for conflict management from different respects.

Satisfaction with work and family life, and thus the evaluation of family wellbeing as well, can only be defined in a family context, so we created a typology of four characteristic family patterns in terms of the work–life balance of both parties. The first type (mother-solution type) comprises families where the decision that the father stays at home solved or mitigated the work–life conflict of the mother primarily. The second type (double solution type) encompasses families where this decision helped both parents to achieve family wellbeing through work–life balance. The third type (father solution type) contains families where the father staying at home was a solution primarily for the father's work–life conflict. The fourth type included families in which we did not find any references for work–life conflict problems but both parents were satisfied with the situation and could report wellbeing.

In the first type (mother-solution type), the mother finds it important to go back to work as soon as possible for different reasons and it would have caused a work–life conflict if she had stayed at home with her younger child for longer. One reason for this was that it was her nature that she did not like this lifestyle, "so she thought even before giving birth to the child that she did not want to stay at home but wanted to work" (25). Another reason was that a longer maternity leave could have resulted in the loss of workplace, or rather the position fulfilled, or a now-or-never opportunity: "as my wife had an office job, . . . she cannot stay at home for long with the child" (2). In addition, the mother wanted to be sure that the child was in good hands and refused to apply for a nursery place. However, in the case of fathers belonging to the first type, we could not identify any work–life conflict before staying at home and, especially because of the egalitarian approach mentioned before, they were happy with the changeover even when they knew what they risked with this: "it was clear for me that I needed to postpone the start of my career or my career plans" (3). In other cases, the father spent much time at home even before as he worked flexible hours (e.g., as an entrepreneur), and he played his part in childcare duties so, for him, the mother's returning to her workplace did not really mean a change. In this respect,

one of the fathers outlined a typical attitude: "and then we discussed that I am very lazy and do not want to work, and that she is very hardworking and loves work—the nursery was a bad idea per se" (19).

We could make a distinction between two subtypes within the mother-solution type. Within the first subtype, the fathers were happy to perform these duties for the whole time they spent at home. In the second subtype, we included those families in which the father's staying at home initially seemed to be a good solution for both parents, however, it was a difficult period for the father as he had to face work–life conflict: "basically, the biggest problem or conflict was that after some time I became very depressed because I could not get on with my projects or things and I became more and more frustrated as time went by" (3). Another interviewee and his wife shared parental leave equally, working half time, and he felt that he could not meet his own expectations either at home or during work: "When the father is so involved, balancing between work and family is a major challenge for such a father" (9). Thus, if they had another child and he stayed at home, he would definitely stop working to ensure the family wellbeing.

In the second, notably most populous, type (double-solution type), those families are included in which the father's staying at home, similarly to the first type, helped the mother to achieve work–life balance, and in the meantime, it was also a solution for the father's work–life conflict, deriving from different reasons. The mother, here too, typically "finds it hard to bear monotony. So, she likes when a lot of people surrounds her and then things are dynamic" (20), while for the father this is usually not that important: "we discussed that she definitely wanted to build a career and I did not . . . I do not know, I was not really attracted by staying somewhere from morning till the evening and . . . no, I am really not that type" (20). In some cases, the current economic environment caused the father a workplace crisis: "There was a so-called gap in my profession at that time. So to speak, people with sales qualifications were not needed so much, so there were no sales representatives, and there was a recession" (1). Several fathers mentioned that "for a long time I felt the tension to change but I simply could not move yet" (20), it is just that "a change can do you good" (13). Others felt the need for a change because the boss or the working atmosphere were considered to be bad, or they were close to burning out.

In this group, while they were staying at home, most fathers could contemplate their career plans, make a career move, start a business, or take part in ongoing trainings, so that after the parental leave, they went back to the labor market as more balanced persons. "I have this peace of mind in me now" (6). So, the fathers' staying at home was an important and key period for both parents in order to achieve family wellbeing through work–life balance.

Within the third type (father-solution type), those two families can be found in which it is obvious that staying at home helped the father's conflict only, as the mother would have liked to stay at home with the child for longer. In one case, we could identify a prolonged career crisis that was alleviated by the time he spent at home. "So, it was a good excuse to get out of this and leave this poisonous environment behind", said one of our respondents (7). Another interviewee (23) partly wanted to change, he was looking for new challenges in his life, and he wanted to test himself in this role by all means. However, in both cases, we can say that the mothers, even if they said they were satisfied with their husbands' efforts, experienced this often (financially) forced situation extremely difficult with a lot of work–life conflict. "I really suffered from it, but we had no choice then, under those circumstances" (7's wife). Despite these, the decision served the family wellbeing the best possible way in the given life situation.

