



Development in a Roma family by discourse of social workers in the Czech Republic

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ABSTRACT

This article describes how social workers identified the development of Czech Roma families to emancipation and gives an insight into the differences in the roles of men and women in society and the family.

It deals with the discourse of social workers, gained through three focus groups and objectifies it through 60 interviews with Roma men and Roma women, who are in a relationship.

Although the element of equality is more and more emphasized within social life, distinctive inequality between genders is still documented in expert ethnographic literature.

The results describe development over previous ethnographic studies. Roma families, where husband and wife are working, have in the majority rather patterns of behavior. Families with unemployed men and women have a socio-economic decline. The role of financial security now belongs to women which receiving social benefits. Roma men in present are losing their main role by this and their role in Roma families is disturbed.

KEYWORDS : Emancipation - Roma - Social role - Social workers

Introduction

Roma women face disadvantages from many perspectives, concerning both their ethnicity and their gender. Although the element of equality is more and more emphasized within social life, distinctive inequality between genders is still documented in expert ethnographic literature. The roles traditionally expected from a Roma woman need not necessarily correspond to her present needs, and the tendency to subordination towards her partner may be related with many behaviours observed in the Roma family and described as an ethnic particularity in expert literature. The goal of our article is to describe the development of the roles and positions of the Roma woman based on the discourse of social workers and to compare them with the statements of 30 Roma couples.

Roma people

The Roma minority constitutes the largest ethnic minority group in the Czech Republic. The Roma arrived to Europe in several migration waves from north India, *most notably from the regions of Punjab and Rajasthan* (Brearley, 2001). The motives of the Roma to leave India are mentioned primarily in connection with descending development of their position in the Indian caste system. They probably migrated from India seeking subsistence and their arrival to Europe dates back to the 1400s. (Řičan, 1998; Brearley, 2001)

The denomination "Gipsy" was used for this group of people based on one of the oldest historical, archive-documented reports from a Greek monastery on the Athos mountain, mentioning people called Athinganoi, who lived in Greece in the 9th century already and who are described there as wandering boilermakers and jugglers. That denomination was borrowed by a number of other languages. The denomination "Roma" is the own denomination of an overwhelming part of Gypsies all over the world. It is, in fact, an ethnonym. In Roma language, the word "Roma" denominates the man, the husband and the life partner. (Davidová, Uherek, 2010)

As Navrátil et al. (2003) state, it is estimated that about 1,5 million Roma live in Western Europe and more than three million in Eastern Europe at present. The Roma do not constitute a unified group of inhabitants. They consist of several so called subethnic groups. Five Roma groups live in Bohemia: the Czech and Moravian Roma, the Slovak, Hungarian and Wallachian Roma. The Wallachian Roma arrived to Bohemia from Romania after abolition of serfdom, at the end of the

19th century. The Slovak and Hungarian Roma came to Bohemia and Moravia from Slovakia after World War II. (Davidová, Uherek, 2010; Jakoubek, Hirt, 2004)

Gender roles and roles of the Roma

The concept of gender expresses the differences between men and women and their essence consists in cultural and social behaviour patterns. At general level, the concept expresses that social and cultural standards of womanhood and manhood, determining what it means to be a woman or a man in a specific society in a specific period, are historically changeable and that the ways in which the relations between men and women in a society are arranged do not constitute a naturally given and unchangeable state (Maříková et al., 2012). Until the Enlightenment, the men and the women were perceived as two different beings, thus belonging to different spheres of life. The constructivism of the gender roles relied upon the concept of naturalness and biological and religious arguments; the male roles were privileged for example due to the fact that the man was the first to be created by God. The female roles were restricted to the private space of the household and to limited walks to the church, to the market, etc. Male roles expanded further to the public space. The limited autonomy of women was substantiated by their weakness and subordination. (Gjuričová, Kubička, 2003) But the expectancies concerning the male and female roles have survived till the present in some respects.

