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**The Erosion of Relational
Anchoring as a Mechanism of
Social Disadvantage among
Children of Incarcerated
Parents**

Habilitation Thesis

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Declaration

I declare that I have prepared the habilitation thesis entitled *Erosion of Relational Anchoring as a Mechanism of Social Disadvantage among Children of Incarcerated Parents: Implications for Social Work*. All sources and references used in the writing of this thesis have been cited in the text and are listed in the bibliography.

Brno, April 13, 2026

Jitka Navrátilová, Ph.D.

Abstract

This habilitation thesis examines the impacts of parental incarceration on a child's living situation, with particular emphasis on its relational dimension. It is based on six published studies forming a continuous line of research, moving from a general reflection on child well-being and the capability approach to an empirical and theoretical analysis of children of incarcerated parents. The thesis aims to explain how parental incarceration contributes to a child's social disadvantage and to show that one of the key mechanisms of this process is the erosion of the child's relational anchoring, which in its most severe form may lead to social exclusion.

Studies 1 and 2 establish the initial theoretical and empirical framework through the capability approach and research on the well-being of at-risk children and young people in the care of social services. Study 3 introduces the issue of children of incarcerated parents and defines the theoretical and methodological basis for its examination. Studies 4 and 5 analyse the needs of these children, their relational losses, and the multilevel impacts of parental incarceration on their life situation. Study 6 focuses on the professional identity of social work and shows what kind of professional reasoning is needed to recognize and address these processes appropriately.

The thesis draws on the capability approach and a relational perspective informed by attachment theory. Its main contribution lies in formulating a distinct analytical framework for understanding how disruption of a child's relational environment limits real-life opportunities, social recognition, and participation. It introduces the concept of the erosion of the child's relational anchoring to explain how the impacts of parental incarceration extend beyond the family to other areas of the child's social life. The thesis shows that parental incarceration affects not only the parent-child relationship, but also the broader network of relational and social resources essential to the child's security, stability, and life orientation. It thus clarifies the mechanisms of social disadvantage among children of incarcerated parents, their potential outcomes in social exclusion, and The implications for theory, practice, and social work education.

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1 Introduction

A parent's incarceration is not merely a criminal or family law issue, but also a significant social reality with far-reaching consequences for children. For many children, a parent's incarceration means not only physical separation, but also a broader disruption of the relationships, daily certainties, and social conditions that shape their lives. These impacts thus extend beyond the mere loss of contact with a parent and can affect the child's emotional well-being, social functioning, school experiences, and long-term life prospects. Despite growing international interest, children of incarcerated parents have long remained on the margins of systematic attention in both research and social work practice. In the Czech context, this lack of attention has been even more pronounced. Although greater attention has begun to be paid to this issue in recent years, it has not yet been sufficiently integrated into the institutional frameworks through which a child's life situation is typically assessed and supported. The broader psychosocial and relational consequences of a parent's incarceration therefore often remain unrecognized or are sidelined. This habilitation thesis focuses on the question of how the experience of a parent's incarceration translates into a child's social disadvantage and is based on the assumption that one of the key mechanisms in this process is the erosion of the child's relational anchoring. The theoretical contribution of this work lies not only in linking the capability approach with attachment theory, but also in developing an original analytical framework that enables an understanding of how the disruption of the child's relational environment gradually translates into limitations on their life opportunities, a weakening of social recognition, and, in extreme cases, social exclusion. From this perspective, a parent's incarceration is not understood as a one-time adverse event, but as a process that can gradually weaken the relational and social conditions vital for a child's development. The concept of the erosion of relational anchoring is therefore presented in this work as an analytical tool for social work, enabling a more precise understanding of these children's life situations while simultaneously opening the door to more sensitive and better-targeted interventions.

2 Problem Definition, Research Objective, and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Children of Incarcerated Parents as an Overlooked Population

Children of incarcerated parents are a specific group of at-risk children that has long been underrepresented in both research and social work practice. Although more recent review and qualitative studies confirm that a parent's incarceration impacts a child's life across a range of social, emotional, and developmental dimensions and can significantly affect their daily functioning and long-term life prospects (Siegel & Luther, 2019; Johnson & Arditti, 2023), their situation continues to remain on the margins of systematic attention within institutions and research. This fact has also been highlighted by earlier works emphasizing the broader psychosocial and socially stratifying impacts of a parent's incarceration on a child's life (Wildeman & Western, 2010; Arditti, 2012; Turney, 2014; Poehlmann-Tynan, 2015). This reality thus presents a significant challenge for social work, which is confronted with the consequences of this neglect in everyday practice.

International research has repeatedly shown that a parent's incarceration is a significant social determinant of a child's well-being and is associated with a range of adverse developmental outcomes. These manifest in themselves in the area of mental health, social functioning, academic performance, and peer relationships (Poehlmann-Tynan & Turney, 2021; Davis & Shlafer, 2017; Murray, Farrington, & Sekol, 2012; Kjellstrand & Eddy, 2011; Shlafer & Poehlmann, 2010; Murray & Farrington, 2008; Turney, 2017). At the same time, evidence suggests that these effects are often cumulative and can significantly influence children's life trajectories (Johnson & Arditti, 2023; Krysik & Rodriguez, 2022; Scharff-Smith, 2014; Arditti, 2012; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008).

The situation in the Czech context is, however, unique in many respects. Although international research has been highlighting this issue for some time (Eddy and

Poehlmann-Tynan, 2019; Murray and Farrington, 2008; Arditti, 2012), it has long remained on the margins of professional and research interest in the Czech context. Systematic attention to this group of children has only begun to develop in recent years and has often been initiated by individual nongovernmental organizations rather than by broader institutional attention (Navrátilová et al., 2024). According to qualified estimates by non-governmental organizations, there may be approximately 25,000 to 40,000 children in the Czech Republic who have an incarcerated parent, with the lower estimate based on data from *Children of Prisoners Europe* (COPE, 2023) and the upper estimate from *Prison Fellowship International Czech Republic* (PFI Czech Republic, 2023).

The research project *Parenting Behind Bars*, conducted at Masaryk University from 2020 to 2023 with support from the Technology Agency of the Czech Republic (TAČR ÉTA, TL03000199), which I led as the principal investigator, contributed to a more systematic understanding of the living conditions of these children. The project focused on the experiences of children of incarcerated parents, their caregivers, and the incarcerated parents themselves, and represented the first systematic research in the Czech context to examine the impacts of a parent's incarceration on a child's well-being from the perspectives of these stakeholders. The data collected show that these impacts significantly affect the child's relational and psychosocial functioning and cannot be reduced solely to the domain of material security.

It is precisely in this regard that a certain inconsistency with the institutional framework for assessing a child's living situation in the Czech context becomes apparent. The system of social and legal protection of children is primarily focused on ensuring the child's basic needs, such as care, nutrition, and housing (Navrátilová, 2018), and may thus overlook the broader psychosocial impacts of a parent's incarceration. These include, for example, the stigma associated with a parent's criminal activity, concerns about the incarcerated parent, experiences of loss, feelings of shame, or social isolation (Murray, Farrington, & Sekol, 2012; Arditti, 2012). These experiences significantly

influence the child's daily well-being, understood not only as the fulfillment of basic needs but also as the quality of their relational and social experiences, and thus their opportunities for social inclusion.

2.2 Gaps in Current Knowledge, Research Objectives, and Main Theses

These findings suggest that the impacts of parental incarceration cannot be reduced solely to the family's socioeconomic disadvantage or to the stigma associated with the parent's criminal activity (Condry and Minson, 2021). Parental incarceration disrupts the very structure of the relationships in which the child is embedded, thereby limiting the conditions for their social inclusion and opportunities for further development. Despite a growing body of studies, it remains insufficiently explained through what mechanisms these experiences translate into social disadvantage and children's life course trajectories, particularly in the context of their accumulation and interconnection (Hickle, 2020). While existing research describes the individual consequences of this experience in detail, it sheds less light on the processes that link these impacts and enable their gradual accumulation over time.

The aim of this study is to explain how a parent's experience of incarceration contributes to a child's social exclusion, and to demonstrate that one of the key mechanisms in this process is the erosion of the child's relational anchoring. At the same time, I aim for this concept to serve as an analytical framework applicable in both the theory and practice of social work, particularly in identifying relational and social mechanisms that often remain in the background during routine assessments of a child's life situation.

In this study, I therefore **develop the concept of the erosion of a child's relational anchoring as a key mechanism through which a parent's incarceration experience translates into the child's social exclusion.** The theoretical contribution of this work lies not only in linking the capability approach and attachment theory, but also in defining an analytical framework that allows us to observe how the disruption of

relational security and the weakening of supportive bonds are transferred from the family level to other levels of the child's social life. This framework also helps explain why the impacts of a parent's incarceration accumulate over time, why they spill over into different areas of the child's life, and where opportunities for social work intervention arise in this process.

2.3 Theoretical Foundations of Relational Theory

The importance of relational bonds for a child's life trajectory is confirmed by broader theoretical and empirical approaches that link experiences of trauma, weakened supportive relationships, and social exclusion to adverse psychosocial development in children (Antle et al., 2020; Berkel et al., 2023; Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015). These approaches demonstrate that disruptions in the relational environment cannot be understood merely as an individual psychological problem, but rather as part of broader social conditions that shape a child's life opportunities. In this sense, they build upon both theories of social ties and broader sociological perspectives emphasizing that individual behavior is embedded in social relationships and networks (Hirschi, 1969; Granovetter, 1985; Tilly, 1998), as well as research demonstrating the importance of high-quality relational bonds for stabilizing life trajectories and leaving criminal paths (Uggen, 2000; Maruna, 2001; Raszková, Zhřivalová et al., 2021).

The importance of attachment bonds for a child's development is also systematically emphasized by attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988; Ainsworth, 1989). This theory demonstrates that secure attachment bonds are a crucial prerequisite for psychological security, trust, and the ability to form and maintain relationships in other social contexts as well. It is precisely this perspective that is essential for understanding the situation of children of incarcerated parents, as it allows us to view the effects of a parent's incarceration not only as a loss of contact with a significant other, but as an intrusion into the child's broader relational environment.

2.4 Multilevel Dynamics of the Erosion of Relational Anchoring

The process of the erosion of relational anchoring unfolds across several interconnected levels of social relationships. This concept can be analytically linked to the ecological model of child development, which emphasizes that a child's development is shaped by the interplay of relationships at various levels of the social environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The individual levels of a child's relational anchoring can thus be understood as specific manifestations of these layers of the social environment, ranging from the family microsystem through peer relationships to the broader social environment, which shapes the conditions for the child's social participation. At the first level, relational security within the family is disrupted as a result of a parent's sudden absence and changes in the daily functioning of family life. At the second level, difficulties arise in peer relationships, often associated with stigmatization, ostracism, feelings of difference, or limited opportunities to share one's own experiences. At the third level, these experiences extend into the child's broader social environment and may escalate into a sense of marginalization or a difficult search for a respected position in society.

The capability approach subsequently allows this process to be interpreted within the broader context of the conditions that shape a child's actual opportunities to develop their capabilities and participate in social life (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2011; Biggeri, Ballet, and Comim, 2011; Venkatapuram, 2011). From this perspective, attachment relationships are not merely a source of emotional security but also one of the conditions that shape a child's social opportunities. Their weakening thus not only affect the relational level but also limits the child's life opportunities (Otto and Ziegler, 2008).

I build upon these approaches by integrating attachment theory and the capability approach when interpreting a child's relational experiences in the context of their life opportunities. This integration allows me to view a child's relational experiences not only in terms of their significance for psychological and social development, but also in relation to their actual life opportunities. While attachment theory helps us understand

the importance of secure relational bonds for a child's development, the capability approach shows that these bonds are simultaneously part of broader social conditions that shape a child's opportunities to develop their abilities and participate in social life. A child's relational experiences cannot therefore be understood merely as an individual psychological experience, but also as part of the social environment that shapes their life opportunities.

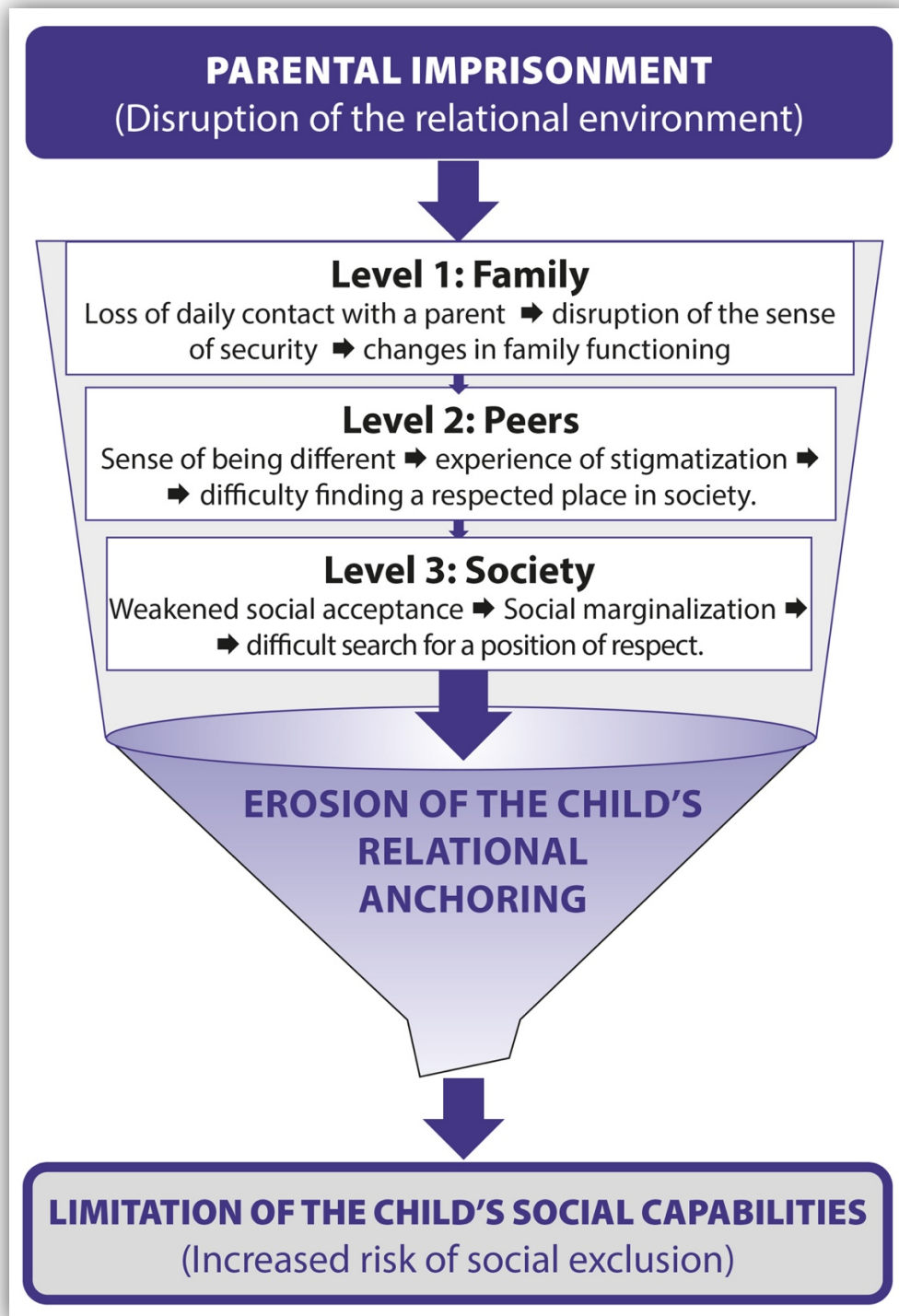
From this perspective, the effects of a parent's incarceration can be understood not only as a disruption of family relationships, but also a process that gradually erodes the relational and social conditions essential for a child's development. The erosion of the child's relational anchoring thus represents a mechanism through which these impacts are projected onto the child's long-term life opportunities. I also view this concept as an analytical tool for social work, as it allows us to link the relational dimension of child development to the broader social conditions in which the child's life opportunities are shaped.

2.5 The Erosion of Relational Anchoring as an Analytical Framework for Social Work

At the same time, empirical data analysis reveals that the disruption of a child's relational environment resulting from a parent's incarceration is not a one-time event but develops gradually. This process is shaped by the accumulation of stressful events, experiences of stigmatization, and the weakening of supportive relationships, which together interfere with the child's psychosocial development and social functioning.

Based on these findings, this process is conceptualised as a gradual erosion of the child's relational anchoring—that is, as a weakening of relational bonds that enable the child to develop stable relationships, gain social recognition, and find their place in society. This interpretation also serves as the basis for a conceptual framework of the entire process, which I develop in this work in the form of the model of the erosion of a child's relational anchoring (see Fig. 1).

Fig. 1: **Model of the erosion of a child's relational anchoring** as a result of a parent's incarceration (own elaboration)



From the perspective of the capability approach, this process can be understood as a gradual restriction of the child's social capabilities, particularly their ability to develop relationships, gain social recognition, and participate in social life. The diagram illustrates how the effects of a parent's incarceration gradually extend to various aspects of the child's social life. Disruptions in the family's relational environment spill over into relationships with peers and subsequently into the child's broader social environment. These dynamics can reinforce one another and lead to the erosion of social resources that provide the child with a sense of security, social recognition, and a stable place in society. The erosion of relational anchoring thus unfolds across several levels of social relationships, from the family through peer relationships to the child's broader social environment. This multi-level nature corresponds to the ecological conception of child development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and can also be understood as a form of developmental cascade, in which disruptions in relationships in one area gradually affect the child's functioning in other social contexts as well (Masten and Cicchetti, 2010; Masten, 2013).

Although the number of studies on the effects of a parent's incarceration on children is growing, they still offer only limited insight into how these experiences translate into long-term social disadvantage and the Children's life trajectories.

In this paper, I therefore develop the concept of the erosion of a child's relational anchoring as one of the key mechanisms of social exclusion among children of incarcerated parents. On a theoretical level, I combine the capability approach with the perspective of relational bonds, and I do not interpret the impacts of a parent's incarceration as a set of isolated difficulties, but rather as a process of disrupting the relational environment that determines a child's opportunities for development, participation, and social recognition.

The theoretical contribution of this work lies not only in the integration of two perspectives, but also in a more precise definition of the mechanism that links disruptions in attachment and other relational bonds to the limitation of a child's capabilities. I thus

understand the concept of the erosion of a child's relational anchoring as an analytical framework for social work that helps explain why the impacts of a parent's incarceration accumulate, spill over between different levels of social life, and can result in social exclusion. For terminological consistency, I use "social exclusion" as the primary term for the resulting process, while I understand "social disadvantage," "limitation of capabilities," and "disruption of life trajectories" as its partial manifestations and mechanisms. **The erosion of relational anchoring is then a concept that connects these levels and allows us to observe how relational weakening translates into the child's real-life opportunities.**

In this context, I link empirical findings on the experiences of children of incarcerated parents with theoretical reflections within the field of social work. The collection of published studies is organized to progressively develop the thesis's main argument, ranging from the general capability framework of child well-being, through the methodological and empirical understanding of the situation of children of incarcerated parents, to my own conceptualization of the erosion of the child's relational anchoring and the formulation of its implications for social work theory and practice.

3 Structure of the Habilitation Thesis

I view the present study as part of a broader, long-term research focus on the life circumstances of at-risk children and young people. One of the initial motivations for this research was the effort to find a suitable analytical framework for assessing children's well-being in the theory and practice of social work. Social workers have long been guided to strive in their work toward enhance children's well-being or act in the best interests of the child, which represent key principles of child protection (Ben-Arieh, 2010; Clark et al., 2020). In practice, however, these concepts often remain at the level of general principles rather than analytical tools that would allow for a systematic assessment of whether a child's living conditions create space for their development or, conversely, pose a threat to their future life trajectory (Ben-Arieh, 2010; Fattore, Mason, and Watson, 2016; Henderson and Denny, 2015; Navrátilová, 2025, pp. 17–27). The gap between the legal enshrinement of the best interests of the child and its analytical operationalization thus represents a long-standing problem not only in research on child well-being but also in social work practice, where difficulties in its concrete application are reflected in the assessment of a child's life situation, as demonstrated by studies focused on social services and work with at-risk children (Navrátilová, 2018; Navrátilová, Navrátil & Punová, 2021; Punová, Navrátil & Navrátilová, 2020). This broader focus on the child's well-being and best interests also resonates with recent discussions in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, which seek to translate these normative principles into more concrete indicators relevant for evaluation and practice (Mydlíková, 2024).

In the course of this research, the issue of well-being gradually emerged as a key area of interest. However, this concept is interpreted in a wide variety of ways in the academic literature and often emphasizes primarily the individual characteristics of the child, such as their subjective satisfaction or psychological indicators of quality of life (Ben-Arieh et al., 2014; Fegter & Richter, 2014; Clark et al., 2020; OECD, 2020). Such an approach, however, fails to fully capture the broader social and institutional

conditions in which a child's life unfolds, nor the complexity of the relational and social dimensions of their life (Fattore, Mason & Watson, 2016).

The capability approach was developed primarily by Amartya Sen (1999) and later elaborated systematically by Martha Nussbaum (2011). It has subsequently been applied by other authors in research on well-being and social justice, including studies focused on children's well-being and living conditions (Alkire, 2002; Biggeri, Ballet & Comim, 2011; Biggeri & Santi, 2012). The capability approach provides an analytical framework for understanding a child's life situation within the broader context of social, institutional, and environmental conditions. It enables the analysis not only of the child's current situation but, above all, of their real opportunities to develop capabilities, form relationships, gain social recognition, and find their place in society. In this sense, it provides a suitable starting point for interpreting empirical findings regarding the life situations of children and young people as well as their opportunities for participation in social life. At the same time, it allows for linking the principle of the child's best interests with an empirical analysis of their real-life opportunities, thereby bridging the tension between the value-based foundations of social work and its empirical reflection (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2011; Clark, 2005; Robeyns, 2017; Biggeri & Santi, 2012).

The gradual development of this research interest subsequently led to a more in-depth examination of the situation of a specific group of vulnerable children: those with incarcerated parents. Empirical studies focused on this group have made it possible to identify the mechanisms of social disadvantage and gradual social exclusion that emerge in their life trajectories (Murray & Farrington, 2008; Murray, Farrington & Sekol, 2012; Poehlmann, 2005; Wildeman, 2009). Analysis of these findings has shown that one of the key processes through which the effects of a parent's incarceration unfold in a child's life is the cascading erosion of relational bonds and social resources that provide the child with a sense of security, social recognition, and a stable place in the social environment.

It was precisely these findings that ultimately led me to the question of how to theoretically grasp the significance of the relational environment for understanding the child's life situation. In this habilitation thesis, I answer this question by conceptualizing the erosion of the child's relational anchoring, which I further develop in dialogue with attachment theory.

The importance of the relational environment for a child's life situation is systematically highlighted by attachment theory, which emphasizes the role of early relational experiences in shaping a sense of security, trust, and the ability to form and maintain relationships throughout life (Bowlby, 1969/82; Ainsworth et al., 1978; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007; Cassidy & Shaver, 2016). From this perspective, relational bonds can be understood as an important source of a child's psychological stability and social orientation, and their disruption can have long-term consequences for the child's development and life trajectory. In the context of a parent's incarceration, there is a fundamental disruption of the child's relational environment, which can undermine their sense of security, the continuity of relationships, and their ability to navigate the social world (Poehlmann-Tynan et al., 2015; Arditti, 2016; Turney & Goodsell, 2018; Wildeman & Andersen, 2017). Attachment theory thus provides an important starting point for understanding why the weakening of relational bonds and social resources emerges as one of the key mechanisms of social disadvantage among children of incarcerated parents.

The capability approach, on the other hand, allows me to view the child's life situation from the perspective of their real opportunities to develop capabilities and participate in social life. While attachment theory helps us understand how these possibilities are anchored in relationships, the capability approach highlights their broader social conditioning. In this work, I therefore combine both perspectives so as not to interpret the impacts of a parent's incarceration merely as a limitation of available resources, but primarily as a disruption of the relational environment that is essential for the child's development. It is precisely at this intersection that I formulate **the concept of the**

erosion of a child's relational anchoring as an analytical tool, which allows us to capture the process of the gradual weakening of the relational and social conditions important for the development of a child's capabilities and for the formation of a stable life trajectory.