While even the three previously detailed patterns do not match exactly with all the interviewees, we created a fourth type (none-solution type), and we put those two families for which none of the parents could specifically find work–life balance but according to their opinion this was the best for their family. For the mother, "it is extremely difficult" that it is not her who can stay with the children and the father also thinks that "work is very important in life. But there might be more important things in life than going to work

(. . .) so the system works like this now, and we should not mess it up" (10). Thus, the family is in balance after all in spite of the fact that "my wife can spend less time with us than she wants. I need to spend more time than I want" (27), this solution unequivocally supports the family's wellbeing. We also included in this group those couples who did not experience work–life conflict before the father stayed at home, and the father simply wanted to actively take his share of the childcare duties. Furthermore, "it was a good decision even from the financial point of view that I stayed at home, however, it was not the moving force only an extra benefit" (5). Moreover, in another family they said that this situation did not change anything in their life, "it is part of the project that I stay at home after the child becomes half a year old" (14).

For all types, it has to be said that the fathers had a particular need to spend more time with their child, therefore, this period was very positively perceived. In connection with the other involvements, it can be expressed as a common experience that the respect towards the other's work increased in both parties and both parties had the opportunity to achieve successes in the other's role. It can also be stated that fathers who belong to types 1 and 4, who could not find work–life balance during this period, all gave account of a certain type of conflict: either because they could not succeed in neither of these areas according to their own expectations, or because the assumed role was not consistent with their gender role perception. (Voydanoff 2005; Perrone et al. 2009). According to the questionnaires the mothers filled in, more than half of them reported compunction (Meisenbach 2010) or even remorse and feeling excluded, yet they knew the children were in good hands.

It is clear from the varied situations and different perceptions of the families that belong to the abovementioned four types that people react to similar objective circumstances in different ways and so these can impact on the wellbeing of the individual in several ways (Diener et al. 1999). In conclusion, it can be stated that the father's staying at home with the young child, although it develops the parents' work–life balance in a different way, is a well-working alternative of establishing the subjective family wellbeing.

5. Discussion

The subjective wellbeing is a phenomenon that can be interpreted according to several interrelated dimensions (Allard et al. 2011); of these, we focused on two domain specific satisfaction factors in our research: satisfaction with work and family relationships. In order to better understand the wellbeing of the stay-at-home father–working mother families, we also consider it necessary to assess several objective and subjective wellbeing factors, such as the satisfaction with financial matters, health, free time, and social relationships. Furthermore, it is also considered necessary in family wellbeing research to assess the children's wellbeing, to which previous research studies paid less attention (Pollard and Lee 2003).

We are also aware that the generalizability of our results is limited due to the non-probability, purposive sampling method, and the narrow availability of interviewees with lower educational achievement from the countryside. In addition, as a result of the qualitative method, our findings are less reliable, which we tried to improve by involving two research analysts, and precisely documented and controlled coding and interpretation. However, we think that the experience we gained even via this non-representative sample helped us identify several of the characteristic patterns of the stay-at-home father–working mother family model with respect to wellbeing.

6. Conclusions

In our qualitative research based on interviews carried out with questionnaires answered by Hungarian stay-at-home fathers and working mothers, we analyzed the subjective wellbeing of the family model under examination regarding how the families under examination evaluated this life situation—particularly in connection with harmonizing paid and domestic work.

While in Hungary even today the traditional gender role practices prevail, the families in the examined sample can inevitably be characterized by the egalitarian approach and practices with respect to gender roles and the division of work in the family.

Suffice it to say, as a result of our research, in those rare cases when the father leaves the labor market in order to stay at home, the workplaces in Hungary are rather neutral and willing to acknowledge this, follow the law and regulations, and a truly, actively supporting working environment is rare to find. With regards to the division of domestic work, an unequivocally balanced sharing of the tasks was characteristic of the examined families, which was very often based on the same principles that they had even before having children.

The central element and the major lesson learnt is that the father's staying at home, that is, when the parents have a proportional division of time spent with the younger child, in many cases can contribute to the achievement of the work–life balance of both parents and, therefore, to the family wellbeing. That is the reason why we cannot discuss the mothers' and fathers' attitudes, experiences, and practices related to work and career in isolation. The relationship between these is also important to examine, as breadwinning and caretaking duties in the different families are shared based on family decisions. After examining the alleviation of the parents' wellbeing, the families could be classified into four types: when the decision primarily facilitated the work–life balance of the mother; when work–life balance was achieved by both parents (this is the biggest group); when it served as a resolution for the father's work–life conflict; and when the father's stay at home facilitated the family wellbeing, but did not impact on the couple's work–life balance.

In our present research, we focused on a small group of Hungarian families that can be characterized by a behavior different from the typical family model and, therefore, they provide a new alternative model for the period after childbirth. In Hungary, their number is low; however, there is an increasing tendency which makes it important to understand and unfold this phenomenon and all its aspects. On the basis of our research, therefore, it is our conviction that men's active and significant participation (and not help!) in rearing and caring for a child can be one sound alternative contribution of the two worker-carer family model's wellbeing.

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