

UNEMPLOYED, EMPLOYED & CARE-GIVING MOTHERS: QUALITY OF PARTNER & FAMILY RELATIONS¹

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Abstract: A retrospective ELSPAC study (N = 2756) compared three groups of mothers of three-year-old children: 1) employed, 2) voluntarily unemployed, and 3) involuntarily unemployed, about the quality of their partnership and family relationships. The results show that the involuntarily unemployed mothers have the lowest quality of family life. In these families there is more conflict, disagreement and hostile communication towards the woman and child. Employed mothers also experience some family problems. Overall, those most satisfied with their family lives are the voluntarily unemployed mothers. There is more positive communication between partners, including sharing and intimacy in this group. The results were interpreted as stemming from the distress caused by involuntary unemployment, the double burden of the female role and gender role models in the family.

Key words: female employment; involuntary/voluntary unemployment; balancing work and family; family relationships and models; gender roles.

Introduction

The introduction of a market economy in the Czech Republic in the 1990s triggered major changes not only in the labor market but also in the social stratification and value-orientation of the population. Individualistic values such as independence, assertiveness, competitiveness, career and performance orientation began to penetrate society (Kolman, Noorderhaven, Hofstede, & Dienes, 2003; Křížková & Vohlídalová, 2008). At the same time job insecurity increased and the phenomenon of unemployment appeared, which had been unknown for several generations (Buchtová & Snopek, 2012; Buchtová et al., 2013). Overall, inequalities in society grew, especially those relating to age, education and gender (Dudová, 2009). In the 1990s women, in particular, were pushed out of the labor market resulting in lower employment rates (Hašková, Saxonberg, & Mudrák, 2013; Křížková & Vohlídalová, 2008).

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Birth rates declined and the average age at which people start families significantly increased at the same time (Možný, 2002). Fundamental transformations at the economic, social and political levels contributed to these phenomena. Formerly unheard-of opportunities opened up for young people (e.g. travel, study, entrepreneurship and careers) and they started choosing other means of self-realization than family life. Institutional support for parenthood and the general feasibility of combining work and family decreased as well (Křížková & Vohlídalová, 2008). Childcare facilities (kindergartens, nurseries, etc.) started to be abolished and maximum flexibility (being available to the employer at any time with no regard for other commitments—so-called negative flexibility) was required instead of a more flexible work regime. For example: flexi-time is available to only 8% of Czech parents (Hašková, 2010).

Family care, typically the responsibility of women in the Czech Republic (the so-called *feminization of care*) lost its prestige in the context of the aggressive economy (Uhde, 2009). Mothers of small children are viewed as a burden in companies and the value of their work is marginalized (Křížková & Vohlídalová, 2008). This is caused first by gender stereotypes and prejudices (a working woman with a small child is perceived mainly as a mother, not as a professional) and second by objective factors, such as frequent absences due to child sicknesses, which interrupt the day-to-day running of a business (Buchtová et al., 2013).

The complex effects of involuntary unemployment on the individual, family, social and societal level are thoroughly documented in the literature (for a review see Buchtová et al., 2013). At the level of the family, there is repeated evidence of a decrease in marital satisfaction, deterioration of family relationships, increase in conflicts and hostility between partners, and finally a high risk of divorce (e. g. Hakim, 1982; Hansen, 2005; Hu, Zeng, Zheng, & Flatt, 2010; Jahoda, 1982; Lacinová, 2012; Larson, 1984; Sander, 1992; Weckström, 2012). The unemployment stress and frustration experienced by one family member is a stressful event for the whole family, generally weakening family cohesion (Břicháček, 2002). The emotional difficulties suffered by unemployed individuals are often transferred to other family members. Family relationships and job loss are further complicated by financial problems (Broman, Hamilton, & Hoffman, 1990); economic hardship increases emotional distress, leading to marital discord and the risk of marital breakdown.

A particularly vulnerable group are children, some of who may have been assessed for learning difficulties, deteriorating school performance, low self-esteem, behavioral and emotional problems, antisocial behavior, psychosomatic symptoms, depression and other symptoms that often reveal the problems of unemployed parents experience (Chinnock, 1984; Choudry, 1986; Christoffersen, 1994; Garfinkel et al., 1982; Kaltiala-Heino, Rimpela, Rantanen, & Laippala, 2001). Involuntary unemployment often leads to changes and a deterioration in parenting (Hu et al., 2010; Christoffersen, 2000). For example, some unemployed parents have been reported for neglect and abuse of children (Christoffersen, 2000; Lindell & Svedin, 2001; Sleskova, Salonna, Nagyova, Geckova, Stewart, van Dijk, & Groothoff, 2004). A study from the United States pointed to an increase in the number and severity of physical and sexual abuse cases, as well as neglect of children in times of economic recession. The highest risk group was the children of unemployed mothers (Tobey, McAuliff, & Rocha, 2013).