The concept does not merely serve as a general interpretive framework for empirical findings on the living conditions of children of incarcerated parents, but is also gradually shaped by the individual studies included in the habilitation thesis. The first two studies seek an adequate capability framework for assessing the well-being of at-risk children; the third text builds a theoretical and methodological bridge to the issue of children of incarcerated parents; the fourth and fifth studies empirically capture their needs, relational losses, and the multi-level impacts of a parent's incarceration; and the sixth text, focused on the professional identity of social workers, demonstrates the kind of professional thinking required to recognize this mechanism and respond to it appropriately.

The set of included studies thus represents not merely a collection of thematically related texts, but a comprehensive research program aimed at understanding the mechanisms of social exclusion among children growing up in the context of a parent's incarceration, and at identifying theoretical and empirical tools that enable these processes to be not only analysed but also reflected upon in social work practice. I view the erosion of the child's relational anchoring as a key mechanism through which the impacts of a parent's incarceration are projected onto the child's life opportunities and life trajectory.

The following section of the habilitation thesis therefore presents individual studies that gradually develop this line of research. For each of them, it is important to consider not only its individual contribution, but also why it is indispensable to the whole and how it supports the main argument concerning the erosion of a child's relational anchoring as a mechanism of social exclusion.

4 Collection of Published Studies

This habilitation thesis is based on a collection of published studies that stem from my long-term research focus on the life circumstances of vulnerable children and young people. The included studies capture various stages of this development, ranging from a more general reflection on child well-being and the search for a suitable analytical framework for its assessment in social work to empirical and theoretical works focused specifically on children of incarcerated parents. Taken as a whole, they thus contribute to an understanding of the mechanisms of social disadvantage that emerge in the life trajectories of these children, while simultaneously providing a basis for **the formulation of the concept of the erosion of a child's relational anchoring**.

The included studies combine theoretical reflections on children's well-being with empirical research on the effects of a parent's incarceration on their relational and social environment. They progressively develop an analysis of the relational bonds between the child and the incarcerated parent, the broader social impacts of a parent's incarceration on the child's life situation, and the interpretation of these processes within the framework of the capability approach and other theoretical perspectives focused on the relational and social conditions of the child's life.

The collection of studies in the habilitation thesis is organised according to the analytical logic of the development of my research focus, rather than strictly according to the chronology of their publication. Taken as a whole, it reflects a shift from a more general reflection on children's well-being to an empirical analysis of the impacts of a parent's incarceration, and subsequently to a theoretical conceptualisation of the erosion of a child's relational anchoring as an analytical framework for social work.

In the following section, I briefly present each study. For each one, I outline its objective, methodological approach, main findings, and significance for the overall research direction of this habilitation thesis, including its contribution to the gradual development of the concept of the erosion of a child's relational anchoring.

Part of this approach also involves explicitly defining my own contribution as an author. My long-term research and interpretive footprint across this body of work is characterized primarily by the way I formulate research questions, ground the capability perspective, emphasize the relational dimension of well-being, and interpret findings in terms of their implications for social work theory and practice.

Study 1

NAVRÁTILOVÁ, Jitka; NAVRÁTIL, Pavel; PUNOVÁ, Monika. *The Well-being of Children and Young People: The Context of Social Services from the Perspective of the Capability Approach*. Clinical Social Work and Health Intervention. Vienna: International Society of Applied Preventive Medicine, 2021, vol. 12, no. 4, pp. 49–61.

This study represents the first step in a line of research focused on the well-being of vulnerable children and young people in the context of social services. Its aim was to understand how social services contribute to the well-being of the children and young people who use them, while also exploring the potential of the capability approach as a framework for analyzing their life situations. While the study does not yet focus specifically on children of incarcerated parents, it establishes a more general theoretical and methodological foundation for future research on this group.

This study is empirical in nature and employs a mixed-methods research strategy. Data were collected through 44 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with children, young people, and their parents or foster parents who use social services in one of the regional capitals of the Czech Republic. The research design was grounded in the capability approach and utilized dimensions of capability adapted for the field of child well-being; the interviews were supplemented by scaling and subsequent qualitative and quantitative data analysis.

The results show that the living conditions of children using social services cannot be adequately interpreted solely through individual characteristics or psychological indicators of quality of life. Social and relational conditions in their lives also play an

important role, particularly the presence of caring and loving parents, the quality of relationships, and the availability of support. At the same time, it has been shown that social services primarily contribute to ensuring the child's basic functioning in the present, while providing only limited support for their ability to envision an open and meaningful future. It was precisely this insight that was important for the further development of my research focus, as it raised the question of under what conditions even children growing up in a challenging family or foster care environment can perceive their future as a realistically accessible space of possibilities.

My contribution was 60%. I contributed to the study's theoretical framework, its capability-based orientation, and the development of the research instrument. I also helped interpret the findings in the context of social work and children's well-being. The study marks the first major expression of my long-term research focus on the relational conditions of children's well-being.

Study 2

PUNOVÁ, Monika; NAVRÁTIL, Pavel; NAVRÁTILOVÁ, Jitka. *Capabilities and well-being of child and adolescent social services clients in the Czech Republic*. Children and Youth Services Review. London: Elsevier, 2020, vol. 117. DOI 10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105280.

This study represents the first significant empirical application of the capability approach in research on the well-being of vulnerable children and adolescents in the Czech context. Its aim was to analyse which desired and actually achieved capabilities are associated with the well-being of children and adolescents using social services in the Czech Republic, from the perspective of the children themselves, their parents or foster parents, and social workers. The study thus provides an important empirical foundation for further research focused on the relational and social conditions of vulnerable children.

The study is based on a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods. Empirical data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews, a questionnaire survey, and a focus group with social workers. The research design was based on the capability approach, particularly the work of Sen, Nussbaum, and Biggeri and his colleagues, and focused on identifying both desired and actually achieved capabilities in the daily lives of at-risk children and adolescents.

The results show that harmonious relationships—particularly those with parents or caregivers—are of fundamental importance to the well-being of children and adolescents. At the same time, it has been shown that children often lack the capabilities that would enable them to lead a meaningful life, which is also significantly reflected in their outlook on the future, which they often do not associate with hope or the prospect of a positive life experience. The study further suggests that the social and relational conditions of these children's lives significantly influence their ability to develop skills, form relationships, and participate in social life.

I see the value of this study in its empirical grounding of the capability approach in the field of social work with at-risk children and adolescents, and in its emphasis on the importance of the relational and social dimensions of their well-being. From the perspective of the present habilitation thesis, I consider it particularly important that the study raised the issue of limited future prospects for children growing up in challenging conditions and, at the same time, demonstrated the significance of the relational environment for shaping their life opportunities. It was precisely this insight that became an important impetus for the further development of my research focus and foreshadowed the later emphasis on the concept of the erosion of a child's relational anchoring.

My contribution was 30%. I contributed to the study's theoretical framework, the development of the research instrument, and to data collection and analysis. I also contributed to the interpretation of the findings in the broader context of social work and children's well-being. This study reflects my authorial perspective most clearly

through its emphasis on relationships and an open future as key dimensions of a child's life opportunities.

Study 3

NAVRÁTILOVÁ, Jitka. Assessing the well-being of children of incarcerated parents: theoretical and methodological background. In: Navrátilová, J.; Navrátil, P., eds. *Parenting Behind Bars: The Impact of Parental Incarceration on Children's Well-being and Relationships*. Brno: Masaryk University Press, 2025, pp. 17–28.

This study provides a theoretical and methodological foundation for research focused on children of incarcerated parents. Its aim is to conceptualize the consequences of a parent's incarceration in the context of children's well-being and to demonstrate how these impacts can be understood through the capability approach. At the same time, it addresses the ambiguity of the concept of the child's best interests in the Czech context and seeks a more suitable interpretive framework for assessing the life situation of this specific group of children.

The study is theoretical and methodological in nature. I systematically present the development of the concept of *child well-being*, its multidimensionality, and its variability depending on the social and institutional context. I use the capability approach as a key theoretical framework, particularly in connection with the work of Amartya Sen, Martha Nussbaum, and other authors focused on child well-being. In doing so, I emphasize the assessment of a child's real-life opportunities, rather than merely monitoring deficits or individual isolated indicators.

An important part of the study is also the definition of the methodological framework for the *Parenting Behind Bars* research project. Here, I describe a mixed-methods design combining qualitative and quantitative strategies and outline the data collection methods used for three groups of respondents: incarcerated parents, children, and caregivers. The methodological approach included in-depth semi-structured interviews, focus groups, drawings by the youngest children, and age-differentiated

questionnaires, with the entire research grounded in the capability perspective as a framework that allows for linking children's individual experiences with the structural conditions of their lives.

The contribution of this study lies in its provision of a fundamental theoretical and methodological foundation for subsequent empirical analyses. It allows us to view the impacts of a parent's incarceration not merely as a set of individual problems, but as a comprehensive intervention in a child's life opportunities, their relational environment, and future life trajectory. In this sense, it creates a framework from which, in subsequent sections of the study, an interpretation of the social disadvantage of children of incarcerated parents emerges, as well as the later formulation of the concept of the erosion of the child's relational anchoring.

My contribution was 100%. I am the sole author of the chapter and bear full responsibility for its research direction, manuscript, and theoretical and methodological framework. The chapter most clearly demonstrates how the capability approach can be applied to the analysis of the life situations of children of incarcerated parents.

Study 4

NAVRÁTILOVÁ, Jitka; NAVRÁTIL, Pavel; PUNOVÁ, Monika; SMUTNÁ, Veronika. *Needs of Children with Incarcerated Parents in Their Own Voice. Qualitative Social Work.* 2024, vol. 23, no. 1, pp. 11–25. DOI 10.1177/14733250221151030.

This study represents one of the key empirical components of research focused on the living conditions of children of incarcerated parents. Its aim was to understand the needs of children whose parent left the household as a result of incarceration and to capture these needs from the children's own perspective. The study thus responds to the previous "invisibility" of this group in the Czech context and seeks to ensure that their needs are articulated in the children's own voices. At the same time, it interprets these needs within the framework of the capability approach as part of a broader assessment of their well-being.

This study is qualitative in nature and is based on interpretive phenomenological analysis. Empirical data were collected through individual in-depth interviews and focus groups with children aged 7 to 14 who, at the time of the study, had at least one parent serving a prison sentence and had lived with that parent in the same household prior to their incarceration. The research design was part of the broader mixed-methods project *Parenting Behind Bars*, and the capability approach served here as an interpretive framework that made it possible to link children's statements about their needs with the question of their real-life opportunities and overall well-being.

The study's results show that children most frequently express the need for love, care, emotional support, and relational closeness. The need for contact with the incarcerated parent also occupies a significant place, not only in terms of being informed about their situation but also in terms of personal meetings, physical closeness, and maintaining relational continuity. In addition, children point to the need for safety, economic security, the opportunity to share their situation with others, psychological support, and protection from stigmatization and condemnation by those around them. The study also identifies specific needs that are not typically captured within standard capability frameworks, such as the need for the parent's return from prison, the need not to be judged for the parent's actions, and the importance of a pet as a source of comfort and support. These findings show that a parent's incarceration impacts multiple interconnected areas of a child's life and significantly affects their relational, social, and psychological functioning.

I see the value of this study in how it significantly deepens our understanding of the relational and social dimensions of the lives of children of incarcerated parents. It shows that their disadvantages cannot be reduced to material deprivation or isolated psychological difficulties, but rather concern the very conditions under which children can experience safety, closeness, recognition, and dignity. The study thus provides an important empirical foundation for the subsequent formulation of the concept of the erosion of a child's relational anchoring, as it demonstrates how disrupted relationships, stigma, and the

weakening of the supportive environment impact a child's life opportunities. At the same time, it emphasizes the need for sensitive and multidisciplinary support for these children as well as the cultivation of the relationship between the child and the incarcerated parent within the framework of social work.

My contribution was 50%. I contributed to the study's theoretical framework, the capability-based interpretation of the findings, and the preparation of the research design. I also helped interpret the results in the broader context of social work. An important contribution of this study is its renewed emphasis on children's own voices, which have often been missing from existing knowledge about their situation.

Study 5

NAVRÁTILOVÁ, Jitka. Childhood in the Shadow of Bars: How Children and Adults Perceive the Impact of Parental Incarceration. In: Navrátilová, J.; Navrátil, P., eds. *Parenting Behind Bars: The Impact of Parental Incarceration on Children's Well-being and Relationships*. Brno: Masaryk University Press, 2025, pp. 29–47.

This study constitutes the key empirical component of research focused on the impacts of a parent's incarceration on a child. Its aim is to capture how these impacts are perceived by the children themselves, caregivers, and incarcerated parents, and to demonstrate the various ways in which a parent's incarceration affects a child's life. The study thus offers a multifaceted perspective on the consequences of a parent's incarceration and demonstrates that it is not merely a one-time loss of contact, but an intrusion into the child's broader relational and social environment.

This study is empirical and analytical in nature and draws on both qualitative and quantitative data collected from three groups of respondents: children, caregivers, and incarcerated parents. I combine the respondents' accounts with factor analysis and interpret the results from a capability perspective. The research also examines age differences among children and shows that the impacts of a parent's incarceration vary depending on the child's developmental stage.

The study's results indicate that a parent's incarceration affects a wide range of areas of a child's life. Children experience significant emotional distress, particularly sadness, fear, feelings of guilt, anxiety about their parents, and a loss of a sense of security. At the same time, there is evidence of reduced parental care, worsening material conditions, disruption of school functioning, limited social relationships, and experiences of stigmatization. The study further shows that as the child grows older, the negative impacts gradually shift from a disruption of the sense of security within the family to problems in peer relationships and subsequently to difficulties in finding acceptance and a respected position in society. In conclusion, I interpret this process as the gradual "uprooting" of the child from the relationships and social structures that are crucial for their development and well-being.

I see the value of this study lies in providing a crucial empirical foundation for understanding the multilevel nature of the impacts of a parent's incarceration. It demonstrates that the social disadvantage experienced by these children does not arise solely from individual, isolated problems, but rather as a result from a process in which the disruption of the relational environment spills over from the family into other aspects of the child's social life. It is precisely this insight that forms an important link between earlier research on the well-being of at-risk children and the subsequent conceptualization of the erosion of a child's relational anchoring as a mechanism of social disadvantage.

My contribution was 100%. I am the sole author of the study and bear full responsibility for its research direction, empirical analysis, and manuscript. I consider this chapter the key empirical focal point of the whole work, as it most clearly demonstrates the multilevel impacts of parental incarceration.

Study 6

NAVRÁTILOVÁ, Jitka; NAVRÁTIL, Pavel. *The Concept of Professional Identity in Selected Approaches to the Education of Social Workers.* In: Sajid, S. M.; Baikady, R.;

Sheng-Li, C.; Sakaguchi, H. (eds.). The Palgrave Handbook of Global Social Work Education. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021, pp. 133–150.

This study focuses on the professional identity of social work and how it is shaped in the education of future social workers in the Czech context. Its aim is to demonstrate which concept of social work is promoted in education and what consequences this has for understanding the client's situation and for selecting appropriate interventions.

The study is theoretical and empirical in nature and is based on a secondary analysis of data collected in a research project focused on educational approaches in social work in the Czech Republic. It is particularly important for the present habilitation thesis in that it emphasizes the significance of a reflective approach to social work, which leads future social workers to view a client's situation not merely as a collection of individual problems, but as a complex life situation shaped by relational, social, and structural contexts.

The contribution of this study to the present habilitation thesis lies in highlighting the importance of educational and professional conditions for social work with children of incarcerated parents. It demonstrates that when addressing the negative impacts of a parent's incarceration, it is not enough to focus solely on the child and their family; it is also necessary to examine whether social workers are guided toward reflective and relationally sensitive work in both their education and practice. In practice, however, approaches persist that lack sufficient sensitivity to the life situation of these children and tend to view contact with the incarcerated parent primarily as risky or inappropriate, without sufficiently considering its potential significance for the child and the quality of their relationship. It is precisely this approach to social work that is crucial for determining disruptions in the child's relational environment and for identifying appropriate interventions.

My contribution amounted to 60%. I contributed to defining the problem and to interpreting the significance of professional identity for social work education. I also

contributed to the interpretation of the findings in relation to the reflexive concept of social work and its importance for understanding clients' complex life situations. In the context of this habilitation thesis, this chapter is particularly important because it demonstrates the kind of professional reasoning social work needs in order to identify the mechanisms of social disadvantage affecting children of incarcerated parents and respond to them appropriately.

4.1 Summary of the Collection of Studies

This collection of studies documents a gradual shift in my research focus from child and youth well-being in the context of social work and social services to a deeper examination of the life circumstances of children of incarcerated parents. Together, the studies create a framework for understanding how parental incarceration affects the child's life, relationships, and social opportunities; while also highlighting the challenges this poses for social work theory and practice.

Throughout this research process, it became evident that one of the key mechanisms underlying these impacts is the weakening of relational bonds and social resources that provide the child with security, social recognition, and a stable place in their social environment. The empirical and theoretical findings thus confirm that the relational dimension is fundamental to understanding the life situation of children of incarcerated parents and essential for sensitive and appropriate social work intervention.

Based on these findings, this habilitation thesis formulates the **concept of the erosion of a child's relational anchoring**, which interprets the effects of parental incarceration as a gradual weakening of the child's relational and social resources. The concept offers an analytical framework for social work by helping identify these children's needs, understand the mechanisms of social exclusion, and seek forms of support that address not only individual difficulties but also disruption of the child's relational environment.

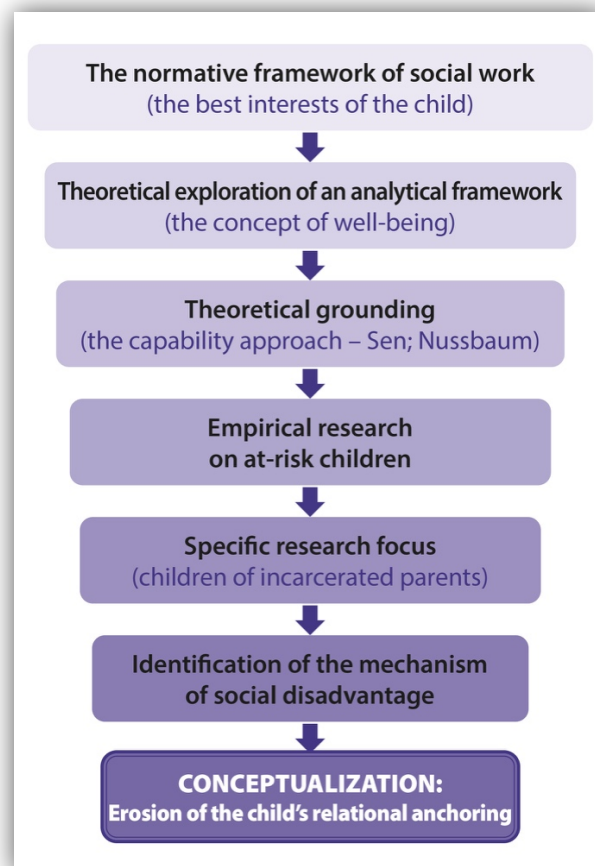
The full text of each study is included in the appendix.

5 The Concept of the Erosion of a Child's Relational Anchoring as an Analytical Framework for Social Work

5.1 The Logic of the Research Focus

My research focus has gradually evolved toward the formulation of the concept of the erosion of a child's relational anchoring, in which I integrate theoretical foundations with empirical findings regarding the life circumstances of children of incarcerated parents. This development can be schematically captured as a shift from the normative and theoretical foundations of social work toward an empirically grounded conceptualization of the mechanism of a child's social exclusion (see Fig. 2).

Fig. 2: Logic of the research line's development (own elaboration)



The figure illustrates how my research focus has gradually shifted from a normative understanding of social work to a theoretically and empirically grounded conceptualization of the mechanisms of social exclusion among children of incarcerated parents. It demonstrates that the concept of the erosion of a child's relational anchoring does not arise as an isolated theoretical construct, but as the result of the gradual integration of theoretical frameworks and empirical findings.

At the same time, it suggests that understanding the impacts of a parent's incarceration on a child requires moving beyond purely normative or partial analytical approaches toward an integrated theoretical framework capable of capturing the complexity of the child's life situation. The theoretical contribution of this work lies in the fact that I do not place the capability approach and attachment theory side by side, but rather link them through a single explanatory mechanism: the erosion of the child's relational anchoring.

5.2 Theoretical Framework of the Research

The theoretical foundation of this habilitation thesis is based on the integration of the capability approach and the relational perspective rooted in attachment theory. This integration allows me to view a child's well-being not only as a set of individual capabilities and possibilities, but also as the result of the quality of the relational environment in which the child develops.

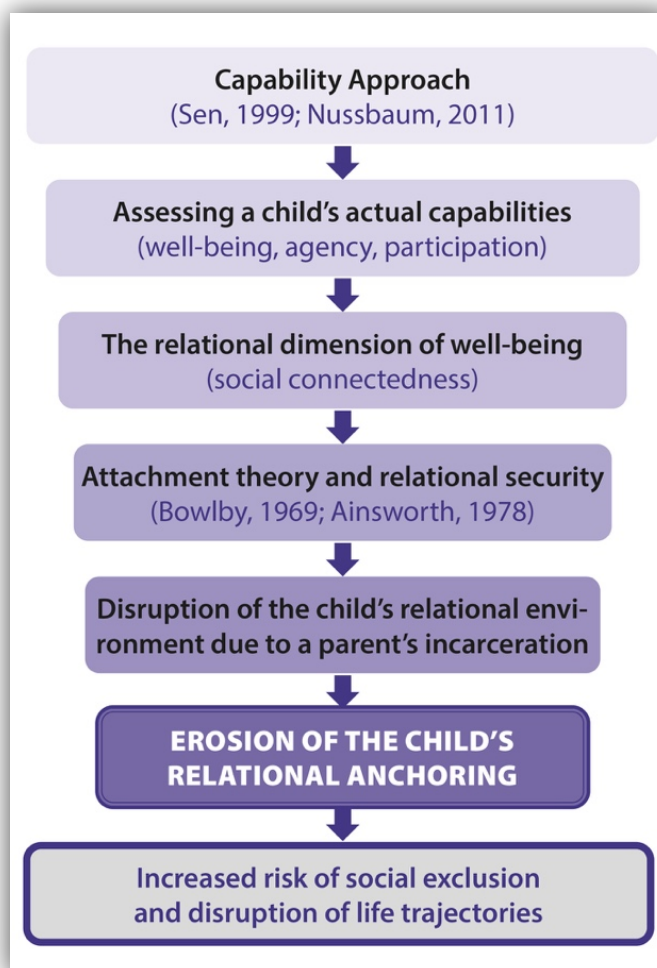
The capability approach (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2011) provides a broader analytical framework for assessing a child's real-life opportunities, well-being, agency, and participation. It allows us to capture the extent to which a child has a real opportunity to develop their capabilities and assert themselves in a social environment.

I further develop this perspective by incorporating the relational dimension of well-being, which emphasizes social belonging and the quality of interpersonal relationships (Lee and Robbins, 1995; Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015). Attachment theory plays a

key role here (Bowlby, 1969/82; Ainsworth et al., 1978), which highlights the importance of relational security for a child's healthy development and for their ability to form and maintain social bonds.

By combining the concept of capability approach with the relational perspective, I am able to interpret the effects of a parent's incarceration as a process that disrupts the child's relational environment, which in turn limits the child's real-life opportunities. In this study, I conceptualize this process as the erosion of the child's relational anchoring (see Fig. 3).

Fig. 3: Theoretical framework of the research (adapted by the author)



This theoretical framework allows us to view the effects of a parent's incarceration as a process that disrupts the child's relational environment, which simultaneously limits the child's real-life opportunities. It thus goes beyond one-sided approaches focused either solely on individual capabilities or solely on the quality of relationships, and allows both levels to be linked in the analysis of the child's life situation. In my view, this is precisely where the true value of this concept lies, as it demonstrates how the weakening of relational bonds leads to a limitation of capabilities and, subsequently, to social exclusion.