Gender stereotypes can be defined as traditional and often even discriminatory concepts of typically male and female characteristics, roles and positions of men and women in the society (Harnachová et al., 2010). Hoffman a Hurst (1990) found that stronger stereotypes emerged in a period when the categories were biologically defined. Therefore the biological factor can be considered a strong substantiating factor. Gender roles that are defined in traditional Roma society have serious consequences for the life of the men and of the women. The roles have created a framework in which both the men and the women get their identity and shape their goals (Hughes, Kroehler, 2013, pp. 248–249).

Socialization within the family and broader community influences gender identity of children and the selection of their activities towards gender stereotyped roles (Eccles et al., 1990). The gender roles

are passed in the family by the mother and the father in approximately the same proportion (Hess et al., 2014).

Costa et al. (2001) researched gender stereotypes in different cultures. They saw that the greatest personality differences between men and women could be found in European and American cultures where, on the contrary, the gender roles are the most egalitarian. Feingold (1994) processed a meta-analysis of personality features of men and women from different cultures and found only minimal differences.

The 1950s are characterized by T. Parsons' functionalist approach. According to it, the female and male functions in the family complement each other, which is important for the operation of the modern society. Male roles have rational and instrumental character; they sustain the family, care for the relations of the family with broader society and mediate social restrictions to the children. Female roles are emotional and expressive. Their task is to give love and everyday care to the family. (Gjuričová, Kubička, 2003)

Betty Friedan, a psychologist of early 1960s, stated in "The Feminine Mystique" (Friedan 1963) that the women who stayed "imprisoned" in their homes frequently suffered from feelings of emptiness, lack of fulfilment or mental disorders. However, it was not a purely personal and private problem of such women (as people could think) but a deeper, social problem - problem of inequality - inequality of social position (of women and men), a problem of their different social evaluation, unequal opportunities and perspectives related to their roles and positions in this type of arrangement.

At present, several models of gender roles can be seen in Czech families. The so called egalitarian model, in which both partners practise an equally challenging profession and share equally the care for the household and for the children, is preferred by 43% men and 52% women. (Sirovátka, Bartáková, 2008). In many families, the man holds the role of breadwinner and the woman acts caregiver, i.e. cares more for the children and for the household and therefore practises a less challenging profession than her partner. (Gornick, Meyers, 2004, Pfau-Effinger, 2004).

Roma woman from historical perspective

The Roma consider their family one of the most important relationship institutions. It constitutes the base for socialization, acculturation, emotional and social life of all its members. But at the same time, the Roma family faces more and more the current majority trends and behaviour patterns that weaken its role. (Davidová, Uherek, 2010) The most Roma people were characterized by a large patriarchal family constituting a broader blood-related group of relatively independent large families until recently. (Poláková, 2014; Rác, Šusterová, 2014) As Davidová (2004) states, the woman's position in the family was very low, subordinate and even humiliating by the present criteria. The woman was considered a being of lower importance, intended primarily to love, deliver and raise the children and care for food and household (Poláková, 2014; Štěpařová, 2005).

The Roma woman is led to respect unwritten traditional Roma laws and the whole community supervises their observance. (Rác, Šusterová, 2014; Leeson, 2012). The oldest (first born) daughter has a specific position in the family. Primarily the mother was glad about the first born daughter, as she saw her helper and substitute in her. (Poláková, 2014) Roma girls usually did not marry for romantic love but they married the man chosen by their parents. (Budilová, Jakoubek, 2007; Sedláček, 2004) The fathers engaged more frequently in choosing the bridegrooms for their daughters. (Štěpařová, 2005) Girls often married at an age of about 13-14 years. (Davidová, 2004) The woman had a subordinate position towards her husband during marriage. The man is traditionally seen as the woman's master and the woman must follow and obey him. (Sedláček, 2004) The Roma communities did not consider it a common thing that couples show love or endearments to each other in public (Pape 2007). Most men often treated their wives in an humiliating way. For example, the woman was not allowed to sit at the same table with the men at different social encounters and women never participated in debates or in important decisions. (Davidová, 2004; Žlnayová, 1996; Poláková, 2014) The woman's main role in the family consisted in delivering children and caring for the household. (Poláková, 2014) The roles and the related activities in the Roma family and in the household were traditionally