When the different effects of unemployment on the health and family relationships of men and women are discussed, research that showed milder effects in women argues that

this was due to their alternative female role—as care-giver (Waters & Moore, 2002) and a weaker link between female identity and work and financial income (e. g. Hakim, 1991). Where a woman loses her job, motherhood may play a supporting role and thereby mitigate the negative impacts (Artazcoz, 2004; Buchtová, 2013; Forret, Sullivan, & Mainiero, 2010), or even contribute to greater family harmony. Other studies (e. g. Hansen, 2005; Perucci & Perucci, 1997), however, did not find significant differences between men and women, and these divergent results are explained by contextual factors, i.e. the status of men and women in family and society (Strandh, Hammarström, Nilsson, Nordenmark, & Russel, 2013).

The effects of unemployment on both sexes are similar in countries with a high proportion of women in work, that is, in the context of the double-income family model (e. g. Sweden), in contrast to the more conservative division of gender roles, such as in Ireland (Strandh et al., 2013). Some important factors are the degree of the psychosocial and economic demands of the job. The high intensity of these demands increases the likelihood of impaired health and adjustment in marriage (Strandh et al., 2000). Lane (2009) argues that shifts in gender roles and the rise of double-career marriages blur the differences in the consequences of involuntary unemployment for both sexes; in men they are decreasing, whereas in women they are increasing. Generally, worse adjustment in marriage as a consequence of job loss is predicted in more rigid and traditional gender role models, especially in the case of unemployed fathers (Larson, 1984; Thomas, McCabe, & Berry, 1980).

The typical Czech family is a double-income one. Female employment is not only an economic necessity but also an important part of the self-esteem and self-actualization of Czech women (Uhde, 2009). Nevertheless, the domestic chores that are often the domain of women are less symmetrically divided regardless of employment status (Plaňava, 1999). Although young college students expect domestic duties to be equally shared once they are married, in reality, a more traditional model results during co-habitation (household chores are the responsibility of women), which is logically preferred more by men than women (Plaňava, 1999; Hašková & Rašticová, 2002). The way in which male and female university students perceive success is interesting. While a successful man is able to assert himself in his career, a successful woman can reconcile work and family (Hašková & Rašticová, 2002). Nevertheless, according to the research, female responsibility for running the household and raising children is typical of dysfunctional couples. Another feature is the uneven balance of power between partners; this presents a risk of marriage failure in the next generation (Plaňava, 1999; 2002).

Gender gaps in terms of the traditional family model are broadly widening with the arrival of the first child in a young family (Plaňava, 1999; 2002; Rajmicová, 2002; Hašková & Rašticová, 2002). Even after women return to work, the degree to which domestic responsibilities are shared between partners does not return to that of childless families (Hašková & Rašticová, 2002). Generally, there are higher levels of conflict between partners in families with young children (a consequence of sleep deprivation, different opinions on child upbringing, etc.). This is part of the family cycle, more specifically, the normative crisis (Lacinová, 2012) that arises when the family adapts to change.

Another issue concerns non-normative conflicts, e. g. job loss. According to Gottman (1993), couples with traditional gender role arrangements report conflicts to a lesser extent; however, their occurrence is more frequent in the case of employed women, who must

combine work with family. Czech families generally opt for the egalitarian model that in young generations can lead to partner disagreements as opposed to the nuclear family in which the mother is fully in charge of the household (Lacinová, 2012; Plaňava, 1999). It must be pointed out that the enormous benefits of the greater involvement of fathers in child-rearing is not only good for the family, but also for the men themselves in terms of balancing work responsibilities and reducing work stress (Greenhaus, Collins, & Shaw, 2003).

As noted earlier, the income of both partners is essential for the family budget, therefore the traditional allocation of roles (male as exclusive breadwinner and woman as exclusive care-giver) is unthinkable for a Czech family. Female employment brings enormous benefits for the individual, family and society. Employed mothers enjoy better health and overall well-being (thus burdening the health system less) and reduce the risk of poverty in families; their children do not only make greater progress, but are generally more successful in life (Buehler & O'Brien, 2011; Gormly & Brodzinsky, 1989). Female employment in general reduces social inequality between the sexes, increasing the flow of taxes to the state budget and strengthening the stability of the welfare state (Hašková, Saxonberg, & Mudrák, 2012; Sirovátka & Mareš, 2002).

Despite these benefits, Czech social policy does not promote combining work and family for women; on the contrary, it encourages the inactivity of mothers of small children on the labour market (Sirovátka & Mareš, 2002). In the 1990s, pre-school child-care institutions were extensively abolished and it has become difficult for parents to access them, both in terms of capacity and cost (Hašková et al., 2012; Křížková & Vohlídalová, 2008).