5.3 Defining the Concept of the Erosion of a Child's Relational Anchoring

By integrating the capability approach with the relational perspective, this study formulates the concept of the erosion of a child's relational anchoring as an analytical framework for understanding the impact of a parent's incarceration on the child's life situation.

By the erosion of a child's relational anchoring, I refer to the process of gradual and cumulative disruption of their relational environment, associated with the weakening of relational bonds and social resources, which limits the child's real opportunities to develop and apply their abilities, participate in social life, and gain social recognition. At the same time, this creates conditions for the child's social exclusion and disrupts the formation of a stable life trajectory.

I do not view this process as a one-time consequence of a parent's incarceration, but rather as a gradually developing and cumulative disruption of the child's relational environment. The weakening of these relational bonds affects not only the relationship between the child and the incarcerated parent but also the child's broader social relationships and their standing within the social environment.

From the perspective of the capability approach, the erosion of relational anchoring manifests as a gradual restriction of the child's real opportunities to develop their abilities, participate in social life, and gain social recognition. Here, the relational

environment represents not only the context of the child's development but also one of the key sources of their life opportunities.

In line with attachment theory, this process can also be understood as a disruption of relational security, which is essential for the child's healthy socio-emotional development as well as for their ability to form and maintain stable relationships. The disruption of relational security does not operate in isolation but is reflected in a broader spectrum of the child's social interactions and life experiences.

The concept of the erosion of a child's relational anchoring thus allows me to link the individual, relational, and structural levels of analysis regarding the impacts of a parent's incarceration. It makes it possible to capture not only the immediate consequences of disrupted family relationships but also their long-term impact on the child's life trajectory. At the same time, it provides an analytical framework for social work, as it helps to better identify the mechanisms that may gradually lead these children toward social exclusion, to understand their relational and social situation, and to seek appropriate forms of support. In this sense, I view it as an original theoretical contribution to understanding the mechanisms of social exclusion among children of incarcerated parents in the context of social work.

5.4 The Mechanism of Erosion of a Child's Relationship Anchoring

An analysis of empirical data shows that the erosion of a child's relationship anchoring is not a one-time consequence of a parent's incarceration, but a gradual, multi-level process that unfolds across several interconnected levels of social relationships.

At the first level, relational security within the family is disrupted, particularly due to the sudden absence of a parent, restrictions on contact, and changes in the daily functioning of family life. These changes weaken the relational bonds between the child and the incarcerated parent and can disrupt the sense of security and continuity that is essential for the child.

At the second level, the impacts are reflected in relationships with peers. Children of incarcerated parents may face stigmatization, a sense of being different, or difficulties sharing their experience with those around them. These factors can lead to weakened social bonds and make it harder to form and maintain peer relationships.

At the third level, these experiences extend to the child's broader social environment and can lead to feelings of marginalization, diminished social recognition, and difficulty in finding a respected place in society.

These three levels are not isolated but influence and reinforce one another. A disruption in relational security within the family can increase a child's vulnerability in relationships with peers, while negative experiences in the broader social environment can, in turn, further weaken relational bonds and social resources.

It is precisely within this dynamic that the mechanism of the erosion of a child's relational anchoring becomes evident, gradually limiting their real opportunities to develop and apply their abilities, participate in social life, and gain social recognition. The erosion of relational anchoring thus does not represent an isolated consequence of a parent's incarceration, but rather a cumulative process unfolding across the child's family, peer, and broader social environments.

5.5 Implications of the Concept for Theory, Practice, and Education in Social Work

The concept of the erosion of a child's relational anchoring offers important insights for practice and education in social work. It allows us to move beyond narrow perspectives focused solely on the individual or family level and to understand the impacts of a parent's incarceration as a complex process that unfolds across various levels of social relationships. This creates a basis for a more sensitive assessment of the child's situation and for more precise targeting of interventions.

On an analytical level, the concept contributes to a deeper understanding of the mechanisms of social exclusion among children of incarcerated parents. It allows us to observe how the disruption of the relational environment manifests in the limitation of the child's capabilities, the weakening of social recognition, and the shaping of their life trajectory. It thus provides a tool for a more comprehensive interpretation of the child's life situation, one that takes into account not only the child's individual characteristics but also the quality of their relational and social anchoring.

In the context of social work practice, this concept emphasizes the importance of supporting and nurturing a child's relational bonds as one of the key prerequisites for their well-being. It allows for a more precise distinction between manifestations of difficulties and their underlying relational mechanisms, thereby enabling better-targeted assessment, intervention, and prevention. From this perspective, interventions should not be focused solely on resolving current problems, but also on strengthening relational security, supporting the child's contact with an incarcerated parent where it is in the child's best interest, fostering the relationship with the parent who cares for the child, and developing the child's social relationships within the broader community. At the same time, the concept highlights the need to sensitively address stigma and marginalization, which can further undermine the child's social inclusion.

In terms of social work education, the concept supports an emphasis on a reflective approach that enables the interpretation of clients' complex life situations within their broader contexts. The ability to recognize the process of erosion of relational anchoring and to respond appropriately to it requires the development of critical and reflective thinking, which is essential for working with clients in situations of social exclusion.

The concept of the erosion of a child's relational anchoring thus links theoretical reflection, empirical findings, and implications for practice and education in social work. Its contribution lies not only in redefining the impacts of a parent's incarceration, but above all in the fact that it allows us to understand them as a process of gradual weakening of the relational and social bonds that shape a child's life opportunities.

6 Discussion: Theoretical Grounding, Implications for Current Social Work Practice, and Future Research

6.1 Theoretical Grounding of the Concept in the Context of Current Knowledge

The concept of the erosion of a child's relational anchoring is formulated in this habilitation thesis at the intersection of the capability approach and the relational perspective. It builds upon both theoretical traditions, while also addressing their previously rather separate development in the analysis of the life situations of at-risk children. Its contribution lies in integrating the structural and relational dimensions of social exclusion into a single analytical framework.

From the perspective of the capability approach, the concept builds upon the classical conception of Sen's theory (Sen, 1999) and its further elaboration (Nussbaum, 2011) by emphasizing relational anchoring as a key condition for the realization of capability. Unlike approaches that primarily emphasize individual dispositions and institutional conditions, it builds on authors who highlight the socially and relationally conditioned nature of capability (Walker, 2005; Biggeri & Santi, 2012; Hart, 2012). Author demonstrates that relational ties do not merely constitute the context for a child's capability development but are an integral part of it. The weakening of relational embeddedness thus results in limitations on a child's actual opportunities to participate in social life, gain recognition, and develop their own life course.

In relation to attachment theory, the concept is based on the classic works of Bowlby (1969/82; 1982; 1988; 2010) and Ainsworth (1978), which emphasize the importance of secure attachment for a child's socio-emotional development, as well as on developmental and longitudinal studies (Sroufe, 2005; Cassidy & Shaver, 2008). These works show that the quality of early relational experiences has long-term consequences for emotional regulation, interpersonal functioning, and social adaptation. However, the presented concept further expands the attachment perspective by including not only

the relationship between the child and the caregiver, but also relationships with peers and the child's position within the broader social environment. In connection with authors who emphasize the need to view relational bonds within a broader context (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Belsky, 1984; Woodward, Fergusson, and Belsky, 2000), the disruption of relational security can be understood as a process that unfolds across multiple levels of social reality.

In the case of children of incarcerated parents, these processes are further exacerbated by experiences of separation, ambiguous loss, and stigmatization. Empirical studies show that a parent's incarceration is associated with an increased risk of behavioral problems, post-traumatic stress, school failure, and social exclusion (Murray & Farrington, 2008; Murray, Farrington & Sekol, 2012; Arditti, 2012; Bocknek, Sanderson & Britner, 2009). At the same time, it appears that these impacts extend to broader family life and are also shaped by broader criminal policy frameworks and social inequalities (Wakefield, Lee & Wildeman, 2016; Besemer, Dennison, Bijleveld & Murray, 2019).

Poehlmann (2005) also points out that the separation of a child from a parent can disrupt attachment relationships, which may lead to long-term insecurity in relationships. Grady et al. (2017) demonstrate that adverse childhood experiences disrupt socio-emotional development, the formation of attachment bonds, and the capacity for regulation, and increase the risk of later relationship difficulties and problematic trajectories. This line of reasoning is further supported by a more recent study by Grady et al. (2023), which shows that adversity in childhood is associated with responses to traumatic stress, the quality of the caregiver-child relationship, and regulatory deficits. These findings support the interpretation that the erosion of a child's relational anchoring may represent one of the mechanisms through which a parent's incarceration experience translates into the child's later social disadvantage.

At the same time, this process must be viewed within the broader context of risk accumulation. Theories of risk and resilience show that the negative effects of individual stressors do not add up linearly, but can reinforce one another and create

developmental cascades leading to further forms of disadvantage (Rutter, 1979; Sameroff et al., 1993; Masten, 2001). Children of incarcerated parents are often exposed to a convergence of multiple risk factors, such as socioeconomic disadvantage, instability in the family environment, psychological stress, or reduced access to supportive relationships. The concept of relational anchoring erosion further develops these findings by demonstrating how the accumulation of risks specifically manifests itself in the weakening of a child's relational bonds and social anchoring, and thereby in the limitation of their life opportunities.

Another important complementary framework is the perspective on trauma and adverse childhood experiences, which highlights the long-term effects of chronic stress on child development (Felitti et al., 1998; SAMHSA, 2014). In this context, a parent's incarceration can be understood as a significant stressful event that disrupts the child's sense of security, the continuity of relationships, and the stability of the child's environment. This approach thus provides further support for interpreting the erosion of relational anchoring as a process of gradual weakening of the child's relational and social resources.

Unlike the approaches mentioned above, the concept of the erosion of a child's relational anchoring systematically links the relational dimension with an analysis of capability, thereby enabling a more comprehensive interpretation of the impacts of a parent's incarceration. It does not merely add relationships as another variable to existing frameworks, but highlights their function as a mediating mechanism between changes in the child's environment and the restriction of their actual possibilities.

From this perspective, the concept of the erosion of a child's relational anchoring represents an original theoretical contribution that expands current understanding of the mechanisms of social exclusion while providing an analytical tool applicable in both research and social work practice.

6.2 Implications of the Concept for Social Work with Children of Incarcerated Parents

The concept of the erosion of a child's relational anchoring has important implications for social work practice, as it shifts the focus from an isolated assessment of individual risks to an understanding of the relational processes that shape the child's life situation. It highlights that the impacts of a parent's incarceration cannot be adequately understood without considering how this experience disrupts the child's relational bonds and broader social anchoring. For social work, this perspective is particularly significant in that it helps identify situations in which a child is not merely reacting to a single stressor, but to the gradual weakening of the relational infrastructure of their life.

This perspective simultaneously raises a critical question regarding current social work practice. This practice is largely built on child protection, risk identification, and the assessment of parental competencies. While this framework is undoubtedly legitimate and necessary in many situations, it can lead to the relational dimension of the child's situation being sidelined. As a result, decisions may be made that, while reducing the immediate level of risk, simultaneously weaken the child's long-term relational resources.

This ambivalence is particularly evident when it comes to contact between a child and an incarcerated parent. Decisions regarding contact are often driven primarily by the desire to protect the child, while its importance for maintaining relational continuity, identity, and a sense of security may not always be sufficiently taken into account. Empirical evidence suggests, however, that social workers are not always inclined in their practice to actively support such contact. It is more often viewed as a potential risk than as a potential source of relationship-building, and decisions therefore naturally lean toward restricting it.

Such an approach is understandable to a certain extent, as it stems from an emphasis on child protection and the prevention of further harm. At the same time, however, it

can lead to an underestimation of the importance of relational bonds in a child's life. Social work may thus, albeit unintentionally, contribute to deepening the erosion of relational anchoring rather than mitigating it. **This is not about replacing the perspective of protection with the perspective of relationships, but about considering them in mutual context so that child protection does not lose sight of the importance of the child's relational and social anchoring.**

At the same time, it is becoming clear that supporting a child's relational anchoring is not merely a matter of individual professional decisions, but also of the institutional conditions within which social work operates. If the children of incarcerated parents remain on the margins of the system's attention, it is difficult to identify their needs in a timely manner and respond to them in a way that would prevent further erosion of their relational and social resources. At this level, therefore, a broader question arises: to what extent does the very structure of the system enable timely and sensitive intervention, and to what extent does it, conversely, hinder it?

6.2.1 Barriers in Current Social Work Practice

In this context, it is important to highlight several practical and systemic barriers that hinder the timely identification of the needs of children of incarcerated parents and the selection of appropriate interventions. These are not isolated problems faced by individual workers, but rather limitations related to the way in which the situation of these children is recognized, interpreted, and addressed institutionally in current practice.

6.2.1.1 Low institutional visibility as a barrier to timely identification and intervention

One of the most significant barriers to timely intervention is the low institutional visibility of children of incarcerated parents. As shown by Eddy and Poehlmann-Tynan (2019), Bourgeois et al. (2022), or earlier Petersilia (2005), these children are often referred to in the professional literature as "invisible," "forgotten victims," or "unseen victims of the prison boom." In the Czech context, this invisibility is all the more

pronounced because children of incarcerated parents are not systematically identified and often come to the attention of social work only indirectly, through other family difficulties, or only when they themselves begin to exhibit problematic behaviour. Support for this group thus remains unsystematic and depends more on the individual sensitivity of specific workers or organizations than on a stable, institutionalized response (Navrátilová et al., 2023).

This situation also highlights the limitations of standard social work practice. As Flaquer (2014) points out, the life circumstances of these children are often assessed through standard child protection procedures, which focus primarily on meeting basic needs. In the Czech context, this approach can lead to aspects such as the stigma associated with a parent's conviction, concerns about the incarcerated parent, loss of relational security, shame, or social isolation being overlooked. The problem, therefore, lies not only in the fact that these children are not sufficiently "visible," but also in the fact that the system does not always have sufficiently developed tools to capture the specific nature of their situation.

From a practical standpoint, therefore, there is a need to develop procedures and tools that allow for the sensitive identification of these situations without the risk of further stigmatizing the child or their family. This is not merely about implementing record-keeping mechanisms, but about broadly strengthening the system's ability to respond to situations that remain on its periphery. As Hickle (2020) points out, if children are identified only when they exhibit risky or problematic behaviour, it is easy to confuse cause and effect. In this case as well, social work tends to respond to the secondary manifestations of disadvantage rather than to the very process of its formation.

6.2.1.2 The Diversity of Children's Situations as a Limitation of a Standardized Approach

Another barrier to social work with children of incarcerated parents is the fact that these children do not constitute a homogeneous group. As Wakefield and Wildeman (2016) point out, parental incarceration often does not occur as an isolated event, but

as an additional burden in the lives of children who were already growing up under conditions of various forms of family disadvantage. At the same time, research by Dallaire (2007), Jones and Wainaina-Woźna (2013), Poehlmann (2005), as well as Czech findings published by Navrátilová et al. (2023) and Smutná (2023), show that the significance of relational bonds and the role of contact with the incarcerated parent vary significantly depending on the child's prior experience, the quality of the relationship before incarceration, and their current life situation. This diversity is further illustrated by Wang (2022), who reports that approximately half of incarcerated fathers lived with their children prior to arrest, while the other half did not. It is precisely this diversity that complicates the use of uniform intervention procedures and requires a sensitive assessment of the specific significance of the relationship for the child in question.

In cases where a child grew up in a relationally stable environment and had formed a secure attachment to the parent, the parent's incarceration represents a significant disruption of the relationship's continuity. As shown by Dallaire (2007), Jones and Wainaina-Woźna (2013), Arditti and Johnson (2022), and Navrátilová et al. (2023), maintaining contact can play an important role in preserving relational continuity, the child's identity, and the sense that the parent remains a part of their life. A disruption in contact can then represent an additional loss that deepens insecurity and weakens the child's relational anchoring.

The situation is different for children whose family environment was already marked by conflict, neglect, violence, or substance abuse prior to incarceration. As shown by Greene et al. (2000), Poehlmann (2005), and Czech findings published by Smutná (2023), in these cases the relationship with the parent may not be unambiguously secure and can be significantly ambivalent. Some children perceive the parent's departure with relief, while others describe a mixture of anger, disappointment, stress, and alienation. However, this does not mean that the relationship lacks significance. Social work here navigates the tension between protecting the child and supporting their

relational needs, and must seek forms of contact that respect the need for safety while also allowing the child to process this relationship.

Situations involving children growing up in foster care or institutional care have specific dynamics. Dallaire (2007), La Vigne et al. (2008), and Park and Clarke-Stewart (2002) note that, particularly when mothers are incarcerated, the existing care arrangement is more frequently disrupted, leading to the child's placement in foster care. Czech findings complement this picture: as noted by Smutná (2023), of the 29 children of incarcerated mothers in the analysed sample, 83% did not identify their mother as the person caring for them, suggesting that the relationship with the mother had already been weakened in many cases prior to her incarceration. In these situations, tension may arise between the stability of the new caregiving environment and the bond with the biological parent. If this dimension is not sufficiently addressed, the child may be subjected to implicit pressure to choose between two relational worlds. Social work can play a crucial role here by helping to bridge these worlds and integrate them into the child's identity.

It is precisely among children growing up in foster care or institutional care, as well as those whose emotional attachment was already weakened before their parent's incarceration, that the erosion of emotional attachment often has a cumulative nature. Intervention, therefore, cannot consist solely of maintaining contact with the incarcerated parent, but must also include actively creating and strengthening other relational resources that can provide the child with stability, recognition, and security.

6.2.1.3 The Neglected Role of Caregivers

Another significant barrier to social work with children of incarcerated parents is the neglected role of those who care for the child on a daily basis. As Shlafer and Poehlmann (2010) and Tasca (2016) point out, caregivers act as "gatekeepers" of contact, particularly for younger children, and significantly influence both the frequency and nature of that contact. The child's relationship with the incarcerated parent therefore does not take place solely between these two individuals but is mediated by the

attitudes, opportunities, and decisions of those who provide immediate care for the child (Arditti & McGregor, 2019).

The importance of this role is also confirmed by Czech research. Navrátil (2025) shows that a good relationship with the caregiver, usually the mother, is a fundamental prerequisite for maintaining at least some elements of the parental role. Without her cooperation, the incarcerated parent may effectively be cut off even from basic forms of contact, such as a phone call, a letter, or mediated communication with the child. Czech research thus confirms that the caregiver is not merely an organizational facilitator of contact, but a key actor who fundamentally influences whether the relationship between the child and the incarcerated parent can continue to develop.

At the same time, it must be taken into account that caregivers themselves are often under considerable strain. As Navrátilová et al. (2023), citing Nesmith and Ruhland (2008, 2011), note that they are often exposed to financial pressures, conflicts, the effects of previous criminality in the family, psychological stress, and concerns about the child. These difficulties can also be passed on to the children themselves, who sense the emotions and tension of the adults caring for them. Decisions regarding contact with an incarcerated parent cannot therefore be viewed merely as a technical or administrative matter, but as part of broader family dynamics in which child protection, caregiver fatigue, their own experiences, and the quality of previous relationships intertwine.

If social workers do not systematically engage with these individuals, supporting contact remains merely a formal option. Caregivers may actively support contact, but they may also tend to limit it—often to protect the child or based on their own negative experiences. Without their involvement, therefore, it is impossible to work effectively either on maintaining the child's relationships or on understanding the true significance of these relationships for the child.

From this perspective, it is essential to view work with caregivers as an integral part of the intervention. Social work should create space for sharing concerns, working through ambivalence, and jointly seeking forms of contact that are acceptable to both the child and their immediate caregiving environment. It is precisely here that it becomes clear that supporting the child's relational anchoring is not possible without sensitive work with those who directly shape their everyday relational world.

The barriers mentioned not only highlight the limits of specific practice but also raise the broader question of the analytical frameworks through which social work interprets the situation of these children. The concept of the erosion of a child's relational anchoring therefore offers not only a new way of naming the problem but also an impetus to reevaluate certain established approaches in social work and to target interventions more precisely.

6.2.2 The Concept of the Erosion of Relational Anchoring as a Catalyst for Reevaluating Social Work Approaches

These findings also open the door to a new perspective on existing social work approaches and methodologies. Approaches based on assessing the best interests of the child or on identifying risks work with categories that are undoubtedly essential for the field of child protection, but they capture less of the very structure of relational bonds within which the child's life situation unfolds. As Navrátilová (2018) demonstrates, the capability approach allows for assessing a child's life situation not only in terms of the fulfilment of needs, but also in terms of their real possibilities to develop relationships, gain recognition, and find their place in society. The concept of the erosion of relational anchoring builds on this logic and demonstrates that relationships are not merely one factor among others but form the framework within which other factors operate and acquire meaning.

In the Czech context, this need for a more reflective and relationship-sensitive approach also aligns with recent analyses that highlight the tension between a controlling and a reflective approach in social work with vulnerable children and their families

(Mikulcová et al., 2024). These analyses suggest that professional responses to children's situations are shaped not only by formal procedures or legal categories, but also by interpretive frameworks through which social workers understand vulnerability, family dynamics, and possibilities for intervention.

From a similar perspective, approaches focused on resilience can also be reinterpreted. As Punová (2025; 2024) points out, resilience cannot be understood merely as an individual trait of the child, but as a dynamic process conditioned by the influence of resources and protective factors within a broader socio-ecological environment. For social work, this means that relational bonds do not function merely as one of the protective factors, but as a key resource whose weakening has repercussions across other areas of the child's life. Punová and Dvořáčková (2025) also emphasize that an assessment of a child's situation should not end with the identification of risks, but should also focus on recognizing sources of resilience, support, and growth potential in both the child and their environment. From this perspective, it becomes clear that supporting the child's relational anchoring is not a supplementary aspect of intervention, but one of its key prerequisites.

6.2.2.1 Practical Orientation: Working with Relationships as the Core of Intervention

In practice, therefore, social work should not reduce the issue of contact to a decision about whether to allow it or not, but should understand it as an opportunity for targeted work. This means considering not only the very existence of contact, but also its form, timing, support, and above all its relational significance for the specific child.

At the same time, it is essential to extend attention to the child's broader network of relationships. Relational anchoring is not shaped by a single relationship, but by the entire structure of bonds, which includes caregivers, peers, and the institutional environment. Social work therefore does not merely play a protective role here, but also acts as an agent capable of supporting, mediating, and stabilizing relationships.

The presented argument suggests that the situation of children of incarcerated parents must be understood as a process of gradual erosion of their relational and social resources. From this perspective, supporting the child's relational anchoring does not appear as a partial intervention, but as one of the key tasks of social work in this area. It cannot be understood merely as a matter of an individual professional decision, but as the result of comprehensive work with the child, the incarcerated parent, and the caregiving environment.

6.3 The Concept's Contribution to Theory and Future Research Directions

The concept of the erosion of a child's relational anchoring offers a theoretical contribution to social work by linking, in a new way, the analysis of a child's life situation with the interpretation of the broader social processes that shape that situation. Unlike approaches that emphasize either the child's individual characteristics or the structural conditions of their life, it highlights the relational dimension as the key space where these levels intersect. In this sense, it further develops the capability approach by explicitly demonstrating the importance of relational anchoring as a condition for the realization of capability (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2011; Biggeri & Santi, 2012), while simultaneously expanding the traditional concept of attachment by situating it within a broader social context and linking it to issues of social inclusion, recognition, and life trajectories (Bowlby, 1969/82; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Belsky, 1984).

In this way, the concept helps bridge the gap between the micro-level of everyday relational experiences and the macro-level of social conditions. It thus enables a more comprehensive understanding of how social disadvantage is shaped over time and how it is reflected in an individual's life course. From this perspective, it represents an original theoretical contribution that expands current knowledge of the mechanisms of social disadvantage while offering an analytical tool applicable in both research and social work practice.