divided by genders. The mother had to care for the children, for the household and for everyday food and clothing. (Žlnayová, 1996) Nevertheless, in spite of the unequal (disadvantaging to women) position of the man and wife, divorces did not occur at all in Roma families. The Roma marriage is entered into for life. Official breakups of couples were accepted only in case of the woman's infertility or infidelity, while men's infidelity was tolerated in the families. In some cases, the women were ashamed of it, as the woman was blamed for her husband's infidelity since she was not able to oblige her husband and to care for him as he wished. (Poláková, 2014) On the contrary, some women boasted of their husbands' infidelity, to confirm their qualities. (Štěpařová, 2005) The relation of the man to the woman is aptly expressed by the statement of one Roma man: "The woman does not have the same function as the guy. The guy is the guy. We wear the hat, she only wears the scarf. The guy is the God and the female is only the female. When I sometimes come from another woman, she goes a little wild, slaps me, and I am glad that she slaps me. I feel good that she loves me and she also calms down by it." Or another statement on the same topic: "I can have fifty lovers if I want, but the woman can't have a single one." (Davidová, 2004) The Roma men often strengthened their superordinate and more important position by physical violence against the woman. The tradition goes that if a man beats his wife from time to time, he assures her of his life. (Poláková, 2014; Pape, 2007)

Methods

The research set consisted of 60 Roma persons in total (30 couples) and 3 focus groups, consisting of 20 experts in total, from among social workers and other workers of helping professions (both Roma and non-Roma). The ethnic membership of the research set was perceived by social workers through socioperception when selecting the informants. The thing is that we can define somebody as Roma only if they define them as such or if they are considered as such by a significant part of their surroundings (Kajanová, 2009). The data collection took place in 2014 and 2015 in three selected considerably big cities (above 100 000 inhabitants) in the Czech Republic and in smaller municipalities under the administration of those cities.

The data were processed in the Atlas.ti program, in form of three-degree anchored theory. We focused the interviews on interpretation of the discourses of the social workers, comparing them with the statements of the informants with the help of the contrast and comparison techniques and trying to capture the variances in interpretation of the shift of the Roma woman's role and of their impacts on the life strategies of the minority in question. Thus our results interpret the majority discourse of social workers, the objectiveness of which was confirmed in the interviews with the Roma informants.

Results

The social workers observe different positions of Roma males and females, stating that young Roma girls are led to household chores from tender age (which is in sharp contrast with majority requirements imposed on children). Roma boys have more freedom in this regard and their obligations match those of the majority children; on the contrary, the Roma girl has, additionally to her education, also duties in the family and the parents are stricter also with respect to her leisure activities. The Roma tradition that a girl should be accompanied by a male relative has not been adhered to any more for a long time; nevertheless, Roma girls identify inequalities in the interviews, reporting restrictions and control by their parents who do not allow them many leisure activities, do not want to let them out unlike the boys, and allow them to go to dance parties only if accompanied by other relatives. On the contrary, Roma boys are not restricted in what they want to do; as social workers have observed, they are spoiled, and the families justify it by traditional expectations from the children. The question is whether such upbringing without obligations perhaps results in the men's inability to manage their future roles: *"I know a mother who arranges everything in the household, even on behalf of the husband and of the son who is major already; so she has a quite important role there with respect to contacts outside the family."* (social worker, FG). Roma women (family mothers) also arrange paperwork, contacts with the authorities and contacts among individual families, which is originally a male role, taken over by Roma women at present, additionally to their other obligations: *"it is time consuming to arrange the operation of the household with such a terribly low budget; it costs much running around, pa-*

perwork, borrowing money, maintaining contacts, in order to be always able to borrow some money somewhere and to give it back somewhere else, among friends, and among relatives" (social worker, FG).