For the family, and especially for a woman, a child may represent a few risks (Sirovátka & Mareš, 2002). Firstly, there is the marginalization in the labour market and the associated risk of poverty. Companies see mothers of young children as a burden and their work contribution is downplayed (Křížková & Vohlídalová, 2008). Many of the involuntarily unemployed women reported that having a small child was the reason they had been rejected by an employer (Sirovátka & Mareš, 2002). The second risk is the double burden of the women's role and the associated danger of overload due to the necessity of juggling work and family in combination with the poor institutional support for a work-family balance (insufficient pre-school child-care facilities, shortage of flexible work arrangements for both parents) and domestic chores being unequally shared by partners (women are responsible for most of the household²). Stress arising from this dual role may be reflected in the physical and mental health of women, and furthermore may be transmitted to the children's health and development. Despite this challenging situation, studies have shown that employed women enjoy subjectively better physical and mental health compared with women without employment (Aneshensel, 1987; Buehler & O'Brien, 2011; Gore & Mangione, 1983; Jennings, Mazaik, & McKinlay, 1984; Kandel, Davies, & Raveis, 1985; Strazdins et al., 2013). Our study has also confirmed that employed mothers enjoy better subjective somatic and psychological health compared with involuntarily unemployed mothers (Wyrobková & Okrajec, under review).

² This trend is changing though: more and more men are becoming involved in the child's upbringing and in the household; however in the 1990s, the gender-role division was much more traditional.

Objectives of the study

Our previous study proved that there was a correlation between involuntary unemployment and subjectively less favorable assessment of somatic and mental health (Wyrobková & Okrajek, under review). Given these findings, we consider it important to focus on the stability of the family as well. The key question is what is the relationship between employment status and the quality of family relationships of mothers with young children? In terms of employment status, we distinguish three groups of mothers: voluntarily and involuntarily unemployed mothers and employed mothers. More detail on the groups is provided in the section on the sample. Generally, it can be assumed that the frustration of involuntary unemployment and the more negative perceptions of the somatic and mental health of mothers will be negatively reflected in family relationships. Another factor that will contribute to tensions in the family is the absence of a second income on the part of involuntarily unemployed women, exposing what is usually a double-income Czech family to economic risks.

If a woman cannot contribute to the family budget, it may undermine her equal status within the family and provoke hostility from her partner. It is not that women are unwilling to work or have few skills, since many are well-educated and represent a high proportion of the labour market, but that motherhood is becoming a “punishment”, in the sense that there are few social policies that seek to manage work and family. International comparisons show that the impact of motherhood on the employment of Czech women is one of the highest in Europe (Hašková et al., 2012). A study by Hu et al. (2010) shows how partners react negatively to a woman losing her job and how the woman’s role as co-breadwinner within the family is one of necessity. According to these authors, a woman’s economic contribution is prerequisite to equal status in marriage and society.

The other side of the argument sees the alternative role of the woman as caregiver as having a protective function against involuntary employment. This idea was further supported by the development cycle of the family with a small child (i. e. a preference for the traditional division of gender roles), which is also reinforced by the social policy system of long parental leave and lack of institutional support for combining work and family. In addition, according to the literature, couples with more traditional gender roles generally experience less conflict (Gottman, 1993; Lacinová, 2012). This argument assumes that a woman who cannot find a job on the labour market will be self-fulfilled and beneficial to the family. In contrast, families with mothers who return to work have to adapt to major change. The woman has to juggle work and family and does not have as much time at home as during parental leave, which can lead to conflict.

Given the dual-income model of the Czech family (female employment is not only an economic necessity, but also part of female identity) and the dual-role of the woman (juggling work and family without sufficient institutional support), we presuppose the following:

1. The quality of family life is expected to be lowest among involuntarily unemployed mothers.
2. Employed mothers will have the second lowest level of quality of family life.
3. Voluntarily unemployed mothers will have the happiest family lives.

Study

Sample

In a retrospective study of 1994-1995 performed as a part of the ELSPAC (European Longitudinal Study of Pregnancy and Childhood) project, we compared the following three groups of mothers of three-year-old children (born between 1991 and 1992): 1) involuntarily unemployed (N=158; 5.73%), 2) voluntarily unemployed (N=1669; 60.56%) and 3) employed (N=929 women; 33.71%) aged between 20 and 46 years (average age 29.54) from the South Moravian region. The mothers were divided into three groups according to responses in the Employment section of the questionnaire examining whether the mother had looked for work since the birth of the child and what her motivation was. The employed group consists of mothers who started working (part- or full-time) following the birth of the child and are still employed. The voluntarily unemployed group consists mostly of mothers who chose not to work so as to be able to take care of their children (N=1187, 71.2%) and also mothers who had not yet looked for work due to other reasons (N=482, 28.8%). The involuntarily unemployed mothers had been looking for work since the birth of the child (in the last three years), but had been unsuccessful.