At the same time, the concept raises new questions for further research. One of these is gaining a deeper understanding of the dynamics of relational anchoring in various life situations of children, particularly in relation to the variability of their family and institutional environments. Further research may focus on analysing the mechanisms through which relational bonds are strengthened or, conversely, weakened, and on identifying interventions that can influence this process. In this regard, linking existing knowledge about the accumulation of risks, trauma, and relational insecurity with an analysis of the mechanisms of change and renewal of relational resources appears promising (Rutter, 1979; Sameroff et al., 1993; Masten, 2001; Grady et al., 2017; Grady et al., 2023).

A significant direction for further research lies in the area of children of incarcerated parents who themselves come into conflict with the law and are placed in institutional or protective care settings. It is precisely in these situations that the process of the erosion of relational anchoring can manifest in a cumulative and intensified form, which is reflected not only in relational difficulties but also in the development of antisocial behaviour and disrupted life trajectories. This line of research thus shifts the focus from analysing impacts to identifying mechanisms for change and transformation in the life trajectories of at-risk young people.

Further exploration of this line of research is also represented by a current GAČR project focused on the concept of restorative potential as a mechanism for transforming antisocial behaviour among juveniles in institutional care. In this context, there is scope for a deeper examination of how targeted relationship-building work can restore disrupted relational bonds and strengthen the social capabilities of young people. Linking the concept of the erosion of relational anchoring with the concept of restorative potential thus represents a further step in the development of a theoretical framework that allows us not only to better understand the processes of social disadvantage but also to seek ways to overcome them.

The role of institutions and systemic arrangements, which can either support or, conversely, disrupt a child's relational bonds, also represents an important area for further research. In this regard, there is scope for linking social work research with the analysis of public policies and institutional practices, particularly where the logic of child protection intersects with the logic of control, record-keeping, and institutional management of the child's situation (Flaquer, 2014; Eddy & Poehlmann-Tynan, 2019; Bourgeois et al., 2022).

At the same time, however, it is necessary to reflect on the limitations of the proposed concept. It is based on research into a specific group of children of incarcerated parents, and defining this group alone presents a significant methodological challenge. Children of incarcerated parents are not currently systematically recorded, and their total number therefore remains unknown. For this reason, it was not possible to establish a population or select a representative sample. The present study should therefore be understood as an analytical exploration of the life circumstances of this group of children, which allows for the identification of key mechanisms, but not their prevalence within the population. Another limitation may be the difficulty of operationalizing the concept in quantitative research, particularly given its process-oriented and relational nature. Further empirical validation is therefore necessary both to refine the concept and to assess its applicability to other groups of at-risk children.

A specific issue that arises in connection with the future direction of research and practice is the problem of identifying and registering children of incarcerated parents. These children are not systematically registered, and their numbers can only be estimated indirectly, which significantly limits the possibilities for identifying them and providing targeted support. On the one hand, arguments have been raised highlighting the risk of further stigmatization and institutionalization of their living situation, including concerns about excessive monitoring of families already facing the difficult circumstances associated with a parent's incarceration. On the other hand, however, the absence of any systematic identification leads to low institutional visibility of these

children and limits the possibilities for timely and adequate support. The invisibility of this group may thus represent a specific form of structural disadvantage, in which children remain outside the scope of support systems not because their needs are absent, but because they are not sufficiently recognized (Bourgeois et al., 2022; Eddy & Poehlmann-Tynan, 2019; Navrátilová et al., 2023).

From this perspective, it is not the issue of registration itself that appears to be key, but rather the way in which it is designed and implemented. Future research and practice should therefore focus on identifying approaches that enable the identification and support of these children without leading to their further stigmatization or the undue institutionalization of their living situations. Despite the aforementioned limitations, however, the concept of the erosion of a child's relational anchoring expands the possibilities for theoretical reflection and empirical inquiry in social work and opens up space for further research focused on the relational dimensions of children's lives in adverse life situations.

7 Conclusion of the Habilitation Thesis

This habilitation thesis focuses on analysing the impacts of a parent's incarceration on a child's life situation, with particular emphasis on the relational dimension of these processes. Based on a progressively developed line of research, it has been demonstrated that the impacts of a parent's incarceration cannot be adequately interpreted solely through the child's individual characteristics, nor solely in terms of the structural conditions of their life. **The key mechanism through which this experience is reflected in the child's life situation is the disruption and gradual erosion of the child's relational anchoring, through which the process of social exclusion is also formed.**

The main contribution of this paper is the formulation of the concept of the erosion of a child's relational anchoring, which allows for linking the micro-level of everyday relational experiences with the macro-level of social conditions and processes. The originality of this concept lies not merely in describing the impacts of a parent's incarceration, but clarifying the mechanism through which the disruption of relational security, continuity, and social recognition manifests itself in the limitation of the child's capabilities, their social disadvantage, and, in extreme cases, social exclusion.

The theoretical framework presented here also shows that relational bonds are not merely one of the many aspects of a child's life, but rather form the fundamental structure that shapes their future development. The erosion of relational anchoring therefore manifests itself not only in the realm of family relationships but also affects peer relationships and the child's broader social integration, thereby influencing their life trajectory in the long term.

Another significant finding is that children of incarcerated parents remain largely outside the systematic attention of institutions. Their low institutional visibility limits opportunities for early identification and support and contributes to the fact that the

impacts of a parent's incarceration are not adequately addressed either in social work practice or in public policy frameworks. This reality opens the door to further professional and societal discussion on how to sensitively identify and support these children without subjecting them to stigmatization, ostracism, or the inappropriate institutionalization of their life situations.

From the perspective of social work practice, the paper emphasizes the importance of supporting the child's relational bonds and the need for a differentiated approach to the various life situations of these children. It shows that the issue of contact with an incarcerated parent cannot be reduced to a simple decision, but must be understood as part of broader work with the child's relational environment, including the involvement of those who care for the child on a daily basis.

At the same time, new avenues for research are opening up, particularly regarding children of incarcerated parents who themselves come into conflict with the law and are placed in institutional care. It is precisely in these situations that the process of erosion of relational anchoring can manifest itself in a particularly acute form, creating an opportunity to explore mechanisms for overcoming it—for example, through the concept of restorative potential.

This habilitation thesis demonstrates that the impacts of a parent's incarceration on a child should be understood not as a set of isolated consequences, but as a process affecting the relational, social, and developmental conditions of the child's life. **The formulated concept of the erosion of a child's relational anchoring offers a theoretical and practical framework** that allows for a better understanding of the mechanisms of this process and a more sensitive consideration of intervention possibilities in social work. The dossier thus contributes to the understanding that **the impacts of a parent's incarceration on a child cannot be understood merely as a set of partial losses or risks, but as a process in which, through the erosion of relational anchoring, the child's social disadvantage and vulnerability to social exclusion are also shaped.**

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Appendix A

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The Well-being of Children and Young People: The Context of Social Services from the Perspective of the Capability Approach

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Abstract:

Objective: The aim of this article is to understand how social services contribute to the well-being of children and young people who use them.

Method: The research study, based on Capability Approach, was done using a mixed-research strategy.

Participants: The collection of data took place through 44 in-depth semi-structured interviews with children, young people and their parents/foster parents who use social services in one of the regional capitals of the Czech Republic.

Results: Parents at risk underrate their role in loving and caring for their children. Parents at risk are more likely than children

to undervalue education. Social services do not develop youngsters' capability to live a meaningful life.

Conclusion: The research has shown that although social services have significant potential to ensure well-being for children and youth, they work primarily in a way that provides clients with basic social functioning in the present, without influencing their future positively.

Introduction

Ensuring the well-being of children is a central motive of governmental measures related to protecting children and safeguarding their rights. *The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (The United Nations, 1989) guarantees all children under the age of 18 the observance of their rights and assurance of their best interests (the Czech Republic acceded on 6 February 1991). The state thus becomes the principle guarantor, which, in the spirit of Article 3 of the Convention, "*oversees the protection and care necessary for the child's well-being*". The Convention has given the child completely new status: the child has become an independent subject of the law, which guarantees respect for the identity of his/her person and the legal right to the assurance of well-being.

Although the notion of child well-being is a common part of legislative practice affecting the work of all those in the area of child protection, its meaning is not absolutely clear, thus leading to a number of difficulties in practice. Various interpretations of child well-being are reflected in diverse concepts of practice, which may pose a certain risk to the social functioning of children and young people.

We believe that reflecting on the concept of child well-being will facilitate at least basic insight into the context of its historical development, which reflects its transformation in the understanding and emphasis that have been attributed to well-being. In brief, the content of child well-being has been significantly shaped in society by the "*social indicators movement*" and "*children's rights movement*". The UNICEF initiative has been of great importance for the interpretation of child well-being, and has led to the observation of the situation of children in the world, the assurance of their rights and research into their well-being. Since 1979, when the first such report, *State of the World's Children* (Adamson, 2013), was published, there has been a systematic look at

the situation of children in the world and how they benefit. Almost 4 decades of systematic interest in the well-being of children has also meant a period of conflicting opinions and expert disputes about which indicators are relevant for measuring child well-being, how they should be measured, and what social policy measures should be implemented. Ben-Arieh (2010a; b), one of the most prominent researchers in the field of child well-being, points out, in agreement with Khan & Kamerman (2009), that in the understanding of child welfare, we have moved from the original notion of rescuing poor and suffering children to the current idea of supporting the development of child well-being. This development reflects the fact that the child is seen as a distinct autonomous being who has his/her being own physical, psychological, spiritual, cultural and social qualities, all of which need to be developed and supported in the interest of the thriving and flourishing of the child (Ben-Arieh *et al.*, 2014).

Emphasis on the well-being of children has also prompted the need to monitor the prosperity of those children whose life situations require specific attention (Gojova *et al.*, 2020; Glumbikova, 2020; Land, 2000; Selwyn & Briheim-Crookall, 2017; Mydlíková, 2017; Punova, Navratil & Navratilova, 2000). In light of this goal, we focus our attention to a group of children who are in the care of social services. Based on the research, this article should answer the question: ***How is well-being developed in children and young people who use social services?*** In assessing the development of well-being, we refer to the Capability Approach to anchor our theoretical and methodological conceptualization and assess how social services in the selected locality support the development of child well-being.

Child well-being and the Capability Approach

Nowadays, when examining child well-being, the Capability Approach (CA), developed

by Amartya Sen (1999; 1993) and Martha Nussbaum (Nussbaum, 2000; 2007), has increasingly been gaining attention. The Capability Approach focuses on the conditions, possibilities and capabilities that enable people to live a life of well-being and prosperity. Both authors, who have made a significant contribution to the formulation of the concept of well-being, point out that not every person in society has the same opportunities and freedom of choice to achieve dignified well-being.

Sen's interest in issues of human development and quality of life in the context of existing global inequalities, poverty and famine resulted in the conceptualization of criteria for quality of life and human development, including Human Development Index. The fundamental optics for viewing the functioning of an individual in society include capability, understood as "a varied combination of functioning (ways of being and acting) that a person can achieve. Capability is a set of working vectors reflecting the personal freedom to lead a certain way of life... to choose from possible lives (Sen, 1992). In other words, it is "substantial freedoms that a person uses to lead such a way of life that he/she has reason to appreciate" (Sen, 1999). In Sen's conception, capabilities are perceived as "the ability of an individual to do valuable deeds or to achieve a state of being he/she values" (1993). The decisive factor is, according to Sen, "freedom of choice," which is determined by the structure of the options available to a particular person (1992). In this respect, the notion of capability is essentially a "concept of freedom" reflecting the spectrum of choices that a person has in deciding what kind of life he/she wants to lead (Palovičová, 2011). Different options available to the individual thus lead to different levels of capabilities. These are explained by Sen as the individual peculiarities of individuals, and their cultural and social specificities (1993).

Sen and Nussbaum advocate different approaches to capabilities. Sen's ideas are integral to the participatory development of a person based on the ability of individuals to express and defend, through social dialogue, the minimum degree of capability that would enable such a quality of life that a given society deems as valuable; however, Nussbaum is critical of such an attitude. Her selection of capabilities is

founded more as the fulfillment or non-fulfillment of which is an indicator of the existence or non-existence of capabilities. Nussbaum is critical of Sen's assumption that all individuals have the same opportunities to participate in social dialogue and negotiate capabilities allowing them to live the kind of life they could appreciate. For example, people with disabilities point to the fact that there are always individuals in society who are not able to formulate and promote their own rights (Nussbaum, 2007). In contrast to Sen's approach to capabilities, Nussbaum applies a more analytical attitude based on the need for a fairer approach to people who are unable to rationally participate in creating the conditions for the kind of life they could value. In this respect, she has identified 10 basic capabilities she considers to be the foundation for a dignified human life. They are "a set of basic human claims that create a prerequisite for various ways of life; claims that are contained in the idea of human dignity" (1999; 2007).

In the context of the Capability Approach, human well-being is assessed merely by the degree to which an individual achieves the kind of functioning that he/she values. The assessment of human well-being presupposes a distinction between capabilities and human functioning, with "capability meaning only a real opportunity to achieve social functioning in various areas" (Sen *et al.*, 1993). Social functioning itself is a concrete result that the individual has achieved. Palovicova (2011) states that "the difference between capabilities and functioning is, therefore, the difference between the possibility to achieve social functioning and its actual achievement; between the potential and the outcome."

Although Sen and Nussbaum choose different ways of promoting well-being, they agree that society should create fair conditions (for capability) for all, which presupposes taking into account the unique conditions of individuals and their cultural and social contexts. Because of the way the CA is conceptualized, it opens up space for analyzing the physical opportunities that people encounter and their freedoms for achieving a valued way of functioning, as well as making it possible to work with the needs, desires and feelings of individuals. The multi-dimensional character of CA allows us to track several factors simultaneously (Alkire, 2008; Deneulin, 2002).

Nussbaum's endeavor to have a fair approach to providing conditions for a dignified life, especially for those who have difficulty accessing this, has strong resonance in consideration to child well-being. Arising from a constructivist perspective, the CA approach has thus become one of the pillars of the "conceptual frameworks for understanding the well-being of children" (Biggeri, 2017; Biggeri *et al.*, 2007; Fegter & Richter, 2014; Navratilova, 2018). This has contributed to the fact that the methodological features of this approach can respond to changes in the way children are perceived which has occurred in the social sciences. Fegter & Richter (2014) characterize these changes in 3 points: 1) the child has become the subject of separate analysis, rather than merely a part of family analysis; 2) there is an increasing focus on the need to explore the diverse areas of children's lives that are important to their everyday life; 3) children are increasingly considered to be "experts on their own lives".

Fundamental shifts in perceptions on children and childhood have also had a significant impact on methodology. In contrast to the previous adult-centered perspective applied in the analysis of child well-being, attention has shifted directly to children. Children themselves and their view on how they see their possibilities to realize their own life are now at the heart of the analyses. As such, an autonomous space has opened up for children allowing them to freely and actively participate in shaping their own lives. The child is seen as a distinct social actor; to understand him/her, it is necessary to explore his/her own experiences and ideas (Navrátil, 2019). The Capability Approach allows the understanding of a child's reality not only on his/her individual level, but also takes into account the social context. It is especially the network of relationships between the possibilities that children have and their vision of how they would like to live that can capture the quality of their functioning, or the level of their well-being. This makes it possible to gain a more accurate image of what is important for the child's life from his/her point of view.

Method and study characteristics

An empirical survey was carried out using a mixed research strategy of semi-structured in-

terviews. We created interview scenarios for children and adolescents and their parents / foster parents based on Nussbaum's list of 10 capabilities that are a prerequisite for a dignified life: (1) life; (2) bodily health; (3) bodily integrity; (4) senses, imagination and thought; (5) emotions; (6) practical reason; (7) affiliation; (8) other species; (9) play; (10) control over one's environment [13]. This list of capabilities was updated on the basis of the work of Biggeri *et al.* (2007) which focuses on the study of capabilities in children.

With regard to finding answers to the main research question (*How is well-being developed in children and young people who use social services?*), the interview scenario covered 4 main areas that were focused on determining the following: **1) child capabilities; 2) the achieved functioning within the individual dimensions of capability; 3) the impact of the service on the individual dimensions of capability; 4) which aspects of capability the project should prioritize.** This scenario enabled the children and young people to determine the most appropriate dimensions of capability and to assess their functioning in light of their ideas of how they would like their life to be. At the same time, it also made it possible to see to what extent the parents consider social services as creating an environment that promotes well-being for their child.

1st, from the point of view of determining the capabilities of children, we identified the following: "*What are the most important opportunities that children / young people should have during their lives?*" The aim of this question is to find which capabilities (i. e. opportunities) are relevant here, without us limiting the possible responses by a predefined range of options. When the child mentioned a capability that was not previously identified by a researcher, we added the response to the list. When the child mentioned a capability that was already listed, the response was noted. As such, the children directly participated in the formulation of the questionnaire. This phase of interviewing allowed us to conceptualize and identify various capability dimensions.

The 2nd phase of the research was focused on the functioning of the individual capability dimensions that they spoke about in the 1st phase. The children and young people were asked to

evaluate every capability based on their experience. For example, in regards to the "health" capability, we asked, "*Have you been feeling healthy lately?*" The result was also noted by the children according to the Lickert scale (1 – lacking; 10 – full health).

In the 3rd phase, we asked the children about what impact the social services had on their capabilities. For this reason, we asked (e.g. in regards to the health capability) "*Do you think that the social services you use affect your health or the possibility of living in a healthy way?*" The aim of this question was to measure the impact of social services on each identified capability dimension from the subjective view of the children. This question evaluates the expanding or contracting of the capability.

In the 4th last phase of the research, the children were asked what capabilities should be given more attention in social service. Each of the children was questioned about their preferences. The aim is to identify which capabilities the service should pay most attention to. For this reason, we asked, "*Which areas of life should the social service pay more attention to in the future?*"

Before the implementation of the research, interviewers were trained on the basis of a specially created Interviewer's Manual which included an interview script and remarks sheet. The length of the interview, including filling in of the remarks sheet, ranged from 30-60 minutes, depending on various circumstances, especially the respondent's age; the interview environment; the motivation of the respondent. The conversations were recorded on a Dictaphone, transcribed and then qualitatively interpreted. Selected interview information was also transferred to a remarks sheet containing the list of capabilities, including new ones, so as to make it possible to quantify them all. Scaling techniques have also been used within this strategy. The collected data were processed using IBM SPSS Statistics.

The selection of respondents took place in cooperation with social services organizations thus allowing us to collect data directly from the organization. In total, there were 28 in-depth semi-structured interviews with children and young people up to the age of 22. The average age of the interviewed children and youth was 15.4 years, with the ages ranging from 11-22 years.

For the youth over the age of 18, we encountered some individuals who continue to make use of social services for youth, despite being over the age limit (of 18).

At the same time, however, we also considered it essential to speak with their parents/foster parents, who have experience with social services and who naturally could evaluate the impact of these services on the children's lives. We conducted 16 interviews with these parents/foster parents: 45% of which were men; 55% women. Average age of the interviewed parents was 44.6 years. The youngest parent was 25; the oldest 70 (this was the case of a foster grandmother). All participants provided informed verbal consent with their participation in our research.

Results

In the following section, we present the basic empirical findings related to the evaluation of 4 of the researched areas of capability.

Main areas of potential (opportunities and possibilities)

Table 1 shows the perspective of children and their parents on what opportunities they consider valuable and essential in order for children to be able to thrive. In order to secure the well-being of their children, parents see as the most important areas: *the presence of loving and caring parents (or surrogate parents), and opportunities for learning and health (both 56% of the parents)*. A slightly smaller but significant percentage of all the parents (50%) identified the area of *safety*; over 77% of all respondents (children and parents together) agreed with this point.

It seems that the parents want their children to enjoy the commonly held values of *health, safety, a family setting and learning opportunities*, which are considered in this society to be prerequisites for a successful life. Parents believe that the following are also important for their children: *having good relationships (44%), an open future (38%), and to have a life free from bullying (31%)*.

From the point of view of relationships, it is evident that parents prefer their children to have close family relationships, that is, between child, parents and siblings. Other (more distant) family relationships, and those with friends or within the community are of lower priority.

Table 1 The importance of individual areas of life from the perspective of children & parents

Areas of life	Child/Adolescent		Parent	
	Count	%	Count	%
Health	3	10.7	9	56.3
Loving parents	25	89.3	9	56.3
Siblings	7	25.0	4	25.0
Relatives	5	18.5	3	18.8
Friends	16	57.1	3	18.8
To be feeling fine	3	11.1	5	31.3
Safety/security	3	10.7	8	50.0
Good relationships	12	42.9	7	43.8
Having personal opinions	2	7.1	1	6.3
Chance to learn new things	4	14.3	9	56.3
No bullying or exploitation	3	10.7	5	31.3
Nice clean environment	3	10.7	4	25.0
Fun	4	14.3	2	12.5
Respect	3	10.7	4	25.0
Spirituality	1	3.6	1	6.3
Enough time	3	10.7	2	12.5
Goals	3	10.7	3	18.8
Going where I want	3	10.7	3	18.8
Orientation in life	-	-	4	25.0
Open future	4	14.3	6	37.5
Money	5	17.9	1	6.3
School	4	14.3	1	6.3
Work	4	14.3	2	12.5
Accommodation	3	10.7	-	-

It is interesting that parents do not place emphasis on areas that are potential sources of creativity development for their children: such as the ability to express their opinions; have their own goals in life; or form relationships with friends. It seems that parents remain in their parenting “guardian” role and consider the needs of the child only from their point of view. It is clear that the application of an adult-oriented perspective suppresses those areas of children's lives that are important to their development and future.

We analyzed the same question exclusively from the point of view of the interviewed children and young people who use social services

and social work services in the city of Brno. The research revealed differences in the viewpoints of the parents and children. The children's views were not so different overall; however, there are some noteworthy differences.

The children and young people assess the importance of the presence of loving and caring parents even more often than the parents. Almost 90% of them spontaneously stated that the presence of affectionate and caring parents is a very important condition for their well-being. Overall, children and youth are particularly in need of social relationships to be satisfied. Among the most-described conditions for a good life, there are also relations with *friends* (57%), good *relationships in general* (43%) and relationships with *siblings* (25%). In comparison to the parents, some areas of life are not considered as crucial by the children: security (11%); learning (14%); respect (11%); open future (14%). The question is to what extent certain factors play a role in the children's evaluation; for example, they may feel satiated in terms of security and learning, while certain points may be completely irrelevant or even unimaginable for them for the time being.

The research data show the differences between parents' and their children's views of what is important for children to prosper. We consider empirical mapping of these differences to be crucial to confirming the importance of including the perspective of children in a study of child well-being.

Assessing the State of Conditions of Life

In our research, we also focused on assessing the current state of conditions for child well-being. Table 2 shows the average assessment of the state of conditions for child well-being in individual areas of life. The table contains a comparison between the evaluations of the children/youth and parents. We particularly point to those areas where there are noticeable differences between them. The respondents used ratings from 1 to 10, where 1 is unsatisfactory and 10 is the best possible situation.

Of the areas that were actively evaluated by children, the worst ranked item was Open Future, which rated an average of 3.0 points. Unfortunately, the item Support was also rated 3.0 by children. This item represents formal sources and places of support where children and youth can

Table 2 State of the individual areas of life from the viewpoints of the children and parents

Areas of life	Child Mean	Parent Mean
Health	9.33	9.10
Loving parents	8.48	8.22
Siblings	9.14	10.00
Relatives	9.00	9.67
Friends	8.50	7.33
To be feeling fine	9.33	7.40
Safety/security	7.33	5.57
Good Relationships	8.33	7.43
Having personal opinions	7.50	8.00
Chance to learn new things	4.67	6.50
No bullying or exploitation	10.00	6.75
Nice clean environment	9.00	10.00
Fun	6.00	7.00
Respect	10.00	10.00
Spirituality	-	9.00
Community	9.00	7.50
Enough time	7.67	8.67
Goals	7.67	5.33
Going where I want	-	6.75
Orientation in life	8.50	7.00
Open future	3.00	-
Money	8.50	8.00
Support	3.00	8.00
School	8.00	10.00
Work	9.25	10.00
Accommodation	10.00	-
Money	7.50	7.33
Special Education	10.00	-
Decent education	-	10.00
Social worker	10.00	-

turn when in need. It is not clear whether this reflects an inadequacy in their knowledge of available possibilities, or whether there is an actual absence of support. In either case, however, this is a serious finding that requires action. The overall average of the status of Support (including the rating by parents) was higher. Thus, parents assess the possibilities of formal support more positively. It is likely that they have a positive experience

with the provision of this support.