The Roma community in the Czech Republic suffers from considerable unemployment, which is severalfold as high as in the majority population. Therefore the traditional man's role of money bringer is changing. The families sometimes adapt themselves to such situation; the man may be unemployed and the woman may earn money. It is not too frequent a situation; the man usually cares for money even if he is unemployed, either in form of season work or in form of grey economy. In cases where the Roma female is actually the breadwinner of the family, and the family departs from the traditional role due to that, the experts evaluate their life strategies similarly to those of the majority group; such partners often do not identify themselves as Roma any more: *"at present, we have one female client whose husband is... in the household, or simply, the husband is unemployed, so she is something like the master there. And she, when we talked about it, so she identifies herself as Roma, but she does not identify herself, or separates herself from out other female clients, and her husband does not identify himself as Roma"* (social worker, FG) (thanks to that fact, they do not care about the opinions of their surroundings on their gender-turned strategies). Many young Roma women try to copy the majority behaviour patterns, particularly postponing of motherhood and emphasis on equal position of partners; such women described in the interviews their plans of achieving education, finding work and acquiring capital and own housing before starting a family. But due to the social situation, when a young family is started, the young couple most frequently lives with the parents of one of them (most frequently with the boy's mother); the young woman helps her mother-in-law and her position depends on her motherhood that brings prestige to her. But social workers speak of a more substantial social ascension, consisting in starting a family in economic meaning of the word - by acquiring own housing. The Roma women get a new perspective in such situation, they can decide about family matters and keep their own budget. But such situation is not frequent due to long lasting unemployment, and young partners are often bound to the broader family. In such case, the status of the arriving Roma girl is low and she is subordinate not only to her partner but also to the authority of the family mother whom she helps with the household like her oldest daughter.

Social worker experts are also qualified to identify relevant social problems in the Roma minority. They report to meet many problematic families, often abandoned by the male partner and facing accumulated social pathologies like addictions or domestic violence. The emphasis on wedding and traditional marriage is declining in the minority; it is only a symbolical act for the partners, without impact on the perception by the surroundings and on their reflection of social status. Social workers reflect that marriage does not bring any social advantages to the family; on the contrary, families divorcing intentionally because of the debts of one of the partner were recorded. The social status of the families is worsened by missing functionality of the Roma man who does not bring money and stops fulfilling the task to maintain the good name of the family. It depends on the marginalization of the family, but in general, if one of the partners displays social pathologies, the other partner faces higher demands. *"If the man loses money on gambling machines, the woman is the one who must get money for the rest of the month."* (social worker, FG) Social workers report that in such cases, the marriage or partnership often breaks up; but if the woman or both partners display social pathology, it has serious impact on the children and their upbringing. If a very young girl or a drug addicted Roma girl gets pregnant, her mother or her mother-in-law must care for the family; in specific cases, they even adopt such child. In other socially pathological families, children even become the means of income; in such cases, the parents provide for the family through social benefits; nevertheless, the benefits are often not sufficient because of the parents' addictions. Particularly in case of Roma men displaying pathologies, social workers must intervene to support the family, because if the traditional man's authority is pleaded, the woman conforms to her husband's decisions, and her interventions against the man's addiction may not be taken into consideration due to her position. In such case, social workers report even domestic violence, which, in contrast to the majority society, is not considered so negatively by the Roma environ-

ment. If domestic violence concerns jealousy, the Roma women even reflected it as justifiable behaviour of the head of the family in our research interviews (if it is not frequent and intensive).

Our research carried out among Roma women shows that young Roma women do not want many children; however, particularly women coming from socially unsuitable environment do not have any means to control their birth rate due to lack of money for hormonal contraception. Roma men keep deciding in essential family matters; they plan and influence to significant degree whether their partner will use contraception. All participants of our research confirmed that the Roma men refuse to use any contraception themselves. Abortion is often unthinkable to the family; children are the best "luck" for the family from traditional perspective, and interruption is used only exceptionally. Interruption or vasectomy often takes place without the partner knowing about it; the interviews with the Roma couples showed very clearly that this topic is still taboo. Additionally, starting a family constitutes the essential role of the Roma woman and influences significantly her position in the community; as social workers state, pregnant Roma women and mothers have more influence, the men respect their demands because of the children. In communities where traditional values are maintained, the Roma woman's position depends on the number of children; on the other hand, having many children starts to be considered as a feature of families with lower economical status; social workers even report cases where: *"she is really ashamed about having too many of them"* (social worker, FG).