Methodology

The data was obtained by means of a questionnaire prepared by the ELSPAC international and interdisciplinary team. The questionnaire was designed for use in all participating countries and was obligatory in all these countries. It also contained items managed at the national level only. For this study we used the T1 questionnaire for mothers of three-year old children, consisting of 59 pages and including the following sections: Your health, Your family, Your childhood, Your feelings, Recent events, Your partner, Your household, Your neighbors, Job, Lifestyle, Chemicals, Health care. For the goals of our research we focused primarily on sections A, B, C, D and K, describing the following categories:

1. Socioeconomic data: age, education, family status, income, partnership
2. Health: psychosomatics, sickness rate, sexual life, hospitalization rate, accident rate, etc.
3. Family and childhood: negligence, mental maltreatment, parental relationships, etc.
4. Psychological variables: mental problems, personality disorders, neurotic symptoms, depression, self-evaluation, self-efficacy, life satisfaction, quality of life, etc.
5. Life style: sleep, nutrition, smoking, alcohol, physical activity, etc.
6. Employment: employment/unemployment, number of hours worked per week, weekend work, job motivation, compatibility of work and family care, time spent with the child, help at home and with child rearing.

Data analysis

A descriptive analysis for all variables was performed. We tested the zero hypothesis about the independence of two nominal values at a significance level of 0.05 (using pivot tables). If the p-value of the chi-square test is < 0.05 , then we can dismiss the zero hypothesis, i.e. that there is a dependency. Where this was a four-field table, we considered

the p-value of Fisher's exact test. Where there were dependencies, the results were evaluated by means of relative risk (RR). In the case of ordinal data (e.g. satisfaction with a particular situation on a scale of 1-10), we tested the variables by means of a nonparametric test, where the zero hypothesis claimed that the medians were identical (alternatively, the medians were different). Continuous variables were evaluated by means of a parametric t-test. The reference group contained involuntarily unemployed mothers and the other two groups were compared with this reference group.

Results

The following abbreviations are used below: UV – voluntarily unemployed mothers, UI – involuntarily unemployed mothers, E – employed mothers.

Descriptive statistics

First of all, we divided the data set (N=3174) into three groups of mothers: 1) employed, 2) involuntarily unemployed and 3) voluntarily unemployed; 2756 mothers matched the selected criterion. The final sample consists of 929 employed mothers, 158 involuntarily unemployed mothers and 1669 voluntarily unemployed mothers.

Table 1. Basic socio-demographic data

	Groups of mothers			
Variable	UV=1669	UI=158	E=929	sig
Average age (years)	31.45	31.12	32.38	***
Education				
Elementary + vocational school	30.1%	40.2%	25.5%	***
Grammar school with final examination	48.8%	41.7%	45.6%	***
University degree	21.1%	18.1%	28.9%	***
Mother has a partner	97.3%	89.1%	92.7%	***

Key: *** p<0.001

UV – voluntarily unemployed mothers, UI – involuntarily unemployed mothers, E – employed mothers

Statistically significant differences between the groups of women were found in age, education and partnership. The involuntarily unemployed mothers are the youngest, are more likely to have elementary or vocational education and are more frequently single. The employed mothers are also more often partnerless than the voluntarily unemployed mothers.

Below we shall present only the results where statistical significances in the differences between the groups were found. The complete results can be obtained from the first author by request.

Table 2. Section K. Experiences of unemployment among the voluntarily unemployed and the involuntarily unemployed mothers

UI=1669, UV=158

How do you perceive the fact that you are unemployed?	RR	sig
UI/UV		
I am angry	17.24	***
I am depressed	6.25	***
I am bored	4.10	***
UV/UI		
I am happy	5.28	***
I don't mind	1.95	***

Key: *** $p < 0.001$

UV – voluntarily unemployed mothers, UI – involuntarily unemployed mothers

Table 2 compares experiences of unemployment among voluntarily and involuntarily unemployed mothers. The results indicate that involuntary unemployment is associated with negativity, mostly anger (as much as 17.24 times more frequently, $p < 0.001$), followed by depression (as much as 6.25 times more frequently, $p < 0.001$) and, finally, boredom (as much as 4.74 times more frequently, $p < 0.001$). In comparison with the data in the table above, the voluntarily unemployed mothers are happier under these circumstances (8.39 times more frequently, $p < 0.001$) and they do not mind being unemployed (4.7 times more frequently, $p < 0.001$).