The item regarding a chance to learn new things was rated somewhat better. Nevertheless, the state of this condition was assessed by children and young people as below average (4.67). Even here, children express a more critical assessment than that of their parents, who rated it at 6.50 on average. In contrast, the research shows that children rate various items less critically than their parents: for example: their safety; their idea of feeling fine; their feeling of belonging in the community; social services helping them achieve their goals. From the point of view of children, it is evident that social services are not only a source of safety and protection, but also development. It is interesting, however, that children are unable to associate this support to ideas about their future. It seems that children primarily appreciate their present state without linking it to their future.

There is a serious gap in the ways that parents/foster parents and children/youth assess the areas of life. This shows that understanding the child as a client should also be sought in the effort to design adequate services; not just the opinions and experiences of parents are important (but neither should they be underestimated). It is evident that we need to talk openly with children about their future and explicitly about how to achieve a successful future.

The impact of services on the state of opportunities for children from the perspective of children and parents

In the research, we looked at how respondents perceive the impact of social services and social work services on individual areas of life that are important for the well-being of children and youth. Table 3 shows the average ratings of service impact according to the respondents' ratings, especially the comparisons between the parents and children. As in the previous case, the respondents worked with a scale of 1-10, with a score of 1 being a bad influence and an evaluation of 10 being the best possible impact.

In general, children and young people who have participated in the research evaluate the benefits of the services mainly on the positive side of the scale. Values exceeding 5 can be considered as an assessment of benefit. The children negatively evaluated only the area of finance (av-

Table 3 The impact of services on individual areas of life from the perspective of children and parents

Areas of life	Child Mean	Parent Mean
Health	5.70	5.86
Loving parents	6.22	7.50
Siblings	8.00	7.25
Relatives	6.00	7.33
Friends	8.13	6.67
To be feeling fine	8.00	8.00
Safety/security	9.67	9.29
Good relationships	8.10	9.00
Express personal opinions	9.00	9.00
Chance to learn new things	0.75	8.56
No bullying or exploitation	6.00	7.80
Nice clean environment	9.33	9.50
Fun	8.75	7.0
Respect	6.33	9.25
Spirituality	7.00	10.00
Community	-	9.00
Enough time	5.33	10.00
Goals	7.33	10.00
Going where I want	8.33	7.33
Orientation in life	-	8.75
Open future	7.00	8.00
Money	4.00	6.50
Support	10.00	-
School	7.50	10.00
Work/Job	8.25	7.50
Accommodation	7.00	-
Free-time activities	-	3.00
Decent education	6.00	10.00

erage 4). However, this result can be understood as meaning that social services do not allow young people to earn money.

Services are valued for their contribution as a source of support (average rating 10). They are perceived by children to provide safety and security (9.67), as well as a nice clean environment (9.33). The services are also highly valued for providing opportunities for expressing and cultivating personal opinions (9), as well as creating and offering leisure time facilities (fun 8.75). The

services expand their clients' possibilities in the area of spatial mobility (8.33) and increase their chances of obtaining a job (8.25). Children also perceive that the services increase their possibilities for an open future (7). It is evident that the potential of social services to help provide a better future for children is great and that children also perceive it. It is a challenge for social services to exploit this potential, because the unfortunate data showing little hope of an open future for children in the care of social services may point to unused resources. It is also worth mentioning that, according to children's assessments, the services are not able to influence the provision of loving and caring parents. The average rating in this area is 6.22. We believe that it would be worthwhile to consider whether and how the focus of services can be developed and strengthened in the future. It is evident that the development of parental competences of the parents/foster parents would be appreciated by the children in the study.

From the perspective of parents there is a better evaluation primarily in the area of relationships, especially between themselves and their children, and between relatives and children. Compared to children, parents give a lower rating to the impact of services on sibling and friend relationships. Compared to children, parents give a significantly higher rating to the amount of free time. This difference is worth noting because, as other research shows, the nature of free-time activities affects children's well-being (The Children's Society, 2017).

The development of social services in terms of capabilities

In this section, we asked about which conditions of life should be given more attention in the context of social services and social work services. We asked children and parents about their preferences for future service delivery. The aim is to identify the most important conditions that service providers should pay increased attention to. The areas of life are judged on a scale of 1-10, where 1 has the least importance for service development and 10 has maximum importance.

The average values, which respondents assigned according to the importance of individual areas of life for service development, are presented as a comparison between parents and chil-

Table 4 Development of services with respect to individual areas of life from the perspective of children and parents

Areas of life	Child Mean	Parent Mean
Health	4.50	4.22
Loving parents	6.40	5.11
Siblings	5.00	3.75
Relatives	5.67	4.33
Friends	7.43	6.67
To be feeling fine	8.33	5.25
Safety/security	10.00	7.29
Good relationships	6.80	6.14
Having personal opinions	6.50	9.00
Chance to learn new things	7.50	7.89
No bullying or exploitation	3.67	6.40
Nice clean environment	4.67	10.00
Fun	7.50	5.50
Respect	5.33	4.75
Spirituality	5.00	1.00
Community	-	2.00
Enough time	6.00	1.00
Goals	5.33	7.00
Going where I want	9.50	9.67
Orientation in life	-	7.75
Open future	6.00	9.80
Money	5.80	8.00
Support	5.00	-
School	2.00	10.00
Work	4.33	9.00
Accommodation	7.33	-
Car	5.00	-
Education	-	5.00
Free-time activities	-	4.00
Decent education	-	10.00

dren/youth who participated in the interviews (Table 4).

In terms of future service development, the priorities for children and youth included: safety/security (average 10); spatial mobility (9.5); emotional well-being (8.33); development of knowledge and skills (7.5); leisure-time activities. It is worth noting that parents' ratings for safety/security and mental/emotional well-being

appear to be less significant (7.29). However, the views of children here reflect some criticism.

Another 5 areas that children and young people proposed as important for the future targeting of services range in average values from 6.04 to 7.43. This area has unambiguously subjective weight given to the topics; however, the data should also be taken into account in future strategies for service development. The topics include: relationships with friends (average value 7.43); the issue of temporary/permanent housing (7.33); the topic of relationships (6.80); the area of expression and cultivation of personal opinions (6.5); as well as the sphere of support for parental competence (6.04).

When we look at the priorities for service development with respect to the opinions of parents, other important topics appear. The following topics were in the highest positions: a nice clean environment (average 10); raising children to be decent (10); with emphasis on services helping to provide an open future for the children (9.80); as well as a focus on helping children/youth to gain good orientation in life (7.75). It is interesting that in contrast to parents' high rating, children themselves support the development of services in the area of an open future at a value of 6, which is slightly higher than average.

Discussion

The main objective of this article was to understand to what extent social services enable children and young people to improve their well-being. The research, anchored in the theory of capability, not only examines whether social services create conditions for children to prosper, but also shows an image of what children themselves consider as important for achieving their own well-being. In order to better understand what children in the care of social services need, we are taking into consideration results obtained and their interpretations in the context of other research studies involving subjective measurement of child well-being (Selwyn & Briheim-Crookall, 2017; The Children's Society, 2017).

These studies, like ours, have shown the crucial role of relationships in children's lives. The success of children and young people in relationships with peers and others is crucial. According to research (Richardson *et al.*, 2008; Selwyn &

Briheim-Crookall, 2017; Vysloužilová & Navrátil, 2019), these relationships influence children in the perception of themselves as social actors and generally affect the level of their life satisfaction. For children in our group, this means primarily the relationships with parents, whether biological or surrogate. This is closely followed by relationships with friends. For children, the importance of relationships with others is greater than for their parents, although even the parents consider them to be crucial.

In the context of relationships and their fundamental position in children's lives, we should pay increased attention to their development. A comparative study of the Children's Society (The Children's Society, 2017) has produced strong evidence that the quality of these relationships is deteriorating. From 2009 to 2015, there was a decline noted in the level of happiness in relationships with friends and in life generally. Although this trend was observed in British children and young people, an annual comparative study by UNICEF on the situation of children in the world also reflects this fact. For the Czech Republic, this trend is even more pronounced. According to the above UNICEF study, conducted in April 2013, the Czech Republic has the lowest values of all the countries of Central and Eastern Europe in the quality of children's relations (26th place). Only 56% of Czech children consider their classmates to be "nice and considerate". This rating is one of the lowest in the developed world (Adamson, 2013). In this respect, it seems essential to create within the framework of social services conditions that promote good relations and at the same time prevent risky forms of relationship development. This does not concern only the prevention of bullying, but mainly the prevention of arguing and fighting among children. According to this UNICEF report, Czech children are among the highest in the level of conflict among peers.

A more positive point is that social services are seen as a means for helping children and youth to become incorporated into a network of relationships. However, a certain risk can be seen in the fact that social services do not focus on the development of these relationships. The possibility for building interpersonal relationships has arisen as a natural consequence of the fact that social services are, used by other people through

whom the children and youth are drawn into a network of relationships. An active approach to developing this capability could in many ways result in increased success in children's lives. For example, the results of a research study (Selwyn & Briheim-Crookall, 2017) have shown that in order to fulfill the well-being of children in care, it is crucial for the child to have at least one key adult available. Thanks to such a relationship, many skills and abilities develop that are important for the child to mature, and are prerequisites for a successful life.

Perhaps the most serious observation brought about by this research is the perceived lack of hope for the future of the children using social services. The results of the research have shown that skepticism regarding the child's future outweighs optimism and hope. The research findings show that children and young people in social services do perceive that these services affect their future; however, they do not expect them to be a means to help contribute to a promising future.

It has often been shown that hope is an important part of such life prospects, enabling people to actively participate in personal and social life (Matejcek, 1999). It is interesting that the studies in the UK (Selwyn & Briheim-Crookall, 2017) are generally consistent with the results of our studies, although there is one fundamental difference: the British children living in surrogate family care, unlike the Czech children, see hope for the future. This is an alarming fact that cannot be easily resolved and deserves proper attention. These results represent a great challenge for social workers working with these children. It is evident that the mere factual existence of certain capabilities is no guarantee that children will be able to use them; that they will be able to perceive certain potential as meaningful for turning it into a result.

From the point of view of capability approaches, through which we view the well-being of children, it seems to be appropriate to develop services that, instead of merely ensuring material well-being, are consciously aimed at developing the physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, cultural and social characteristics of children, as essential prerequisites for the development and promotion of their well-being. A prerequisite for this development of social services is the education of so-

cial workers, which develops their professionalism (Navratilova & Navratil, 2020; Punova, 2019; 2020)

Conclusion

In this research on the prosperity of children using social care services, we have used a research tool based on the Capability Approach. With this study, we also wanted to discover whether it is appropriate to use this tool to explore the well-being of children and young people in the Czech environment of social services.

Experience from the research has shown that tools based on the Capability Approach were accepted without difficulty by children. Our young respondents actively participated in identifying capabilities that they considered important for their lives. The involvement of children in the research design was also facilitated by the fact that one of the important components of this approach is the emphasis on the individual experience; wishes and aspirations of the people interviewed. It is particularly the emphasis on these characteristics of life that became an important factor of their active participation in the research.

We believe that in using this tool, we have gained significant findings about the lives of these children and young people using social services. We consider the findings that point to the absence of hope in the lives of the children to be particularly serious. We believe that this requires special attention and for us to consider whether the childcare system itself does not create dispositions for the absence of hope for the future of children and young people. We believe that focusing primarily on material conditions may help children to live better in the present; however, this approach may not positively affect their future. For this reason, we believe that there is a need to make significant changes to the childcare system to ensure their well-being. One of the most important changes we see is that we should seriously consider how to invite children and young people to participate in creating their own concept of well-being. We should allow ways for them to participate with regard to their own development and source of freedom.

Although our research has not captured the reason why children in the care of social services do not look to their future with hope, other studies show that active participation of children in

determining their own life opens a space in which they learn to take responsibility for their lives and exploit potential of their creativity. These abilities are also important in the prevention of risky phenomena such as bullying, addiction and other pathological behavior in children (Giant, 2014; Navratilova, 2015). They are also the basis for children and young people to develop resilience for surviving in difficult life situations (Ruzickova & Punova, 2018).

Research on child well-being has brought many challenges to the conceptualization of social services. We believe that within these concepts, we should create a space for involving children and youth in determining the form of what is offered by these services. Although the services are conceived on the basis of community planning (which means there is an opportunity to involve the users of the services), it is still only adult-oriented perspective that is considered. Not only are children uninvolved in the process of negotiation about the form of these services, but this possibility is not even considered.

From the perspective of the content of the service offer, it is clear that certain services are absent; such services involving capabilities that would help children learn practical ways of how to live responsibly in society. Practical experience from the field shows that "overloading the client with services" leads to client dependence on services as well as a low level of responsibility for their lives. Within these services, children and young people should have the opportunity to engage responsibly in the resolution of their life situations.

Furthermore, the offer of social services pays very little attention to existentially sensitive topics such as child identity, their self-development and using their potential for their current and future functioning. The absence of these topics can also be a source of some uncertainties: low self-esteem and disorientation as to who they are and who they would like to be. This could also be a source of the low degree of hope for the future that the children/youth expressed in the survey.

Attention that is dedicated to children and young people who are being helped by professionals is mainly seen from the perspective of securing their rights and fulfilling their needs. Although respecting children's rights and providing for their needs play a key role in their protection,

we do not place enough emphasis on the aspect of prosperity which relates to the high quality living of one's own life. We believe that there is a need within the offer of services to steer slightly away from the perspective of securing children's rights and needs – towards one of supporting their reflective capabilities to handle life. Today's late-modern times require new types of skills: children and young people need to learn to cooperate with others; to negotiate and to have dialogues. They need to learn how – in an uncertain world – to build their own successful existence.

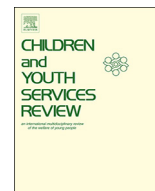
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Appendix B

PUNOVÁ, Monika; NAVRÁTIL, Pavel; NAVRÁTILOVÁ, Jitka. Capabilities and well-being of child and adolescent social services clients in the Czech Republic. *Children and Youth Services Review*. London: Elsevier, 2020, vol. 117. DOI 10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105280.



Capabilities and well-being of child and adolescent social services clients in the Czech Republic



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ABSTRACT

The aim of this empirical paper was to answer the following question: “What are the desirable and the actually achieved capabilities in relation to the well-being of children and adolescents using social services in the Czech Republic from their own point of view, from that of their parents or foster parents and social workers?” Our research study was based on the capability approach and looked at the well-being of vulnerable children who are clients of social service providers in the Czech Republic. It was conducted through a combination of qualitative and quantitative research techniques. Children and adolescents aged 11–22 years ($n = 28$) and their parents or foster parents ($n = 16$) were surveyed using the technique of in-depth semi-structured interviews and a questionnaire survey. We also held a focus group with 15 social workers working with these clients. The study has shown that what children need the most for their sense of well-being are harmonious relationships, particularly with their parents. This finding is all the more serious as parents are not fully aware of the importance of their love and care for their children's lives, as also evidenced in our empirical findings. The research finding that we consider the most disturbing is that children lack capabilities that would allow them to experience a meaningful life. This is most pronounced in their views of their future, which they do not associate with any hope. They do not see their future as providing opportunities for a positive life experience. Another key finding is that both children and parents marginalise capabilities developed through education. What is particularly alarming is that parents were much more likely to marginalise education than their children. Although these children are users of social services, these services proved unable to provide adequate formal support for them and their parents. Based on our study of children and families using social services we recommend that social services should focus on fostering the relationship between parents/foster parents and children. Particular attention should be paid to developing adolescents' potential, while taking into consideration their natural need to learn new skills so that they could live a more active life translating into a more meaningful life experience at present, as well as into a sustained sense of meaning in life in the future.

1. Introduction

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (Convention, 1989) establishes that the state should ensure all children below 18 years such protection and care as is necessary for their well-being. Despite that the legislative concept of children's well-being is part of routine practice of social workers working in child protection in the Czech Republic, its meaning is not entirely clear. This creates a number of practical difficulties, particularly in the area of assessment (Navrátilová, 2018). Ben-Arieh, Casas, Frønes, and Korbin (2014) have pointed out that support of children's well-being is marked by differences in social, cultural and economic notions of what children's well-being is. One of the consequences of the differences in concepts is a focus on selected fragments

of children's well-being and an absence of a holistic approach. According to Sandin (2014), the focus on only selected aspects of children's well-being also results from the fact that debates about children's well-being are carried out primarily as a response to emerging problems. In order to avoid this fragmentation in our study and to take due account of the social, cultural and economic specifics of the situation of child users of social services, we based our study on the capability approach, which can well respond to this variability. The chosen capability approach was developed by Sen and Nussbaum (1993) and its advantage is that it reflects the developments in the perceptions of the child and childhood that have occurred in social sciences.

As Fegter and Richter (2014) have pointed out, these changes manifest themselves in three aspects: (a) the child is regarded as a

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distinct social actor and this is also reflected in research, where the child has become an autonomous research subject and is no longer examined merely as part of the family; (b) research needs to validate different areas of children's daily lives (e.g. the area of relationships, access to education and leisure activities); (c) Emphasis is placed on active involvement of children who are recognised as “experts on their own lives”. As regards the assessment of children's well-being, we can see a radical shift from the previous adult-centred perspective towards a child-centred perspective, where the child has gained an important opportunity to freely express their preferences and have a say in their own well-being.

The sense of well-being derives not only from individual but also social factors. Therefore, when assessing well-being we also examine factors in the broader socio-ecological context, as they are informative of the assets available to children in seeking well-being, as well as of potential barriers to well-being. However, as Garbarino (2014) has pointed out in this context, the focus remains on the person of the child who is the heart of the socio-ecological concept. The child's own view of what is good for them and what life they want to live is a key aspect in assessing the child's well-being. That is also why we focused our research on the child. In line with Biggeri, Libanora, Mariani, and Menchini (2006), Biggeri, Ballet and Comim (2011), we put the child's perspective at the very centre of our research design. This perspective was supplemented with that of adults – children's parents or foster parents and social workers. Our research looked at children and adolescents who are clients of these social workers in the Czech Republic. The aim of this empirical paper was to answer the following question: *“What are the desirable and the actually achieved capabilities in relation to the well-being of children and adolescents using social services in the Czech Republic from their own point of view, from that of their parents or foster parents and social workers?”* We see these children as a group of people whose right to flourish in life is being challenged and who need external help. We also deliberately examined the perspective of other actors. In line with data triangulation, we sought to explore the capabilities of children and adolescents from the adult perspective and to gain information on those aspects of life that are based on a broader socio-ecological framework. In the Czech Republic, this has so far been the only research study that has examined the well-being of children from the child's perspective using the capability approach. In the Czech context, the prevailing opinion is that the needs of children and adolescents should be defined by adults. With this research, we want to highlight the importance of giving children and adolescents a voice to express themselves, as their perception of needs may be very different from other people's perceptions.

2. The capability approach and children's well-being

We have conceptually anchored the assessment of the well-being of children and young people upon the capability approach because of its concern with equitable access to conditions allowing people to live a life they have reason to value. The pioneer of the capability approach was the Nobel Prize winner for economics Amartya Sen (1992, 1993, 1999, 2009) whose ideas have served as a philosophical basis for benchmarking analyses conducted under the UN Development Programme since 1990. By defining quality-of-life and development criteria, Sen has contributed significantly to the conceptualisation of human well-being, including the Human Development Index (Fukuda-Parr, 2003). Against the backdrop of global inequalities and poverty, Sen criticised liberal philosophical reflections on equality of access to human well-being in a lecture entitled “Equality of What?” at Stanford University in 1979, focusing attention on the variability of human behaviour and subjective experience of well-being (Henderson & Denny, 2015). He was interested in what people value and how they can achieve the capability to be and to do things that make up a good, diverse and humane life (Venkatapuram, 2011). It is precisely this concern that is essential for the study of well-being of vulnerable

children and adolescents, since our focus is also on the extent to which the circumstances of their lives allow them to live a good life.

According to Sen, human functioning in society derives from so-called capabilities, which this author perceives as “the various combinations of functionings (beings and doings) that the person can achieve. Capability is, thus, a set of vectors of functionings, reflecting the person's freedom to lead one type of life or another ... to choose from possible livings” (Sen, 1992: 40). Thus, capabilities are “the substantive freedoms he or she enjoys to lead the kind of life he or she has reason to value” (Sen, 1999: 87). The different levels of capabilities derive from the different options that Sen (1993) argues stem from individual differences between people, including their cultural and social specificities. As Otto and Ziegler (2008) have pointed out in this context, it is always important to study the relation between social opportunities and individual needs.

One of the main advantages of Sen's concept is its flexibility and inherent pluralism, which has allowed other researchers to further develop it in different directions (Alkire, 2002). The very fact that Sen did not formulate any list of capabilities inspired many of his followers, such as Alkire and Black (1997), Biggeri et al. (2011), Clark (2002, 2003), Desai (1995), Nussbaum (1990, 2000, 2003) and Robeyns (2003). Among the most influential authors is Martha Nussbaum (1990, 2000, 2003, 2007), Nussbaum and Sen (1993) who focused predominantly on human rights. In a critical response to Sen, and based on her own work with people with disabilities, she pointed to the fact that not all people in society are able to articulate and assert their rights (Nussbaum, 2007), which may also apply to children and adolescents. Building on ideas of Aristotle, she outlined a list of ten capabilities that are fundamental to every person's decent life. According to Nussbaum, the political organisation of the state should ensure that at least a minimum standard is provided to all citizens along the lines of these ten principles. Although her design of the list of capabilities has been criticised for oversimplification of reality and inadequate reflection of the diversity of human life (Clark, 2002, 2006; Gasper, 2004), it undoubtedly has a significant methodological value. Indeed, Nussbaum herself encouraged other researchers to develop her concept further.

In the area of children's well-being, the credit for this goes mainly to Trani, Bakhshi, Bellanca, Biggeri, & Marchetta (2011), Robeyns (2003), Biggeri et al. (2011) and Biggeri and Karkara (2014). It is the concept proposed by Biggeri et al. that we based our research study on. In the authors' view, children are autonomous social actors who are able to express their opinions and priorities. The social organisation should facilitate the development of their capabilities that enable them to freely pursue a flourishing life (Biggeri & Karkara, 2014). In their project “Listen to Children Establishing Their Priorities”, Biggeri, Libanora, Mariani, and Menchini (2004) let children and adolescents themselves define their capabilities. Building on Nussbaum (2000), they then compiled a list of capabilities relevant for children and adolescents (Biggeri et al., 2006: 65-66):

1. *Life and physical health* – being able to be physically healthy and enjoy a life of normal length
2. *Love and care* – being able to love and be loved by those who care for us and being able to be protected*
3. *Mental well-being* – being able to be mentally healthy
4. *Bodily integrity and safety* – being able to be protected from violence of any sort
5. *Social relations* – being able to enjoy social networks and to give and receive social support*
6. *Participation* – being able to participate in public and social life and to have a fair share of influence and being able to receive objective information*
7. *Education* – being able to be educated
8. *Freedom from economic and non-economic exploitation* – being able to be protected from economic and non-economic exploitation*
9. *Shelter and environment* – being able to be sheltered and to live in a

safe and pleasant environment

10. *Leisure activities* – being able to engage in leisure activities
11. *Respect* – being able to be respected and treated with dignity
12. *Religion and identity* – being able to choose to live, or not to live, according to a religion and identity*
13. *Time-autonomy* – being able to exercise autonomy in allocating one's time and undertake projects*
14. *Mobility* – being able to be mobile*

*depending on the age of the child

Biggeri et al. (2006) emphasise that the assessment of capabilities depends on the age and degree of maturity of the child or adolescent and that the above list is open and flexible. At the same time (Biggeri et al., 2006), they draw attention to the fact that for some capabilities (such as love and care) it is desirable to extend research into other areas as well (such as love and care of parents, siblings and other relatives, or support from teachers, neighbours, friends and peers). In another publication, the authors emphasise the educational and formative influence of parents and other people (Biggeri & Kalkara, 2014), since their attitudes and decisions fundamentally influence the chances that the child's capabilities will be converted into functionings. The authors further assert that parents and other people must respect the child's freedom and wishes, while helping the child to develop and fulfil its potential, even if this is contrary to the child's wishes and perceptiveness. We have taken this fact into consideration in our research study and, in line with data triangulation, we examined parents' and foster parents' perceptions of how their children's or adolescent children's capabilities are fulfilled, as well as the perceptions of social workers who have direct professional experience with the children.