Discussion

The research shows clear shift of roles in the Roma family, although there are still visible and significant differences as compared to the majority. The Roma woman faces real discrimination in today's society at several levels, both in social life and in family life. At present, the Roma women fight for their place in the society and equality and strive for emancipation and equality; they are still considered unequal partners by the Roma men and their roles are connected exclusively with care for the children and for the household. At present, the Roma woman seeks the opportunity for self-realization also outside her family, although her subordination to the man is still evident. (Kajanová et al., 2009) One of the most significant causes of traditional unequal relations between Roma men and women can be seen, in accordance with Poláková (2014), in the unemployment that is closely related to low education and low integration of the Roma minority in the majority roles. The Roma informants showed clear differences in emancipation of Roma girls and women, most distinctively related to the fact whether the partners (particularly the woman) were employed or unemployed. If both partners were employed, the Roma couples were able to become independent, to move away from their parents, and they frequently followed rather majority behaviour patterns. Overcoming of borders towards equality of both genders can be seen particularly in the youngest generation, in mixed (Czech-Roma) families and in families integrated in the majority society. The Roma women (more frequently women living in cities) have had distinctively better access to education in recent decades, which influences their ability to make decisions in the family, engage more actively in the socialization of their children and decide about their rights (choice of husband, choice of number of children, etc.). (Pulkrábková, 2009) Such families also show tendency to lack of identification with the Roma and to refuse Roma traditions; therefore the dominant position of the man in the Roma family is not an insurmountable rule any more at present. The women are more active, more independent and need not conform to all decisions of their husbands. McHale, Crouter (1992) state that in families where the incomes of both parents are similar, the fathers participate more in the operation of the household. Nevertheless, that is not the case of a common unemployed Roma family in which the woman provides for most income thanks to the parental allowance, but at the same time must fulfil other traditional roles like care for the children and for the household. For that reason, many social workers consider Roma males nonfunctional, which is supported by the tendency to spoil them and to require help in the household from the girls. Formerly (traditionally), the Roma woman was primarily the caring mother and her prestige increased with the number of the delivered children; today, the tendency to postpone motherhood can be seen; nevertheless, unlike the majority, the decision making on contraception is still strongly influenced by Roma men, and therefore the Roma women often have to change their plans.

Conclusion

From "social workers' perspective, a clear discourse of pathologization of the Roma minority can be seen, which is caused particularly by direct work of social workers with marginalized families. Social workers further see essential pressures against emancipation in socio-economic factors, including incomplete secondary education of Roma girls and their failure to get independent from the generational family (both their own or their partner's). Due to that, the Roma women are not equal to other family members and do not have the authority to decide about their future, since the older generation still emphasizes the men's demands to which the women have to adapt themselves. Concurrently with the opinion of the social workers, most female informants have confirmed that the men also decide on not using contraception, which leads to structural inequality between partners, as the woman takes the maternity leave and therefore cannot participate in the labour market, finish her education and get qualification. But on account of social changes in the Czech society, there are also changes in the traditional Roma roles. Therefore Roma women (from socially weak families) have acquired new roles, traditionally belonging to men. Roma women provide for a great part of family incomes thanks to children allowances, they arrange external contacts of the family in communication with the majority (primarily with the authorities, teachers and social workers). On the contrary, the Roma men are losing their roles in the context of unemployment, and Roma boys who traditionally learned the professions of their fathers do not have any clear role. In some Roma families in the Czech Republic, young people have not seen their parents working for several generations already. Unlike the Czech ethnographic literature on the Roma, which emphasizes the ethnic particularities of the position of Roma men and women, certain emancipation shift can be observed in some couples, resulting from the economic situation of the family and from participation in majority values like work and emphasis on education.

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