Table 3. Section F. Satisfaction with family life-average values and comparison of groups

	mean	sig.
How satisfied/dissatisfied are you with your family life? Please indicate your answer on a ten-point scale (1 – dissatisfaction, 10 – satisfaction, 99 – I do not know)		
UV	7.91	
E	7.46	
UI	6.95	
Comparison of groups of mothers		
UV/E		***
UI/UV		***

Key: *** $p < 0.001$

UV – voluntarily unemployed mothers, UI – involuntarily unemployed mothers, E – employed mothers

As can be seen from Table 3, overall, all the mothers were more inclined to satisfaction than dissatisfaction with their family life. The most satisfied are the voluntarily unemployed

mothers, followed by the employed mothers and finally the involuntarily unemployed mothers. No statistically significant differences were found between the employed and involuntarily unemployed mothers.

Table 4. Section E. Recent events (last 18 months)

Variable	RR	Sig.
Your partner lost his job. (E=917, UV=1653, UI=157)		
UI/UV	1.8	*
UI/E	1.37	*
You faced major financial difficulties. (E=921, UV=1658, UI=157)		
UI/UV	1.9	***
UI/E	1.42	***
E/UV	1.33	***
You got pregnant. (E=920, UV=1658, UI=158)		
UV/E	2.54	***
UV/UI	2.46	***
You had an abortion. (E=919, UV=1660, UI=158)		
E/UV	1.57	**
E/UI	1.37	**
You argued with your family and friends. (E=920, UV=1657, UI=158)		
UI/UV	1.54	**
UI/E	1.21	**
You argued with your partner. (E=908, UV=1647, UI=155)		
UI/UV	1.17	**
E/UV	1.15	**
Your partner was physically abusive to you. (E=916, UV=1651, UI=157)		
UI/UV	1.83	**
UI/E	1.29	**
Your partner was emotionally cruel to you. (E=919, UV=1658, UI=157)		
UI/UV	1.67	***
UI/E	1.09	***
E/UV	1.53	***
You found out that your partner did not want the baby. (E=919, UV=1658, UI=157)		
UI/UV	4.64	***
UI/E	2.12	***
E/UV	2.18	***

Variable	RR	Sig.
Your partner was physically abusive to your children. (E=921, UV=1652, UI=158)		
UI/UV	2.46	**
UI/E	1.64	**
Your partner was emotionally cruel to your children. (E=915, UV=1659, UI=157)		
UI/UV	2.30	**
UI/E	1.69	**
E/UV	1.36	**

Key: *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

UV – voluntarily unemployed mothers, UI – involuntarily unemployed mothers, E – working mothers, RR (Risk Ratio) – relative risk in terms of frequency of occurrence between the groups compared. The figure represents how many times the phenomenon occurs more frequently in the first group compared to the second. For example, the partner of an involuntarily unemployed mother lost his job at a rate of 1.8 times more than the partner of a voluntarily unemployed mother.

Table 4 shows that in comparison with the involuntarily unemployed mothers compared, the remaining groups had higher rates of adverse events (in the past 18 months). The partner more often lost his job and the couple faced major financial troubles. These mothers quarrelled more frequently with their family and friends, and their partner was more often physically abusive and emotionally cruel to mother and children. He also more frequently did not want the baby. Compared to the voluntarily unemployed mothers, they argued more often with their partner. Furthermore, compared with the voluntarily unemployed mothers, working mothers more often had major financial difficulties, quarrelled with a partner who was emotionally cruel to them and the children and more often did not want the baby. Employed mothers have a higher rate of abortion than the other groups. In contrast, the voluntarily unemployed mothers were about 2.5 times more likely to become pregnant compared to the other mothers.

Table 5. Section F. Your Partner

Variable	RR	Sig.
Recently my partner has made me angry almost every day. (E=847, UV=1599, UI=137)		
UI/UV	2.37	***
UI/E	1.5	***
Recently I have made my partner angry almost every day. (E=841, UV=1595, UI=137)		
UI/UV	1.77	***
UI/E	1.18	***