3. Methods

The aim of our research study was to answer the following research question: *“What are the desirable and the actually achieved capabilities in relation to the well-being of children and adolescents using social services in the Czech Republic from their own point of view, from that of their parents or foster parents and social workers?”*

3.1. Participants

For the purposes of our research, we used the purposive, criterion and key informant sampling methods. First we identified local government and non-government organisations providing social services to vulnerable families and children in the Czech Republic (e.g. low-threshold centres for children and youth, shelters for adolescents or mothers with children, counselling centres for vulnerable or foster families). In each of these organisations we selected one social worker who fulfilled the following criteria: a degree in social work, at least one year's professional experience of direct work with children and their families in the given organisation and consent to participate in our research study. These workers recommended further respondents from among their clients as it was direct service users (children and adolescents up to the age of 22) who were at the centre of our research (the sampling method used for children and adolescents was key informant sampling). We are aware of the fact that this type of selection, where we left the choice up to the social workers, may result in some bias in that the social workers may have given preference to certain clients in the sampling of study subjects. However, the research aim was not to assess the level of services provided by social workers but to assess the capabilities of children and adolescents and therefore we believe that this sampling method was appropriate.

We focused on children and adolescents using social services in the selected cities in the Czech Republic, regardless of their situation in life (we did not examine the forms of their risk-taking behaviours or the vulnerability of their families). In total, 28 children and adolescents were interviewed. We also carried out 16 interviews with their parents/

Table 1
Sample.

Respondents	Number	Age	Average age
Child or adolescent	28	11–22	15,4
Parent/foster parent	16	25–70	44,6
Social worker	15	–	–

foster parents. Of the child/adolescent and parent respondents, 45% were men and 55% were women. The sample included both children and adolescents growing up with their biological families (21 children and adolescents and 9 parents) and those in foster families (7 children and adolescents and 7 foster parents). The reasons for the children entering foster care were not the subject of this research.

In order to obtain the most comprehensive possible picture of the desirable and the actually achieved capabilities facilitating children's well-being, we were also interested in the view of the abovementioned social workers who work with these children and help them deal with their difficult life situations. In the next stage of the research, after we had completed the survey of children and their parents/foster parents, we therefore also explored the social workers' views. The composition of the sample is shown in Table 1 below.

Altogether, the respondents in our research were children and adolescents, their parents/foster parents ($n = 44$) and social workers from social service organisations ($n = 15$). In total, 59 respondents were surveyed. All study participants gave their informed consent to participate in the research study and, in compliance with relevant ethical requirements for research, were also informed of the possibility to withdraw from the research study at any time (none of the respondents used this option). The research was approved by the Ethics Board of the Masaryk University. We obtained informed consent to participate in the research both from the children and adolescents themselves and from their legal representatives. After the interviews were conducted, the identities of all conversation partners were consistently anonymised using randomly assigned codes.

3.2. Empirical design

The research was carried out in several stages. In the first stage, we focused on identifying the capabilities seen as relevant by children/adolescents and their parents/foster parents themselves. The empirical survey was conducted through a combination of a qualitative and quantitative strategy, using the technique of individual semi-structured interviews and a questionnaire survey. We developed flexible questionnaires for children and adolescents and their parents/foster parents that included a list of different capabilities. This flexibility consisted in the fact that respondents had the opportunity to make their own choice of relevant dimensions on which to base the questionnaire. The questionnaire dimensions had not been communicated to them beforehand. In order to test the clarity of the interviews and questionnaires, pilot interviews were conducted with children/adolescents and parents.

In agreement with Biggeri et al. (2011), Biggeri and Karkara (2014), the research study proceeded in accordance with the following general scenario:

- 1) Identification of the capabilities seen as relevant by children and their parents/foster parents (identification of the “ideal situation”) – respondents answered the question: *“What are the most important opportunities a child/adolescent should have during their life?”*
- 2) Description of the achieved functionings in individual dimensions of capabilities – respondents answered a specific question for every capability, e.g. in the case of health: *“Are you healthy”*

(at present)?/ *“Is your child healthy now?”*

The purpose of the first question was to determine which

capabilities are relevant without limiting the possible answers to a predefined list of capabilities. If a child mentioned a capability that was not listed in the questionnaire, their answer was added to the list. If a child mentioned a capability already listed, the answer was only recorded.

Subsequently, the child was asked about the actually achieved functionings in relation to the capabilities it had previously mentioned (see point 2 above). The first question thus explored the “ideal state”, whereas the second one examined how they were doing in terms of capabilities in their real life. The result was scored on a Likert scale (ranging from 1 – lacking capability to 10 – abundance of capability). Subsequently, we followed the same procedure to examine the attitudes of parents/foster parents, whom we also interviewed through semi-structured interviews. The way their answers were recorded in the questionnaire was the same as with the children/adolescents. The interviews were conducted either in the respondents’ homes or at the premises of the social services organisations. Privacy was always ensured. Apart from the interviewer, only the child/adolescent or the parent was present during the interview. The interviewers were the authors of this paper.

In the second stage, we turned our attention to social workers. We based this part of our study on a qualitative strategy, using the focus group and focus writing techniques. First, the respondents gave written answers to the following two questions:

- 1 What are the most important opportunities that children/adolescents should have in order to prosper in life?
- 2 What opportunities are not available to children/adolescents with whom you work?

This was followed by a focus group discussion where the participants reflected more in depth on the individual points raised through focus writing. The discussion was transcribed. The focus group discussion was recorded and transcribed verbatim and the transcript served as the basis for data analysis. The different stages are shown in Table 2 below.

4. Results and discussion

The aim of this empirical paper was to answer the research question: “*What are the desirable and the actually achieved capabilities in relation to the well-being of children and adolescents using social services in the Czech Republic from their own point of view, from that of their parents or foster parents and social workers?*” The key for us was the perspective of the child (James, 2003; Funk, Hagan, & Schimming, 1999; Ben-Arieh, 2005), which allowed us to look at the subject matter in a more holistic way. The following section presents the results of the empirical analysis. First, we analyse answers to the first question, which looked into respondents’ ideas about ideal capabilities in children/adolescents. Then we look at the actually achieved capabilities, where it is their absence that is particularly interesting for us in the context of children’s well-being.

4.1. What children need for their sense of well-being

First, we asked respondents the question: “*What are the most important opportunities a child/adolescent should have (in general and as a member of a social group) during their life?*”. Building on Nussbaum (2007), we acknowledge that it is these essential opportunities that our respondents consider to be valuable and that they need for their well-being. That is why we first looked at which capabilities our respondents (child and adolescent social work clients, their parents/foster parents and social workers who work with them) themselves consider significant. The empirical results of this part of our study are shown in Table 3 below.

It is not surprising that respondents from all three groups consider

Table 2
The empirical study design.

Phase	Respondent	Techniques	Research goal	Examples of questions
1	Child/adolescent	semi-structured interviews, questionnaire	identification of the capabilities seen as relevant description of the achieved functionings in individual dimensions of capabilities	What are the most important opportunities a child/adolescent should have during their life? Are you healthy (at present)?
	Parent/foster parent	semi-structured interviews, questionnaire	identification of the capabilities seen as relevant description of the achieved functionings in individual dimensions of capabilities	What are the most important opportunities a child/adolescent should have during their life? Is your child healthy now?
2.	Social worker	focus writing, focus group	identification of the capabilities seen as relevant Identification of the capabilities seen as unavailable to clients	What are the most important opportunities that children/adolescents should have in order to prosper in life? What opportunities are not available to children/adolescents with whom you work?

Table 3
Which capabilities does a child/adolescent need for their well-being.

Areas of life	Child/adolescent		Parent		Social worker	
	n = 28	%	n = 16	%	n = 15	%
Loving parents	25	89	9	56	15	100
Friends	16	57	3	19	3	20
Good relationships	12	43	7	44	3	20
Chance to learn new things	4	14	10	63	5	33
Health	3	11	9	56		
Siblings	7	25	4	25		
Safety	3	11	8	50	3	20
Open future	4	14	6	38	1	7
Relatives	5	18	3	19	3	20
To be feeling fine	3	11	5	31	1	7
No bullying or exploitation	3	11	5	31		
Nice clean environment	3	11	5	31	2	14
Respect	3	11	4	25	1	7
Entertainment	4	14	3	19	3	20
Money	6	22	1	6		
Goals	3	11	3	19		
Going where I want	3	11	3	19	3	20
Work	4	14	2	13	1	7
Enough time	3	11	2	13	5	33
School	4	14	1	6	11	73
Orientation in life			4	25	1	7

the presence of **loving and caring parents** (or foster parents) to be the most important asset. Here we have found a very interesting difference in the perception of this basic capability, in the sense that its importance was widely acknowledged by all 15 social workers, by 25 children and adolescents but only by 9 of the 16 parents.

A social worker from a youth counselling centre (B5) spoke of the role of parents in the family as follows: “For children and youth, for them to prosper, what is essential is a safe family in which they have supportive relationships, where they feel loving care and clear boundaries, and this model is reinforced by well-established family values; a family where children and adolescents are listened to, where their real needs are acknowledged and where these needs are being met in the case of the youngest children”. [Maturkanič \(2010a\)](#) has also highlighted the vital role of love in developing children's personalities and uniqueness, and has linked advancement of humanity with the amount of love that a human individual has received and further nurtured.

This need, clearly seen as the strongest, is immediately followed by two important categories of good well-being prerequisites. The first one is the presence of **harmonious relationships** (by 12 of the 28 children and adolescents, by 7 parents and by 3 of the 15 social workers) and the presence of **good friends** (by 16 of the 28 children and adolescents). A teenage client (5A) of a low-threshold centre said: “I need friends. Friends who don't support me, that sucks.” The important role of friends in the lives of children and adolescents is acknowledged also by social workers (by 3 of 15) and parents (by 3 of 16) but we can see a certain decline in significance. Possible pitfalls associated with friendships were pointed out by mother 25B who said: “Friends, and he has bad friends. His friends are false. He is such a giver and they are so mean to him. So that's my son. So I'm the one who always fixes things for him then. I'm a big mouth. He wouldn't tell on them but I can tell he's hurting, and I don't want him to be hurting, so I always go outside and say: get in here, whoever did whatever to him, and it's sorted in no time. They're always so nasty, that's awful. He can have his friends, but friends that do not force him into things.”

Next, children and adolescents emphasised the role of **siblings** in their lives (one quarter of 28) – here they were in agreement with their parents in terms of the percentage rating of this capability. Overall, the study has shown that children and adolescents primarily need social relationships in order to live their lives happily, be it relationships with parents, friends, good relationships with other people in general, as well as also with their siblings. This fact was aptly characterised by a

teenage user of asylum housing services (8A): “The family, after the family friends are the most important, after friends there are close acquaintances. Basically, I can do with only three groups of people in my life – the family, friends and acquaintances. He who has a good family, who has good friends and who has good acquaintances, doesn't lack a thing. With these people, you can get everything sorted out. Good relationships are important to me.” This respondent also articulated his attitude to parenting based on his own painful experience as follows: “It may be a bit nasty of me as a father's son to say this, but the father and mother should actually bend over backwards for their son, because that's what I would surely do”. We present his statement as an example of the fact that respondents do not always get the potentialities that they desire.

It is not surprising that the most important thing for children and adolescents is the presence of loving and caring parents (or foster parents). All three groups of respondents agreed on this. The importance of this capability was demonstrated also in a study of children's well-being by [Biggeri et al. \(2006\)](#), where child and teenage respondents considered this capability the second most valuable in their lives. What interested us, however, was a difference in the perception of this basic capability between the different types of respondents. All social workers and almost all children/adolescents consider it the most important, whereas parents themselves attach the least significance to it, as illustrated by the respondent quote above (8A). It would appear that parents, who are the vehicle for conveying this capability, do not always recognise their key role in providing loving care to their children. This empirical finding implies that in order to improve children's well-being parental competences need to be developed, particularly with respect to their relationship skills. Also other frequently stated capabilities referred to the fact that children and adolescents need a good network of social relationships (with their parents, friends and siblings) in order to live a happy life.

Another relevant capability that was deemed to be important by 10 of the 16 parents and as many as a third of social workers was the opportunity to learn something new. This capability relates to the opportunity to **learn something new**. Foster parent 6B2 associated this potential with education and leisure activities: “Perhaps available education, education taking into account their specifics. That seems the most important thing to me. Then also the possibility to use free time, again with regard to their specifics, because some children do well in normal clubs for children and some don't. For instance, one of ours is doing well in the scouts, the other one not quite so. The problem is not to find a club, the problem is to make our children stay there. That's why it's necessary to have special teachers there and so on.” However, further empirical findings have indicated that children themselves are not overly concerned with this potentiality. Only 4 of 28 consider it important, which may be a mark of a passive approach to life. On the one hand, it is positive that parents, who should inspire and develop children's desire for knowledge, recognise the leverage this capability provides. The question is, however, how they activate their children in this area when the children themselves do not attach much significance to it. The finding that children do not consider personal development to be important and are passive when it comes to new experiences and knowledge is not very positive.

We were also interested in the nature of activities that give opportunities for development. As a matter of fact, the group most likely to raise this subject were social workers. They emphasised the role of **active leisure** (a third of respondents) and **entertainment** options (by 3 respondents) and went on to note that leisure activities for children should also be available on weekends and should be affordable for families on low incomes. We believe that these findings present a real challenge for representatives of municipalities and providers of leisure activities, who should offer such incentives that are attractive and accessible to children and adolescents. As [Veenhoven \(2001\)](#) has found out, when children are offered a game-friendly urban arrangement, their sense of satisfaction increases.

It is a real fact that education is an important part of the lives of children and adolescents and this is where our research has brought an

interesting (and somewhat alarming, as one might say) finding. While nearly three quarters of social workers considered the opportunity for **education** to be important, this view was shared only by 4 of 28 children and adolescents and one parent. The minor role that education plays in the eyes of children and especially their parents is not a good basis for children's and adolescents' future educational path. This empirical finding, which can be considered one of the most significant, contradicts empirical findings of Biggeri et al. (2006) and Menchini (2006) that have indicated the importance of this capability in the eyes of children and adolescents. Biggeri et al. (2006) have stated that children are aware of the importance of education for their present and future well-being, because their respondents attached the greatest importance to this capability, whereas our child respondents and their parents marginalised it. We believe that this is another important finding of our study, as it points to the existence of risks in educational trajectories of children. If parents do not perceive their children's education as important, there is a risk that they will not motivate and support their children in this area.

One more condition for ensuring well-being that was fairly frequently mentioned by adolescent respondents was enough **money** (by 6 of 28) in contrast to only one parent who prioritised the role of money in the lives of their children. More specifically, it was particularly adolescents from asylum housing that spoke about potentialities related to material security. *"To have a job, money and housing. A job and money in the first place and then housing. Without a job, there's no money, without money there's no housing"* (9A). *"Well, so that I could live in an apartment, not somewhere outside, that is, to have a place to live in..."* (16A).

Parents and social workers were more likely to formulate a broader list of capabilities. If we first consider parents we can see that they also included the need for **safety** (half the parents and 3 social workers) and an **open future** (6 parents) among further essential capabilities for the wellbeing of their children. Parents interpreted an open future for their children in the sense of the answer given by respondent 25B who said: *"Simply, that he is someone, that he doesn't do what everyone else is doing. You know what's going on here, the kids are so much worse today, they start staying up late, start smoking, then the drugs. I don't want them to do this. Better for him to go somewhere, to become someone, to go to school, not cut classes."* A third of parents also find it important that their children **are fine, are not bullied and live in decent conditions** and they wish for them to be able **to find their feet in life** and earn **respect** from others. The significant number of parents expressing the wish that their children should not be bullied and should get respect from others reflects the fact that children from vulnerable families are actually faced with bullying and violence more often than other children (Maturkanič, 2010b).

4.2. What children have and what they lack to achieve well-being

In our study, we also focused on the evaluation of the present state of conditions for children's wellbeing, again from the perspective of children and adolescents, their parents or foster parents and social workers. In interpreting the findings, we give priority to those areas that were rated worse because it is these areas that have empirical implications for improving the well-being of children and adolescents. Respondents carried out the assessment using a scale of 1–10, where 1 indicated an unsatisfactory situation and 10 indicated achievement of the best possible state. The results are shown in Table 4.

We also compare the views of children and their parents in the context of perceptions of social workers that emerged from focus writing and focus group discussions. The results indicate that children and young people have access to a range of potentialities for their well-being. From the perspective of social work, however, it is important to pay attention especially to those potentialities that children are lacking. Our respondents pointed to a number of such potentialities.

The opportunity to **learn something new** was assessed as below average. Children expressed more critical views here than the whole

Table 4

State of the individual areas of life from the viewpoint of children and parents.

Areas of life	Child/adolescent mean	Parent mean
Loving parents	8,48	8,22
Friends	8,5	7,33
Good relationships	8,33	7,43
Chance to learn new things	4,67	6,5
Health	9,33	9,11
Siblings	9,14	10
Safety	7,33	5,57
Open future	3	
Relatives	9	9,67
To be feeling fine	9,33	7,4
No bullying or exploitation	10	6,75
Nice clean environment	9	10
Respect	10	10
Entertainment	6	7
Money	8,5	8
Goals	7,67	5,33
Going where I want		6,75
Work	9,25	10
Enough time	7,67	8,67
School	8	10
Orientation in life	8,5	7

sample of respondents (including parents). The overall average rating score was 5.89. **Entertainment opportunities (leisure opportunities)** were rated slightly above average (6.0) by children and young people. Even in this area of life, there is thus room for improvement. The lack of these capabilities was also highlighted by social workers. In their view, their teenage clients live in environments that do not allow children to flourish. They often live in socially excluded localities, which implies low housing standards, polluted environment, and higher crime rates. The grim financial reality of some families also means that children have no access at all to some leisure activities. As regards selective leisure activities (such as music and art clubs), participation in these is beyond the scope of possibility for these children due to lack of competence. A group at particular risk is children with specific problems, such as children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorders. In this context, social workers often also mentioned their clients having underdeveloped competencies allowing for a meaningful life experience. According to the interviewed professionals, child and adolescent clients lack the competencies improving their daily living skills and facilitating integration into the normal functioning of the majority society. They do not know how to spend free time meaningfully and prefer to idle it away, they are unable to find themselves a hobby. Social workers also gave a very negative assessment of the risks associated with the use of social networks, with children and adolescents often becoming victims of social media. In this context, social workers pointed out that parents do not sufficiently promote their children's competencies allowing for a meaningful life experience and social functioning. These findings are in line with the findings of Navrátilová (2015), who underlined the importance of the relationship between the development of children's potential and the available offer of leisure activities in the Czech environment, emphasising the role of leisure activities in building the identity of children and young people.

Formal resources of support were another area rated inadequate by children and their parents. This dimension can be interpreted to mean places where children, young people and their parents can turn to in case of need, where they can find refuge – these can include organisations providing social services. Parents were more generous in assessing the capabilities in this area (a mean score of 5.5), whereas children were more likely to perceive it as lacking (a mean score of 3). It is possible that a lack of knowledge of available options or their objective absence play a role in this. In both cases, however, this is a serious finding that requires a response. In this connection, mother 18B, who is a client of asylum housing, observed: *"Mental well-being, we*

would have it if we finally had our own apartment, right. It all depends on the apartment... not move from place to place all the time and live with stress... yeah, you get an apartment, you don't get an apartment, and this one is just for a year, and what about a year from now? So all that year you worry about what comes next... Because (kids) are also scared, aren't they? The older ones already know. They also sense it, as I do. Mom, we're here for a year, what will we do then? I say, I don't know, I really don't know. Like, another asylum again, or finally, the way opens up for us to get an apartment, or I don't know." Social workers also spoke about inadequate fulfilment of this capability. The importance of the **availability of resources of formal support** for children and adolescents with specific needs and their families was underlined by 20% of social workers. Social workers included among these resources mainly available assistance from social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, therapists, teachers and lawyers. Social workers also agreed that these services should be extended to also include field services, which in the case of these specific professions are not sufficient in the Czech Republic. Furthermore, social workers drew attention to failing institutional support, which makes the situation of children even more difficult. This is particularly apparent in cases where children remain subject of institutional decision-making processes for unduly long periods of time due to bureaucratic inertia. This has negative consequences for children in foster care, for example, as due to Czech legislation they remain in temporary custody for a long time instead of being placed in families where they would live permanently. Temporary custody was introduced in the Czech Republic in 2013. The initial intention was to provide short-term care for children who could not stay with their own families. In reality, children remain in temporary custody for far too long and are often placed in temporary custody repeatedly. If it is not possible to reconstruct the biological family or to find a suitable permanent foster family, children may, in some cases, find themselves back in a residential care home.

The informants associated the failure in this area with lacking multidisciplinary and multi-institutional cooperation. In practice, this means that cases of child and adolescent clients are not subject to case management but depend on a decision of a single worker. Similarly, support from educational institutions is not adequate either according to social workers. The current structure of the educational system fails to adequately respond to the needs of child and adolescent clients of our informants and instead of contributing to their socialisation, it often deepens differences and segregates them. This applies particularly to children living in dysfunctional family environments or children with specific needs (e.g. due to a health impairment). If children have problems at school, our informants' experience indicates that it is very difficult to get help from psychologists or special teachers due to insufficient staff numbers in this sector.

The worst-rated item was the outlook for an **open future**, which received the lowest average rating of 3. What is noteworthy here is that this item was rated the same by both children and their parents, as if the sceptical view of the future of children fairly universally outweighed optimism and hope. We consider this to be one of the key empirical findings. We believe that the absence of hope and trust that our actions can influence the future, does not create a good basis for a happy future and is also detrimental to adolescents' present well-being, because it leads to merely surviving, instead of enjoying life. Professionals also pointed out that adolescents are often at a loss for what they would like to do in their lives and lack a concept of future and a concept of meaning in life. Their inability to establish personal relationships with other people, in combination with dependence on social networks, leads to isolation and loneliness. In this context, social workers also pointed out a lack of positive role models and an absence of a model where parents instil values that are socially recognised in their children. The actual role models rather encourage risk-taking behaviours, which derives from their value system that tends to exclude them from society rather than encouraging social integration and cohesion. Let us add that the views of social workers on the marked absence of this capability

coincided with those of the children themselves and their parents. Scepticism in relation to the future of children seems to outweigh optimism and hope. However, hope is the driving force for human motivation and a key protective factor building resilience to cope with the challenges of life (Frankl, 2017; Punová & Navrátil, 2013; Punová, 2015; Saleebey, 2000).

Social workers, who have direct professional experience with the children and their parents whom we interviewed, also identified a **dysfunctional family environment** as one of the key potential barriers to their clients' well-being. As regards the first question, all social workers agreed that, in the first place, children need loving and caring parents in order to live a happy life. However, as for the second question, they stated that it was precisely this capability that children were lacking the most (it is interesting that their opinions differ here from the perceptions of children and parents who reported having an abundance of this capability – 8.41). Unlike family members, social workers may not be as likely to embellish the situation and rather perceive it in the context of contemporary requirements for family functioning. The risk factors they identified included mainly incomplete family, livelihood concerns and insecure housing. Social workers also often mentioned the influence of underdeveloped parental competencies. In their opinion, adolescent clients often come from families where parents do not know how to properly raise their children. This is reflected, for example, in the fact that they take no interest in being around their children, developing their potential, building good relationships with them and understanding their needs. Social worker respondents also often referred to inappropriate parenting styles, where it is the extreme parenting positions that appear to be particularly problematic. At one extreme is the above-mentioned parental indifference towards children and at the other is an overprotective parental attitude towards children. Respondent B1 described this as follows: *"This is quite a common thing that the child is not allowed to express themselves, and that is protectiveness. For example, you won't go to the park alone, because there are bad boys who would beat you up. You'll be home by six because it's dark outside at eight and something could happen to you. This is overprotection in every sense. You aren't doing well at school, I'll go see the teacher and we'll replace her because she's a bad teacher."* With such an unhealthy and overprotective approach, the child does not develop self-reliance and the ability to cope with the challenges of life, and its resilience potential is undermined. The child does not learn to make independent decisions, act responsibly, and rather develops a strategy of dependency on other people or institutions. We believe that the child may thus become inclined towards external locus of control (Rotter, 1954).