Variable	RR	Sig.
In the last three months my partner and I have had very frequent quarrels and disagreements. (E=843, UV=1589, UI=137)		
UI/UV	1.92	***
UI/E	1.25	***
In the last three months, I have not talked with my partner for over half an hour. (E=839, UV=1601, UI=137)		
UI/UV	1.16	**
UI/E	1.03	**
In the last three months, my partner and I shouted or swore at each other. (E=843, UV=1589, UI=137)		
UI/UV	1.21	***
E/UV	1.23	***
Your partner's attitudes and behaviour to you recently:		
He feels very hurt when I do not share his views. (E=841, UV=1593, UI=136)		
E/UV	1.07	*
He tends to criticize me for little things. (E=843, UV=1594, UI=137)		
UI/UV	1.15	***
E/UV	1.14	***
He does not understand my problems and worries. (E=844, UV=1594, UI=137)		
UI/UV	2.15	***
UI/E	1.42	***
He tries to change me. (E=842, UV=1592, UI=135)		
UI/UV	1.19	*
UI/E	1.08	*
He wants me to change considerably. (E=833, UV=1589, UI=136)		
UI/UV	1.39	***
UI/E	1.13	***
He tends to boss me around. (E=841, UV=1593, UI=136)		
UI/UV	1.27	***
E/UV	1.25	***
He insists that I do exactly as I am told. (E=843, UV=1592, UI=135)		
UI/UV	1.25	**
E/UV	1.15	**
He attempts to control everything I do. (E=832, UV=1585, UI=135)		
UI/UV	1.45	***
UI/E	1.16	***

Variable	RR	Sig.
*He tries to be superior to me. (E=836, UV=1587, UI=137)		
UI/UV	1.16	**
E/UV	1.16	**
Almost daily, my partner and I...		
talk about work or about how we spent the day. (E=848, UV=1602, UI=138)		
UV/UI	1.19	*
E/UI	1.16	*
talk about our feelings or worries. (E=844, UV=1595, UI=138)		
UV/UI	1.07	*
E/UI	1.05	*
UV/E	1.11	*
kiss or hug. (E=840, UV=1582, UI=137)		
UV/UI	1.18	***
UV/E	1.12	***
laugh together. (E=846, UV=1601, UI=137)		
UV/UI	1.27	**
E/UI	1.14	**
UV/E	1.11	**
How do you perceive the following aspects of your life together? I am satisfied with:		
The expression of affection and emotions. (E=846, UV=1597, UI=138)		
UV/UI	1.12	***
UV/E	1.11	***
With sex. (E=840, UV=1577, UI=139)		
UV/UI	1.05	**
UV/E	1.07	**
The management of family finances. (E=840, UV=1599, UI=138)		
UV/UI	1.16	***
UV/E	1.07	***
Decisions on major matters. (E=846, UV=1593, UI=138)		
UV/UI	1.13	***
UV/E	1.05	***
The amount of time spent together. (E=842, UV=1593, UI=136)		
E/UV	1.06	*
E/UI	1.24	*
UV/UI*	1.17	*

Variable	RR	Sig.
In the last three months, my partner and I did the following activities together:		
We went out to lunch or dinner. (E=847, UV=1605, UI=137)		
E/UV	1.16	**
E/UI	1.14	**
We went for a drink. (E=843, UV=1604, UI=137)		
E/UV	1.18	**
E/UI	1.14	**
We went to the cinema or theatre. (E=844, UV=1596, UI=137)		
E/UV	1.15	*
E/UI	1.34	*

Legend: *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

UV – voluntarily unemployed mothers, UI – involuntarily unemployed mothers, E – working mothers, RR (Risk Ratio) – relative risk in terms of frequency of occurrence between the compared groups. The number represents how many times the phenomenon occurs more frequently in the first group compared to the second.

Table 5 includes items where there are statistically significant differences between groups in terms of partner communication, sharing emotions/intimacy, decision-making, satisfaction with different areas of life and leisure. Communication between the involuntarily unemployed mothers and their partners includes more frequent occurrences of problematic phenomena compared to the remaining groups. There is a higher rate of quarrels and disagreements, they more frequently make each other angry and do not talk to each other. The partner is more prone to displays of power: he wants her to change and tries to change and control her. Finally, the partner more often does not understand the woman's problems/worries and they talk less frequently about work or how they spent the day. Compared to the voluntarily unemployed mothers they shout or swear at each other, the partner bosses her around, criticizes her, insists that she does exactly what he says, and tries to gain superiority over her.

Furthermore, partners of employed mothers often criticize them for little things and feel very hurt when the women do not share their opinion in comparison to partners of voluntarily unemployed mothers. They have more frequent power issues: he bosses her around, insists that she do exactly as she was told, and tries to gain superiority over her. They shout or swear at each other more often.

In comparison with other groups, the family relationships of voluntarily unemployed mothers involve a larger number of positive aspects: they are satisfied with the affection and emotions, sex, family finances, and decision making on major matters. They kiss/hug almost daily, laugh together and talk about their feelings and concerns. Compared with the involuntarily unemployed, the employed mothers laugh more frequently with their partner and talk about their feelings/worries. The working mothers are happier with the time spent together with their partner; they go out more often for lunch/dinner/drink or to the cinema/theatre than the other women and talk with their partner about their day/work. The

voluntarily unemployed mothers are happier than the involuntarily unemployed women in regards to the time spent together.

Discussion

The main objective was to compare the family relationships of three groups of mothers of small children. The results showed that involuntarily unemployed mothers had a negative experience with the lowest quality of family relationships and the least satisfaction with family life. Their families were the subject of more frequent conflicts, power issues and hostile behaviour on the part of the partner towards the woman and child. Constructive communication, sharing and intimacy are present to a lesser extent. Based on these results, we must reject the argument favouring the alternative role of women (i. e. that the care-giver role compensates for the negative effects of involuntary unemployment, or that the involuntary unemployment of women may contribute to more harmonious relations within the family).

The inability to find a job is a stressful experience for the mother, and not an opportunity for self-realization within the traditional female role as caretaker, as was found in other studies (e. g. Forret et al., 2010). The family faces greater risks in terms of serious financial problems. Long-term, the Czech family is moving towards the egalitarian model (Lacinová, 2012) and is essentially double-income (Plaňava, 1999); thus, being unemployed represents a significant risk of poverty for the woman (Sirovátka & Mareš, 2002). The lack of financial income cannot be compensated for by the woman taking greater care for her family; as demonstrated by some authors, financial strains lead to relationship tensions in the family (e. g. Broman et al., 1990). Moreover, women's economic dependence perpetuates gender inequality in the family and society (Sirovátka & Mareš, 2002).

The severity of the findings lies in the fact that the economic difficulties, frustration and stress experienced by involuntarily unemployed parents, and especially primary care givers, may negatively affect child development, particularly during the early stages. An overview of the complexity of the consequences for children is given in the introduction. The difficulties parents have are generally transferred to the children and adverse events in childhood tend to repeat in adulthood (Buchtová et al., in press). Overall, this reduces the life chances of the child and places a burden on the health and social systems (e. g. a higher rate of health problems and social pathological phenomena, such as crime in families of the involuntarily unemployed). Involuntary unemployment is not only an individual but also a family and societal problem; thus, in part, the solution is to invest in the human capital of present and future generations.

The family of the involuntarily unemployed women generally experienced other adverse events, such as their partner losing their job, which could lead to a further deterioration in family relationships. These families are likely to face major financial problems, which increases stress and frustration in the family. Conflicts are usually exacerbated. The involuntarily unemployed mothers are more often single, which presents a high risk of poverty for both mother and child; single mothers are most vulnerable in this respect (Křížková & Vohlídalová, 2008). The study also confirmed a correlation between the type of education and occupational status. Those with a lower level of education are more likely to

experience involuntary unemployment. Mothers with higher education, on the other hand, are more likely to be employed.

Furthermore, families of employed mothers face greater conflict and power issues compared to voluntarily unemployed mothers; although, this occurs to a much lesser extent than among those who are involuntarily unemployed. Positive, warm communication, the sharing of emotions and intimacy occurs less than in the voluntarily unemployed mothers, but more often than in the involuntarily unemployed mothers. The employed mothers are most satisfied with the time they spend with their partner and they most often go out together. It was anticipated that employed mothers would have poorer quality family relationships and be generally less satisfied with them given the developmental changes in the family cycle: the family adapts to the woman's return to work; balancing work with care-giving may be less convenient for the family. For the woman, this change represents a stressful event—mastering two full-time jobs at the same time—work and family. In the Czech Republic, raising the children and running the household generally remains the responsibility of women, even once she has returned to work (Hašková & Rašticová, 2002). The majority of employers do not allow parents flexible working arrangements, which would help them better combine the two duties—only 8% of parents in the Czech Republic have the option of flexible work (Hašková, 2010). Furthermore, the capacity and affordability of pre-school childcare has been a problem since the 1990s.

The employed mothers are slightly more likely to have financial difficulties and are more often single compared with the voluntarily unemployed women. These results again highlight that paid employment is essential for mothers of small children. This also concerns working mothers, who are most likely out of all the women to undergo an abortion. In making this decision, the need to succeed in the labour market certainly plays a role, since each additional child means uncertainty and a greater risk of poverty for both mother and child/children. Many women choose to postpone motherhood as a means of preventing poverty (Křížková & Vohlídalová, 2008); consequently, some of them remain childless. There is a significant increase in the childlessness of female graduates, who often have to deal with a conflict between professional and family life (Hašková, 2010). For the contemporary Czech family, a child represents a social risk (Sirovátka & Mareš, 2002), which is reflected in the total fertility in the Czech Republic—one of the lowest in Europe (Hašková et al., 2012). Employed mothers constitute the largest proportion of university graduates. This could be interpreted in two ways—their high competitiveness on the labour market and/or a greater need for professional self-realization.

An alternative explanation of the less than satisfactory family life of the employed women may be that mothers who have more conflicts with their partner try to return to work earlier, are more likely to have an abortion and are less likely to become pregnant. Consequently, they may be less satisfied with their family life not because they are employed (or involuntarily unemployed) but because of the reason they were previously employed (or involuntarily unemployed).