By reflecting on the assessment of the state of life opportunities as given by all respondents, we were able to identify certain differences in perception of reality, which is very important. It is not surprising that children's and adolescents' view of what they have and what they lack in order to live a happy life differs from that of professionals who work with them since they are not in such close contact together as children and adolescents have with their parents and foster parents. This strictly professional relationship allows social workers to take a fresh perspective on the subject. It could have been down to this professional perspective that the respondents' opinions differed markedly on one potentiality, and that was the area of loving parental care. While children and parents regarded this capability as adequately fulfilled, social workers expressed a very different view of the matter. According to them, children in many cases have to cope with a dysfunctional family environment, where the family lacks adequate material resources and parents are at a loss for how to raise their children and develop their potential. It is precisely the social workers' observations that best demonstrated the importance of the role of the family in the development of children's well-being, as well as also a certain link between capabilities achieved by parents and by their children. Social workers highlighted a number of capabilities that their clients' parents were lacking. These deficiencies then weaken the potential for improving children's well-being and limit children's chances to flourish in life

(Sen, 2009). The fact that capabilities achieved by parents influence the achievement of capabilities by their children has also been proven in other research studies (Mehrotra & Biggeri, 2002; Biggeri et al., 2006).

Our research study, like other child-centred studies (Ben-Arieh et al., 2014; Casas, 2000, 2011; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Biggeri et al., 2006), has shown that the perspectives of children and parents differ, which also implies their different perceptions of capabilities. Therefore, we believe that when designing targeted services, we need to seek to understand the child client, not only the opinions and experience of parents and other professionals (which indeed cannot be underestimated either).

We are aware that our research has its limit. As it is only a small-scale qualitative study (using elements of a deductive strategy), it is not possible to draw statistically significant conclusions about the entire population of children and adolescents who use social services. We are also aware that in order to gain a deeper insight into the well-being of children and adolescents, it would be best to assess their overall situation in life, understand the reasons they use the given social services and also pay closer attention to the foster families' specifics. It would also be interesting to examine broader socio-ecological frameworks of children's and adolescents' lives, including wider economic and social factors as well as conditions in which social workers operate. We are conscious that there are many factors that affect the well-being of children and adolescents. However, it is beyond the scope of this study to cover them all.

The application of the capability approach also involves certain limits. Despite the possibility of expectations to the contrary, it is not an instrument for intervention in the clients' difficult life situations. Instead, it is an instrument for assessing this situation. Another limit is the already mentioned variability in different actors' understanding of the capabilities needed to achieve well-being. Furthermore, it is important to recognise that the capability approach views individual perceptions of one's needs as being linked to the structural conditions in which the person lives, and these conditions differ across national contexts (therefore, some capabilities are likely to be different for children and adolescents from different countries). Nevertheless, the advantage of the capability approach lies in the fact that it offers a comprehensive tool for assessing human well-being and provides a basis for possible future interventions.

5. Conclusion

In our research on children and adolescents using social worker services, we viewed needs from the perspective of capabilities, which represent an essential basis for the child's reflexive life management. Although the need to support the development of projects aiming to build children's and young people's identity is reflected in social work discourse in the Czech Republic (Navrátil & Navrátilová, 2008; Navrátilová, 2015; Punová, 2013), this rarely translates into actual practice of social work. Therefore, the aim of our research study was to answer the following question: *"What are the desirable and the actually achieved capabilities in relation to the well-being of children and adolescents using social services in the Czech Republic from their own point of view, from that of their parents or foster parents and social workers?"* Building on Biggeri et al. (2011), we focused on two areas. We first looked at the question of what the child needs in order to prosper in life, and then we investigated the extent to which the necessary capabilities are, or are not, available to children. For answers, we went to all the above-mentioned groups of respondents. In this final section, we present research implications for practice. Firstly, it has been shown that the capability approach provides social workers with a highly suitable tool for assessing children's well-being. In applying this approach, it is necessary to seek to understand (give a say to) the child and adolescent client, not only the opinions and experience of parents and social workers. Our empirical results have shown that the views of individual subjects may vary considerably. And we suppose that the very fact

children and adolescents have a different understanding of their well-being than adults allows us to point out that the capability approach can be a tool for assessing children's well-being. Because it can bring new perspectives on the topic.

The most important resource for the development of children's potentialities is a functional family environment and, on the contrary, a dysfunctional family may be considered the greatest barrier to children's well-being. Therefore, we recommend that emphasis should be placed on improving family functioning, cultivating those competencies that strengthen relationships within the family, and enhancing skills that promote family cohesion. Social workers should focus more on working with the whole family system. In working with children and adolescents, social services should to a far greater extent accentuate activities that lead to the development and cultivation of skills facilitating the transition from adolescence to adulthood for young people and allowing them to manage their daily lives. Our providers recommend, for example, leisure activities where children and adolescents learn how to spend free time meaningfully, presentations and experiential activities that help develop their personality and that provide space for the search for and construction of their identities. We also recommend that adolescents' and their parents' awareness of the relevance of education as an important predictor of adolescents' future life trajectories should be raised.

Particular emphasis should be placed on increasing adolescents' sensitivity to existential matters so that enhancing meaning in life could lead to a more open view of the future. It is precisely the pessimistic outlook on the future that has proven typical of our children and adolescents. Social workers are faced with an uneasy task to make life more meaningful for adolescents, rouse them from lethargy and call attention to the importance of hope in their lives. This is in order for them to not only survive but also thrive, in the face of everyday tasks, experiencing life with all its ups and downs.

The focus of our study was based on participatory logic and its results will serve as a contribution to the discussion with stakeholders. The aim of the study was to assess the capacities of children and look for difficulties in gaining these capabilities. Based on the study, we proposed selected recommendations that will serve as a basis/a contribution to the discussion on the topic of ensuring the well-being of children and adolescents in the Czech Republic. In the Czech context, there is no legislative definition of children's well-being, neither is there any instrument to measure children's well-being. With this research, we want to contribute to the expert debate concerning the provision of well-being to these vulnerable people.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Punová Monika: Investigation. **Navrátil Pavel:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Writing - review & editing. **Navrátilová Jitka:** Funding acquisition, Project administration, Investigation, Data curation.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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Appendix A. Supplementary material

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Appendix C

NAVRÁTILOVÁ, Jitka. Assessing the well-being of children of incarcerated parents: theoretical and methodological background. In: Navrátilová, J.; Navrátil, P., eds. *Parenting Behind Bars: The Impact of Parental Incarceration on Children's Well-being and Relationships*. Brno: Masaryk University Press, 2025, pp. 17–28.

Appendix D

NAVRÁTILOVÁ, Jitka; NAVRÁTIL, Pavel; PUNOVÁ, Monika; SMUTNÁ, Veronika.

Needs of Children with Incarcerated Parents in Their Own Voice. *Qualitative Social Work*. 2024, vol. 23, no. 1, pp. 11–25. DOI 10.1177/14733250221151030.

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Abstract

Even though Czech social policy cites child protection as one of its main priorities, there continue to be groups of children whose needs remain unnoticed. As many as forty thousand Czech children with at least one incarcerated parent have failed to gain public attention, find no support in the national legislative framework, and are only slowly attracting the attention of helping professionals. Guided by our research question—“What are the needs of children whose parent leaves the household due to incarceration?”—we describe the individual needs of children of incarcerated parents in their own voices through phenomenological optics. These needs, recorded via individual interviews and focus groups, contextualized using the theoretical methodology of the capability approach, which serves as the framework for assessing the relationship between the stated needs of these children and their overall well-being.

Keywords

Children’s needs, parenting, incarcerated parents, capability approach, children’s voices

Introduction

The children of incarcerated parents comprise a specific population threatened by a wide range of risks and negative impacts associated with parental incarceration. While interest in these children among scholars has been growing over the last 15 years in the United States and Europe (Arditti, 2012; Ayre et al., 2006; Krysik and Rodriguez, 2022; Eddy and Pehlman-Tynan, 2019), Czech

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researchers have so far paid little attention to this topic. Social workers and other helping professionals have been treating these children with no systematic approach. Some nonprofit organizations have increasingly pointed out the lack of public interest in the needs of this group of children. Their daily experience shows that even Czech children of incarcerated parents face a plethora of grave negative life experiences, consistent with findings published in research studies from abroad (Besemer et al., 2019; McGinley and Jones, 2018; Minson, 2019; Murphey and Cooper, 2015; Nuytiens and Jehaes, 2022; Poehlman-Tynan et al., 2019; Sykes and Pettit, 2019). These studies show that this group of children is subject to many grave risks, due not only to parental incarceration itself, but also the disadvantages facing their families prior to incarceration. Therefore, parental incarceration is yet another source of problems and difficulties for an already threatened group (Wakefield and Wildeman, 2018).

Even though researchers have given the children of incarcerated parents much attention—Eddy and Poehlman-Tynan (2019) note that during the years 2012–2016 a total of 260 new studies were published—scientists have come to conclude that these children remain of only minor interest. Scholars describe the children of incarcerated parents as “orphans of justice” (Shaw, 1987), “invisible”, “forgotten victims” (Bourgeois et al., 2022; Eddy and Poehlman-Tynan, 2019), and “unseen victims of the prison boom” (Petersilia, 2005). Such descriptions are all the more fitting for Czech children of incarcerated parents. Their invisibility is evidenced by lack of legal support and lack of concerted effort on the part of helping professionals. Consequently, such children “without voice” have not been allowed to participate in any phase of the criminal justice process of their parent. Even when these children are about to lose one of their most significant relationships, they have no possibility to express themselves and their needs are not taken into account.

We perceive this invisibility in the Czech context as a significant source of further danger to children’s well-being, leading not only to lack of interest in this specific group of children but also to lack of support of any kind on both the individual and structural levels. We thus perceive this deprivation of children of incarcerated parents of social support and special protection as an expression of structural oppression.

Our research developed as a response to this “invisibility.” In agreement with the research results of Nesmith and Ruhland (2008), we believe it necessary for children themselves to express what the incarceration of their parent means for them. Our research resonates with other authors who believe that creating a space for children’s voices in research is a key principle allowing us to understand the overall picture of the lives of children (Biggeri and Karkara, 2014; Navrátilová et al., 2021; Selwyn et al., 2017).

Assessing children’s needs through the capability approach

Although our study was based on a phenomenological view of life experience, we decided to compare the authentic interpretations of children with the capabilities approach (CA).

The results of our study are presented here as a source of informed practice for social workers, and we hope that they will also be perceived and especially used in this way. We first sought to understand children’s needs through their own interpretations and then compared the results with the capability approach (Sen 1999; Nussbaum, 2000). This

approach is very comprehensive and provides the basis for a holistic solution that would promote the well-being of this group. It is an appropriate framework in the field of social work that does not point fingers but strives for socially just solutions (Vysloužilová and Navrátil, 2019).

The key idea of the capability approach is to secure more just living conditions allowing people to improve their quality of life. The capability approach is the foundation of our research. As formulated by Amartya Sen (1992, 1993, 1999) and further developed by many authors, most significantly Martha Nussbaum (2000, 2007), CA has quickly gained respect in the field of measurement and assessment of children's well-being. One reason for its widespread application is its sensitivity to the social, cultural, economic, and political context of well-being (Ben-Arieh, 2010; McAuley et al., 2010).

Because the term "capability" refers fundamentally to the "concept of freedom," reflecting the range of possibilities that one has in making life choices (Palovičová, 2011: 837), it is especially important to "... Watch the relationship between the space of social possibilities and the space of individual needs" (Otto and Ziegler, 2008: 12). We find it imperative to investigate the individual needs of children of incarcerated parents because international studies show that social opportunities decrease significantly in many areas of their lives as a result of the incarceration of a parent (Scharff-Smith and Gampell, 2011) and negatively affect their well-being (Bessemer et al., 2019; Minson, 2019).

Assessing the well-being of children of incarcerated parents in the Czech Republic is a bit complicated due to the unclear definition of the well-being concept (Kornel, 2013), which has led to a narrow understanding of children's well-being in practice (Sandin, 2014). It is understood in the Czech context as assuring care and adequate guidance, nutrition, and shelter (Navrátilová, 2018; Punová et al., 2020). We therefore chose to address these questions using CA, which offers tools for the measuring and interpretation of children's needs in the overall context of their well-being.

Many authors treat the topic of measuring well-being using CA (Trani et al., 2011; Robeyns, 2005; Biggeri et al., 2006, 2011; Biggeri and Karkara, 2014). One of the most widely used instruments is a set of 10 potentialities by Nussbaum (2000). Biggeri et al. (2006) developed this concept while focusing on investigating child well-being and expanded this list into the final 14 capabilities. These are: life and physical health; love and care; psychological well-being; corporal integrity and safety; social relationships; participation; education; freedom from economic and non-economic exploitation; shelter and environment; free-time activities; respect; religious faith and identity; time autonomy; and mobility. Our research used these capabilities as they indicate which needs must be fulfilled in order for children to thrive (Biggeri et al., 2006).

The research question

Our research seeks to document children's perceptions of their needs in cases where one or both parents have been incarcerated. Using CA, we examine not only the basic nature of the needs but also assess the fulfillment of needs and whether fulfillment is even possible. We then paint a picture of the overall well-being of children of incarcerated parents. Our results are part of a larger study assessing the impact of parental incarceration

on children via seven focus groups attempting to answer the following question: “*What are the needs of children whose parent has left the household due to incarceration?*”

Methodology

This analysis is part of a larger research project, whose goal is to understand how children’s lives change when their parent(s) go to jail. It is the first research project surveying the situation of children of incarcerated parents in the Czech Republic. The research design combines qualitative and quantitative research strategies. The research began with a social survey rooted in the capabilities perspective 1/among children, 2/ among incarcerated parents, and 3/among the persons caring for these children. After the completion of the surveys, individual in-depth interviews were carried out with the respondents from each of these three groups. In order to gain a deeper understanding of children’s personal stories, focus groups were created with the aim to understand children’s needs, as told in their own child language, arising within the context of their parents’ incarceration. The results of the individual interviews and focus groups are presented in this paper. This particular study addresses this issue in terms of the needs that arise for children in this situation. Therefore, we posit the specific question, “What are the needs of children, whose parent leaves the household due to incarceration?”

We use a qualitative strategy to explore little-understood areas and gain insights into phenomena that would be difficult to describe quantitatively. Our approach is sufficiently flexible to discover the topics that are of importance to the respondents themselves. Given the fact that the condition of children with incarcerated parents is a little-researched topic in the Czech Republic, we are convinced that a qualitative research strategy is the appropriate method for exploration of this research area.

Given the fact that the aim of this part of the research project was to understand the particular experiences of children of incarcerated parents, we chose Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as the most appropriate approach. The goals of IPA studies have been fulfilled most frequently through the use of one-on-one interviews, but IPA researchers have also promoted other methods of data collection, such as work with journals or focus groups (Palmer et al., 2010). In our study, individual interviews with children were carried out first. At this stage, we carefully recorded children’s statements describing their experiences after their parent’s incarceration. We returned to the statements repeatedly to ensure that we understood the meanings that the children attached to their experiences. Analysis of these interviews yielded the topics which were then treated in focus groups (FG).

We believe that this research process contributed to a useful contextualization of individual topics and produced insightful content during the group sessions, which contributed to: “... *finding patterns of shared higher order qualities across cases, noting idiosyncratic instances*” (Finlay, 2011). It was the structured understanding of the needs of children of incarcerated parents that was a prerequisite for using the findings of the study for the benefit of children in the context of social work.

The usefulness of the focus groups and the discussion scenarios were tested in a focus group pilot study prior to the main data collection. The pilot study allowed us to assess

whether focus groups were appropriate for our target group of children and to generate new topics related to their experiences of parental incarceration. This procedure also helped us to better understand those elements of experience that were common to all the children. Data from the pilot study are not included in this paper.

The focus groups met during the first part of the camp, when the children were beginning to get to know each other. We believe that a certain level of relational formation facilitated the research process and strengthened the children's willingness to participate in the research in an open and motivated fashion.

Sample selection

The research participants were children aged 7–14 years old, who had at least one parent in jail at the time and had previously lived with that parent in the same household. These were the two main criteria for selecting our sample. The research was carried out during a weeklong summer camp, organized for these children by a nonprofit organization called Prison Fellowship International, which has been helping children and families with parents in jail. Participating children came from throughout the country.

Research ethics

The caretakers in charge of the children following the parent's incarceration were informed about the children's participation in the research. All consented in writing to the children's participation in the research. Informal consent was also asked of the participating children prior to forming the focus groups. They were given an explanation of why they were asked to take part in the research. The caretakers expressed interest in the research, especially the hope that it would produce new information to highlight the difficult situation for children and families with an incarcerated parent. Within the research, great emphasis was placed on adherence to ethical principles. All researchers followed the "Code of Ethics for Academic and Professional Staff of MU" and the research was approved by the Masaryk University Ethics Committee on 29 April 2020 (ethical approval number: EKV-2019-085).

Data collection

The children were first interviewed individually. After conducting all the individual interviews and their preliminary analysis, we proceeded to the implementation of focus groups. Because children in this age group differ greatly in their perceptions and modes of expression, we decided to divide them into focus groups based on age and sex. The appropriateness of this choice was confirmed by the pilot FG findings. As a result, seven focus groups were created, four female and three male. The female groups comprised a total of 28 girls and the male groups totaled 24 boys (52 in total). The maximum age difference within each FG was three years. However, the majority of children within each FG were not more than two years apart.

The data collection method was designed in such a way as to gather in-depth information from our youth participants about their personal experiences. The questions and method of collection were designed by the research team in cooperation with professionals in the field of the long-term care of families and children of incarcerated parents. The data collection was carried out by Masaryk University researchers with the help of Prison Fellowship International workers, who were present during the FG meetings. Their presence was crucial; the children knew them and thus the workers were able to ensure an atmosphere of safety and trust while exploring this difficult life situation. They did not actively take part in the talks with the children, however.

Focus groups

Data collection took place in seven focus groups. They were designed to create a safe space where the participants could share their life experiences and talk about their needs after their parent or parents left for prison. The information should help us to better understand the overall impact of parental incarceration on children. Within the focus groups, we translated our original research question—"What are the needs of children, whose parents leave the household due to incarceration?"—into a language the children could understand and asked: "What do children need when their mom or dad leave for prison?"

The question was formulated in a projective way so as not to evoke difficult memories. Thanks to the projective method, the children could open up to talk about what they need under the circumstances. Very quickly they also began to reflect their own experiences. We believe that the projective style of questioning gave the children a sense of security and the feeling that they were not alone in this difficult situation, and that there are other children living a similar experience. The quotations below from particular child respondents are cited according to focus group. In other words, we refer to the general characteristics of the FG (e.g., girls aged 12–14 years old), even though the answers were given by different respondents within the FG. The answers from different respondents within one FG are not attributed individually.

The FGs were recorded with parental and children's consent and then transcribed. The children received a small treat for having participated. Each FG session lasted about 60 min.

Data analysis

The data collection method was designed so as to gather in-depth information about the participants' personal experiences. The researchers were aided by professionals in long-term care for families and children of incarcerated parents in formulating the questions and designing the data collection method.

The data analysis was inspired by the interpretative phenomenological analysis approach, which focuses on personal lived experience and the ways in which people ascribe meaning to such experience (Smith et al., 2022; Smith and Osborn, 2003). Prior to the

analysis, we reflected upon our preconceptions about the needs of children of incarcerated parents (Smith and Osborn, 2003).

During pre-analysis, the transcripts of the FG discussions were read, we made notes about the expressed children's needs, and we highlighted specific quotations. The notes were classified according to Smith et al. (2022) as descriptive, conceptual, or linguistic. During this pre-analysis, the texts from all FGs were read several times and all notes and observations were recorded regardless of relevance. In the next phase, we began to systematically distinguish themes and divide them into categories. At this point, we worked mainly with our own notes and when necessary returned to the original transcripts. In the next phase, we looked for relationships between the themes, identifying theme clusters within individual transcripts and across all the transcripts collectively. Finally, we created categories and attached to them representative quotations from the FG sessions.

Research limits

We believe the fact that this topic is difficult for children may have imposed limits on our ability to conduct the research. Speaking about needs related to incarceration of a parent may have evoked troubling memories of situations connected with traumatic experiences. This influenced both individual interviews and the FG sessions; we had to be sensitive and could not pursue some lines of questioning when the discussion became too difficult for the children. This limit was, however, compensated for by the presence Prison Fellowship International staff, who were familiar to the children and gave them support during moments of recalling difficult memories.

Research results

In our study, we expanded the central capabilities as defined by the research team of Biggeri et al. (2006) by including the needs expressed by our child respondents that are related specifically to the situation of a parent being in jail. We categorize our empirical findings according to Biggeri et al. (2006) and then proceed to identify new capabilities.

When asked "What do children need when their mom or dad leaves for prison?" the children stated in the first place needs related to love and care from adults: "We need love. (...) for example from the people that we love a lot, from the rest of the family and so on, maybe from our partner or something like that" (girl 11–13 years old). Some statements made it clear that lack of support may cause very serious consequences for the child: "So that somebody helps you, when you feel bad, because you feel so bad that you may start hurting yourself or even start dying inside and so on" (girl 11–13 years old). In relation to their incarcerated parents, children spoke of their need for personal contact and relationships. Personal contact was needed, "to see him," "to see how he looks," via personal visits in the prison, as well as indirectly through letters and telephone calls. This contact is important for children because it builds the relationship and gives them joy. Such contact allows children to fulfill another need—to have information about the incarcerated parent. A girl of 11–13 years old says, "To hear his voice (...) so that they know that he exists,

(...) that he is alive". In addition to such contact, children referred to the need for physical closeness, to be able to hug the incarcerated parent. Children also expressed their need to feel attention from their incarcerated parent, for example, in the form of gifts or Christmas/Birthday cards. Here is an example of such a wish: "To have a keepsake from him. Like a letter. So that I don't forget" (girl 11–13 years old). It is necessary to note that not all of the children, however, wanted to be in contact with their incarcerated parent. Where the relationship with the parent was unsatisfying, the need for contact changed significantly. In fact, some children expressed a need to end all contact with the parent, as illustrated by the following statement: "(...) so I wrote him a goodbye letter that I don't want to see him ever again. Never in my life" (girl 11–13 years old).

In respect to care from others, it emerged that children need comforting for the strong emotions that arise when a parent goes to jail. Three girls (9–11 years old) described their sadness: "I kept crying," "Every day, every evening," "I am crying now, even just when I remember it." A boy (10–11 years old) described his emotions: "I was so sad, I will tell you openly, I was hitting the wall everywhere, I even punched the glass out of the door (...)". Immediate support and help were needed, especially when the children were present when the parent was arrested: "I was in such a shock that I didn't even know where to go at that moment (...) but the worst was the fact that they took my mom away from me just like that, I didn't even see her properly that day, I was sleeping on the floor and then I just see her all blurry that moment and then an hour later my sister comes and tells me that she was taken into custody" (girl 12–14 years old). Children often noted the need for psychological support (comfort, cheering up, humor, hopefulness) from their nuclear and extended families (most commonly mentioned are mothers and grandparents), and also from friends or a partner. A few children mentioned receiving professional help from a psychologist.