The voluntarily unemployed mothers have the best quality family life and the greatest levels of satisfaction. This is probably due to the fact that they are voluntarily unemployed and do not suffer from stress caused by involuntary unemployment and the women's dual role. The families of the voluntarily unemployed mothers do not need to adapt to a new

situation, whereby the woman's return to work leads to the restructuring of gender roles. They continue to function according to the traditional model, which is practical in terms of the division of labour and provides less opportunity for friction to arise between the partners. As pointed out by Lacinová (2012), in families with a traditional arrangement of gender roles, there is less conflict. The family continues with this model from the birth of the first child, provided they can afford the luxury of living on one income. This is subject to the economic possibilities of the family; based on the data we can infer that these mothers come from better off economic backgrounds. The other groups of mothers, who face financial difficulties more frequently, simply cannot afford the luxury of relying only on the male breadwinner.

Given that the voluntarily unemployed mothers were several times more likely to become pregnant in comparison with the other groups, it is very likely that they have, expect to have or plan to have another child. Having another child in the family is very likely to be a happy life event that contributes to overall family harmony. In the Czech Republic, it is quite common for people to have a second child within one to three years after the first one and mothers often remain on parental leave with the two children for five or six years without interruption (Hašková et al., 2012). Their long-term absence from the labour market, and therefore the practice gap in competence, increase the risk of future involuntary unemployment, which many mothers already face after three years of parental leave. However, extended parental leave may be advantageous in that the woman has only one career break. It cannot be assumed that these mothers have chosen the traditional female role as their lifelong career.

Conclusions

The study pointed to the negative experience of involuntary unemployment and the relationship between involuntary unemployment and, to a lesser extent, the employment of mothers of small children and the quality of family relationships. The findings indicate a need to adjust social policies so as to enable mothers to combine family care and employment. In order to increase the competitiveness of mothers on the labour market, these policies could help mothers of small children engage in the labour market much earlier than after three or four years of parental leave. There is also a need to relieve the burden of the dual role, by investing in pre-school childcare facilities, flexible working arrangements and involving fathers more in child-rearing (Hašková et al., 2012).

Balancing work and childcare is not only an individual or female issue, but is one that affects the family and society as a whole. The frustration and stress experienced by women who are involuntarily unemployed, or who have a dual role burden, has a negative impact on the whole family since it decreases its overall stability and may negatively impact on the successful development of the child. The family is the basic unit of society and if it is vulnerable, it places a burden on the whole social system, including healthcare and social welfare. Investment in social policies that balance work and family life would provide a return on investment many times over: first, by eliminating the costs of the negative effects, but also in terms of human capital—a healthy and competitive population that contributes to overall economic growth.

Although the families of voluntarily unemployed mothers are happiest, this is most likely to be a temporary state, where mothers are expecting or caring for another child. In the long term, continued absence from the labour market is more risky in terms of involuntary unemployment, along with all its associated negative consequences. In the long-term, the Czech family aims at an egalitarian model (Lacinová, 2012; Plaňava, 1999); a return to the traditional gender role arrangement is unrealistic for the following reasons: a) a dual income is essential for most Czech families and b) there is a long tradition of female employment, it is an integral part of the self-confidence and independence of Czech women. We can assume that the employed woman's relationships will also improve once the family has adapted to the mother's re-employment.

Our data are from the 1990s—a period of economic growth. At that time involuntary unemployment was less than half the current rate (in 2014) as the whole of Europe struggles with economic recession. An increase in the unemployment rate also multiplies its negative impacts (i. e. the chance of finding a job is smaller); therefore, we can assume that the effects are much more serious today. We also need to take into account the fact that mothers are most likely to fall into the short-term unemployment category (looking for a job for less than one year). The impact is much more significant in the case of long-term involuntary unemployment (over one year). There should be further investigation, beyond the scope of this study, to examine the effects of female employment and involuntary unemployment on child development.

The nature of our data does not allow us to infer a causal relationship between the employment status of a woman and overall family relations that would imply that family disharmony is caused by the woman being employed or unemployed (voluntarily/involuntarily). Firstly, the relationship could also be the other way round—i. e. women who are dissatisfied with family life more often look for work. Nevertheless, there are plenty of studies suggesting that the deterioration of physical and psychological health, family relations and other negative phenomenon are due to an inability to find a job (see introduction).

Secondly, overall family relations are usually moderated by further variables, such as the partner's job, economic and/or educational status, or overall family economic position. In the present study, we were unable to analyze these factors due to their low occurrence in the sample (e. g. the small number of unemployed men). The causal nature of the relationships between the variables and the dynamic aspects of the family relations could be a topic for further study.³

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