Apart from love and care, children spoke most frequently about the capability of freedom from economic and non-economic exploitation. They spoke mostly about basic needs—"money" in first place—specifically money for "food," "drink," "clothes," "toys." The children's comments about such needs were probably based on their own experiences of lack of finances, as one described: "... first, before dad left, he stole our money,... so we were completely without money, we had nothing" (boy 12–14 years old). It was not exceptional that some mentioned suffering from hunger: "We didn't have money, we didn't have anything for food" (boy 7–10 years old). In some cases, the situation was made even harder by lack of care from the parent: "(...) but my mom didn't have money for that, I was hungry, but she used the money for drugs and once I didn't have anything in my stomach for 3 days..." (girl 12–14 years old). Comments from our child respondents show that they were able to eat thanks to the help of their relatives: "I started to live a new life and I never felt hungry again since I moved to my grandmother's" (girl 12–14 years old). Needs issuing from this capability are linked to yet another capability, that of shelter and environment. Children spoke of the importance of paying rent, followed by the need to have a place "to live", to "have a home".

Through the capability of social relationships, children expressed their need to share with others (to talk it out, to confide in someone, to talk). As one girl (12–14 years old) stated: "And if I wanted to see one of my friends, and she could not be with me, so I

needed to find another closer person and find help and so make more of these closer friends”

The children also spoke about needs connected to the capability of psychological well-being. They described the need for their own strength “to make it”, to maintain one’s happiness and joy, and they speak of the need to hope for the return of the incarcerated parent, the courage to move ahead by themselves, to be alone, to have the courage to confide in someone. Interestingly, these needs were expressed mainly by girls: “The courage to stand on one’s feet and protect oneself” (12–14 years old), and similarly: “the belief that the person will once return from the jail” (11–13 years old).

In the realm of the corporal integrity and safety capability, the children noted a whole list of needs. Often the need to be safe was mentioned. Descriptions of domestic violence prior to incarceration were quite common and point to another motive for this need—to be protected from physical violence. These boys testify to the domestic violence they saw: “...when I was seven, I saw my father beating my mother” (boy 12–14 years old). “He pounded my mother against the sofa so hard the sofa broke.” (boy 10–11 years old).

A similarly difficult situation was described by a girl: “She found my dad beforehand and after they put him in prison, he is there for the fifth time I think, so she found someone else but he was beating her badly, she had a broken rib and a cracked spine” (girl 11–13 years old). Another girl describes sexual violence against her sibling: “He was beating my mother and raped my sister” (girl 11–13 years old). Other children reported being victims of domestic violence, for example: “So when I was little and my joints were growing, he took me by my legs, was beating me and threw me into my crib and said: Be quiet and sleep!” (boy 10–11 years old).

The children also speak of the need to trust in oneself, the need to have self-confidence, to not underestimate oneself and to not judge oneself: “Not to hurt oneself, not to do harmful things to oneself because of this” (girl 11–13 years old). These needs are related to the capability of respect towards self.

In relation to the religious faith and identity capability, children pointed out their need to deal with their difficult situation with the help of forces that are above them, from which they sought solace. Some children spoke of their need for a relationship with God. In their words, a relationship with God gives them strength and a positive outlook on life. This relationship replaces other missing relationships and allows the child to share experiences with someone else: “It was for the first time that I took it as if nothing was happening and then when I was praying, He was helping me” (girl 12–14 years old). And another: “Children also need to pray, when they don’t have anybody else to talk to” (girl 11–13 years old).

In reaction to the parental incarceration, many children experience the need for freedom of movement, which can be included in the capability of mobility. It is understood as freedom to go wherever they please as counterpoint to the parent that does not have that ability: “To go outside so they also would not be as in a prison” (girl 11–13 years old). Children also mentioned the free-time activities capability, which they linked with the need to relax, to have interests outside of home, the need to play and have fun, to go outside: “Or just to let the steam off for example here at this camp” (girl 11–13 years old). Other capabilities according to [Biggeri et al. \(2006\)](#) – life and physical health, education, participation and time autonomy – were mentioned by children only tangentially.

During the research, children expressed other needs arising from specific conditions resulting from their parents' incarceration. On the basis of their stated needs we inferred new capabilities:

The pet capability – many children spoke of the support they got from their pets (e.g., dog, cat, and parakeet). One of the youngest participants, a girl who was placed in the care of her grandparents after both of her parents were been incarcerated, explained this. After her beloved grandfather passed away, and the girl had to live through another loss, she drew strength from her new dog: "(...) and when granddad died, I got Charlie (dog), because I kept crying so grandma bought him for me so I would not cry" (girl 7–9 years old).

The return of the parent from jail capability was also frequently mentioned in children's statements. Children stated the wish for the return of their incarcerated parent, that the family be reunited. During the FGs, one often heard the desire that "he come home," "that s/he returns," "that we could be together." One of the youngest participants said, "Well, I am very nosy and I keep asking her every day, all the time, when she'll be free and when is the next visit" (girl 7–9 years old). Similarly, a boy of 10–11 years old said, "I would like my father to come back and that he be happy and healthy and that all of our family is healthy".

We named the last capability as not being judged for the acts of one's parents. Their fear, based in the personal experience, is linked to another need, that for trust and acceptance from those in their social environment. The fear of rejection and stigmatization even evoked a need to keep the information about the incarcerated parent a secret. One boy explains: "I don't want anyone to know about it. (...) everybody would laugh at me" (boy 10–11 years old). Similarly, a girl (12–14 years old) noted: "That's why I don't talk about it, that my parents are in prison, because then they condemn us because of that" The children expressed the desire to be treated with dignity and respect, without prejudice and stigmatization due to the parental incarceration.

Discussion

The needs specified by children reflect not only their lived reality but also their ideas about what children need in such a difficult situation.

It was [Punová et al. \(2020\)](#) and [Navrátilová et al. \(2021\)](#) who pointed out that love and care is the most important capability for children in the Czech Republic, in this case children as recipients of social services. Such findings were replicated in our research as well. It also became apparent that the children of incarcerated parents perceive the same needs as other children. The current findings are quite different from the results of [Punová et al. \(2020\)](#) and [Navrátilová et al. \(2021\)](#) as regards the capability of religious needs. While in earlier research children marginalized this capability, in our study the children of incarcerated parents perceived it as important, describing their relationship with God as something that gives them strength. One can infer that the extreme situation that the children are living in may lead them to search for resources in this area and the development of a personal spiritual life may become an important source of resilience ([Nesmith and Ruhland, 2008](#)). The children participating in our research also voiced very

specific needs which we grouped into the capability of not being judged for the acts of one's parents. The cumulative nature of the risks surrounding parental incarceration became apparent. Nesmith and Ruhland (2008) arrived at similar findings, indicating that children had a great need to keep the incarceration secret but at the same time felt a need to share the secret with someone.

Fulfilling the needs of children with incarcerated parents, expressed in terms of various capabilities, is far from easy. When a child loses the immediate physical presence of one parent, or both, he becomes an "orphan" and is anxious for the incarcerated parent(s). In this context, the desire for the parent's return and the need for a pet both become apparent. The situation may be even more complicated if the incarcerated parent is the mother. Minson (2019) shows that the children of incarcerated mothers are more likely to suffer from hidden sorrow, which can express itself as anger and aggression. Fulfilling their needs is hampered by the fact that caretakers find themselves in a difficult position. They face many problems with origins predating the sentencing of the family member (e.g., debts and criminal acts). They must also support the family financially (since incarceration means less household income) and assure contact with the parent in jail, which can involve financial and time pressures. Sometimes they experience marriage conflicts leading to domestic violence, separation, or divorce, and they must address their children's risky behavior or weakened psychological state while often being burdened by their own health problems (Arditti and Roux, 2015; Minson, 2019; Nesmith and Ruhland, 2011). As Nesmith and Ruhland (2008) uncovered, the challenges faced by caretakers can carry over to the children, who may experience fear not only for the incarcerated parent but also for those taking care of them, as they perceive adults' emotions and are weighed down by them.

Conclusion

In this study, we researched the needs of children whose parents are convicts or incarcerated. Our goal was to gather knowledge that would help to map the situation of children of incarcerated parents in the Czech Republic and to support the creation of effective strategies for their support. We have presented the results of our study here as a source of informed practice for social workers, and we hope that they will also be viewed and used in this way. After trying to understand the children's needs through their own interpretations, we compared the results with the capability approach, which we believe brings a complex view and sets the groundwork for a holistic solution that would support the well-being of this group. It is an appropriate framework in the field of social work that does not point fingers but attempts to be socially sensitive and find just solutions (Kalenda et al., 2022).

After analyzing these needs, we believe that in the context of the Czech Republic, the support for these children needs to be focused on several areas.

The needs stated by children transposed into the capability language show that these children need urgent and specific help. If we consider children's well-being only in a narrow sense, we will miss some significant problems and risks for the child, such as trauma and its consequences, stigmatization, social isolation, and, last but not least,

domestic violence and poverty, which almost every participant mentioned. It is thus clear that help for such children should include the early multidisciplinary cooperation of professionals in social work, social policy, social and special pedagogy, psychology, psychotherapy, psychiatry, and the criminal justice system. Such cooperation should assure not only basic help but also the development of skills and abilities to strengthen children's resilience (Punová 2019, 2022) and the ability to develop their own life project, within their life conditions, which has value for them (Navrátilová, 2015).

The results also demonstrate the necessity of addressing the development and cultivation of the relationship between the incarcerated parent and his/her child or children. Currently in the Czech Republic, it is uncommon for social work professionals working in prisons to focus their attention on the cultivation of the relationship between the incarcerated parent and his/her child. We believe there to be a great potential for change. Our results show that the parents are not always able to reacting to their children's needs in a manner that does not further hurt or deepen the wounds of the children. We believe that both children and, especially, the incarcerated parents need support in maintaining and developing their relationship. They occupy new roles in which we cannot expect automatic coping.

Placing the expressed needs of the children into the capability framework revealed another significant finding. The children did not explicitly express the need to be present at the criminal trial of their parent. This may be for one of two reasons. Either such a need does not exist, or children don't even think about the possibility of being present at the trial. The current practice of the Czech criminal justice system does not allow for child presence during the adjudication of the parent. We believe our research shows that, to assure the children's right of access to their parent, it is important that children are allowed a safe space within which they can, in an age-appropriate way, participate in the criminal justice processing of their parent. This would help alleviate the structural oppression from which, we believe, the children of incarcerated parents in Czech Republic suffer.

Such measures will require significant efforts at implementation from all the actors involved. Notwithstanding, every child of an incarcerated parent has the right to a full childhood that affords as much as possible of what they themselves envision and need.

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Appendix E

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Appendix F

NAVRÁTILOVÁ, Jitka; NAVRÁTIL, Pavel. The Concept of Professional Identity in Selected Approaches to the Education of Social Workers. In: Sajid, S. M.; Baikady, R.; Sheng-Li, C.; Sakaguchi, H. (eds.). *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Social Work Education*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021, pp. 133–150.



The Concept of Professional Identity in Selected Approaches to the Education of Social Workers

Jitka Navrátilová and Pavel Navrátil

INTRODUCTION

In the Czech Republic, the education of social workers as well as the practice of social work itself has undergone dramatic development in the last three decades. In the early 1990s, following the Velvet Revolution, which ended nearly 40 years of Communist ideology domination, there was a gradual renewal of the higher education of social workers, as well as a new demand for the development of social work as a specific profession (Brnula, Kodymová, & Michelová, 2014). However, this development was marked by the consequences of the previous period, which affected social work. In regard to the development of social work in the Czech Republic, Navrátil (2001) states that the socialist (i.e. communist) establishment not only caused a violent interruption of the natural development of social work, which took place in democratic societies, but if any awareness of social work or social workers persisted in society at all, it was gradually deformed and distorted ideologically. Hardly anything remained of its original professional mission or identity. This “ideologization” also meant that “institutions were not interested in professional social workers and gradually the public awareness of the

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professional profile of this vocation was fading (...)”. As a result, the awareness of the characteristics of social work disappeared and its identity became totally unclear (Schimmerlingová, 1991, p. 10).

In addition to the communist ideological ballast describing social work as an unnecessary profession, the 40 years of the liquidation of practical social work also resulted in the interruption of the training of social workers. Social change in 1989 created space for the development of social work, and questions regarding the identity of the field and the appropriate education of social workers emerged with renewed urgency. These questions became important in connection with the establishment of the Association of Educators in Social Work in 1993.

Although it could have seemed that democratic processes enabled the new development of social work, there were some critical challenges that emerged. Due to the unsuccessful negotiation among social work practitioners, educators, and employers, there was no agreement in the sector on the identity of social work in the Czech Republic (Musil, 2013). The situation was complicated by the legislative definition of social work, which led rather to the fact that social work was perceived as a social service. The absence of agreement on the nature of social work among the most important actors in social work has had its serious consequences to this day. Nearly thirty years after social work began to be retaught in the Czech Republic, it is not entirely clear what social work is, or what its domain is (Chytil, 2007; Navrátil & Navrátilová, 2008; Punová, 2012; Matulayová & Musil, 2013; Musil, 2013).

Even though ambiguities surrounding the identity of social work persist to this day, it does not mean that social work has ceased to be taught or practised. This text is based on the assumption that the lack of agreement among stakeholders on their professional identity does not mean a loss of identity, but rather a space for the construction of a plurality of identities. From this perspective, we try to reflect on how the identity of social work is shaped and formed by education. We ask this basic question: “*What types of professional identities are developed by schools educating social workers in the Czech Republic?*”

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this article, we rely on the data collected in 2010 for a study aimed primarily to find out what educational approaches were chosen by the educators of social work in the Czech Republic. In the framework of that research, a set of case studies was carried out to understand which educational models were favoured by schools educating social workers. We utilised a mixed research strategy and data were collected through questionnaires and interviews.

The selection set of the cases in the first phase involved schools training social workers and cooperating with the Association of Educators in Social Work. This association is the most important social player, which

systematically affects on the long-term the level of education of social work in the Czech Republic. Each of the schools connected with this association was approached with the offer to participate in the study. The schools, in turn, approached their teachers. Those teachers who were willing to cooperate in this research and responded positively to the offer of participation were the ones to become the subjects of inquiry. Our research consisted of 18 case studies, consisting of qualitative and quantitative data. Each of the case studies represented one of the schools that prepares social workers for their future profession.

The role of our respondents was twofold. In the first place, they acted the role of “the expert” who, thanks to their familiarity, could provide insight information about rules, structure, or school practices, as they are part of their curriculum at school. In the second role, they acted as informants whereby through the set of research questions, they expressed their attitudes, opinions, and topics that were part of the survey.

The first stage of the research helped identify the three main educational approaches that are being applied in the Czech Republic (evidence-based, competency-based, and reflective approaches) in social work education.

Although this knowledge brought us a significantly better understanding on educational situation in social work, we started to recognise that identified educational models could rely on different assumptions and images of social work, so we decided to shed more light on it. We have decided to conduct the second part of the research. This follow-up study covers a secondary analysis collected data to answer the question, what discourses and professional identities are inherently present in the educational models we had identified in 2010. At this stage, we used all the data but chose a new interpretative framework for them to help distinguish the discourses and identity types. Also, we focused on identification of the preferred values that were explicitly or implicitly present in each approach. The new interpretative perspective helped us to look at the earlier findings from a new perspective and to recognise the discourses and identities that the schools created, both deliberately and unintentionally.

In the subsequent part of the text, we will briefly introduce the educational approaches we have discovered in the first part of the research.

APPROACHES TO THE EDUCATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC (SUMMARY OF THE FIRST STAGE OF THE RESEARCH)

The question of the identity of social work is becoming increasingly difficult to answer under postmodern conditions. The social construction of the identity of social work is affected by various influences, contexts, and discourses. It is precisely the postmodern *super-diversity* that allows the formulation of different concepts of social work identities (Navrátil, 1998, 2013). However,

the plurality of identities makes it more difficult to define the aims of social work with definitive validity (at least to the extent of a particular group or territory); similarly, it does not allow for the definitive delimitation of the content of the activities of social workers (McDonald, 2006) and poses new challenges regarding the legitimacy of the field of social work (Musil 2013).

With regard to the fact that the area of university education is absolutely fundamental in forming and shaping the identity of social work (Etzkowitz & Dzisah, 2012), a particular method of education was at the centre of the empirical research, specifically “school-based approaches to the education of future social workers”. We realise that the area of education is characterised by a diversity of views as to what are appropriate ways and content of education. Over the history of social work education, many different and often contradictory approaches on how to teach and train social workers (Lishman, 2011) have evolved. Although the education at its general level focuses on “helping clients to manage to interact with their social environment”, schools begin from a variety of premises and emphasise different elements of education. Some of these approaches emphasise the importance of theoretical knowledge; others prefer the training of practical skills; while others focus on topics of self-development, critical thinking, or the ability to foster the active participation of clients in changing their difficult life situations (Navrátilová & Navrátil, 2016). The educational approach most preferred by schools shows what values are considered to be key in the preparation of social workers for their future profession.

Many authors involved in the training of social workers (Doel, Shawdon, & Morrison, 2002; Evans, 1999; Shardlow & Doel, 1996; Sheafor & Jenkins, 1982) point to the idea that the area which undergoes the most debate as to what the form of education should be is the field of professional practice. The value that individual schools attribute to practice is, in our work, also a starting point for distinguishing individual approaches to education and recognising the identities that are supported by the schools of social work. Based on the key dimensions, we differentiate individual learning approaches and consider their consequences for creating discourses and shaping the identity of social work for students.

With the array of approaches that have been created over the course of educating social workers, we have specifically focused on the three below, which concern the fundamental position in the education of social workers in the Czech Republic. In this section, we summarise the basic results of the empirical research from 2010.

Evidence-Based Approach to Education

This type of education emphasises a close *connection with scientific methods*. Although other approaches to social work education can also be seen to involve research, this approach is primarily based on the fact that the basis for

the decision-making of social workers must be *scientifically verified evidence* (Griffiths, 1999; Sackett et al., 1996; Sheldon, 2001; Webb, 2001).

Evidence-based social work is presented by a number of authors as a process in which evidence is used as a tool for deciding on the choice of intervention in the assisting process. The burden of this decision is transferred to the best possible piece of evidence (Gambrill, 1999; Gibbs & Gambrill, 1999), which it is supposed is based primarily on quantitative research (Barber, 2008; McNeece & Thyer, 2004). The most important are those interventions that have the highest level of empirical support, in contrast to those that are based on the mutual consensus of experts with an interpretative understanding of the situation (Rosen & Proctor, 2003; Shaw, 1999; Smith, 2004). Social workers are expected to be able to provide procedures and instructions that are measurable and provide the certainty of objectivist knowledge. Although some of the writers grounded in the “evidence-based” approach consider it important when creating new knowledge also to include ideas based on practical experience and wisdom (Roberts & Yeager, 2004, 2006), it is not considered to be a very reliable resource that should serve as the basis for selecting interventions.

In practice, social work proceeds systematically and rationally from assessment to intervention, followed by evaluations based on the need to choose the most effective intervention (Gray, Plath, & Webb, 2009). The research that social workers rely on in making their decision must include dual information: on the one hand, information about the problem itself, which they are confronting, about its etiology and their knowledge of it; on the other hand, information about what kind of interventions within this problem area can be used by individual types of social services. These research aids eliminate the risks associated with the uncertainty that social workers face in decision-making, and at the same time, provide them with the confidence to find functional solutions when making decisions.

“Finding evidence” in a specific way has influenced how we think about the requirements for students’ knowledge and skills. They are primarily cultivated through the students’ cognitive abilities, which enable them to successfully pass through the process of finding the best evidence.

In terms of the goal, evidence-based education and practice in social work focus on acquiring skills for using scientific resources and evidence, which serve as support for decision-making on intervention. Over the course of study, during which students should be learning to find the best evidence, Jarolímková (2004) emphasises the information literacy of the users. Students are encouraged to systematically search for sources of information about the target population and their problems in order to be able to consider their credibility, reliability, and applicability in their work with the client.

Evidence-based education emphasises the ability to argue with regard to data and other credible sources. The position of the theoretical framework is more influential in this approach than the experience acquired in practice.

Competence-Oriented Approach to Education

The competence approach has been occupying a prime position for social workers in practice and in the education of social workers for several decades. This approach to competences is evident not only in the Czech Republic but in many other European countries as well (Chytil, 2007; Kearney, 2000; Lorenz, 2007; Shardlow & Doel, 1996; Webb, 2001). Competency models based on the behavioural movement began to appear in the 1920s, pervading the education system in the 1950s (Ainsworth, 1977; Kuhlmann, 2009; Parker, 2006; Pierson, 1996), and particularly massively influencing the education of social workers in the last four decades, when it became dominant in educational programs and accreditation standards in diverse areas of education (Kuhlmann, 2009).

The main popularity of the competency models is that it provides workers with clear and specific guidelines (Kanter, 1983). The education system, which was based on developing specific instructions on how to act in certain situations, was soon applied in most areas of social work. For this to take place, a broad system of competencies had to be created to cover the wide range of activities that occupy social workers (Reid, 1992). The sense of competence is to model the capabilities and practices of the idealised actors, who behave rationally and who perfectly handle the rules that underlie a particular kind of behaviour. This involves the formalisation of basic skills (Fay, 2002). Handling certain competences means that one has mastered certain rules or norms of rationality relating to a particular activity.

The use of competence models in practice means that it is preferable to apply pre-prepared solutions for the problems that clients bring. Competence-oriented social work is not primarily concerned with deeper connections affecting the problem that the client has come to a social worker with, but rather takes it like an isolated problem that can be solved using a solution that is known in advance. As a result, social workers do not rely on critical thinking as an inherent part of their intervention. This concept relies on the fact that certain solutions simply work for certain problems. Competency models simplify the various elements of complex and dynamic social interactions and reduce their social nature to individual components (Dominelli, 1997).

In the competency approach, the core of the education is in practical lessons and training. Students learn how to respond in certain situations, acquire skills and behavioural habits. They acquire a wide range of competences focused on specific goals, learn how to respond in certain situations, acquire pre-defined skills and habits that they then improve and refine in practice. Social work is understood as a “craft”. Clark (1976, in Shardlow & Doel, 1996) points out that, although the competence approach in individual study programs is conceived in different ways, it is likely that these programs will include the following characteristics: *focus on outputs rather than the process of learning*. Students are supposed to demonstrate the proficiency

of certain pre-defined competencies. Learning methods through which these competences are achieved do not play such a role. It is the achievement of results that is essential. *Teaching and learning are defined in terms of performance.* The student must demonstrate an ability to perform that is determined in advance. There are *clear performance measurement criteria* that indicate various levels of competence. Competence-based education does not primarily address the reflection of student experience (Bogo & Vayda, 1987). It is necessary only to reflect the accuracy or inaccuracy, suitability or inappropriateness of the use of a particular skill.

Reflective Approach to Education

Reflective approaches are inspiring greater interest and high expectations in numerous areas of professional activities involving work with people. Interest in reflective processes was sparked by authors who began to cast doubt on the usefulness of linear technical thinking in applied professions, but which, in addition to academic knowledge, need to take into account the experience of professionals and their clients (Schön, 1983). Reflective approaches quickly permeated scholarly and educational texts in social work. Since the idea that a social worker when making decisions should take into account not only their experience but also the stimuli on the part of clients, reflective approaches appeared very natural in the context of social work (Chow, Lam, Leung, Wong, & Chan, 2011; D'Cruz, Gillingham, & Melendez, 2007; Ferguson, 2003; Nixon & Murr, 2006).

Although the requirements for critical reflection appeared much earlier (Dewey, 1916, 1930, 1933), its growth and expansion occurred especially during the late modern times (D'Cruz et al., 2007; Ferguson, 2008; Fook, 2002; Howe, 1994; Navrátil & Navrátilová, 2008; Payne, 2008; Parton & O'Byrne, 2000; Thompson, 2002; Thompson & Thompson, 2008) and in conjunction with the need to focus attention on the structural contexts that affect the lives of individuals and the work of social workers with clients (Chytil, 2007; Ferguson, 2008; Fook, 2002; Freire 1996; Keller, 2007; Lorenz, 2007; Payne, 2008; van der Laan, 1998). The postmodern era, which offers the opportunity to choose a variety of perspectives from which to interpret one's own life, has brought social workers not only a variety of possible interpretations and choices, but also greater uncertainty as to which of the chosen perspectives is the right approach for their work with clients.

The work of Donald Schön (1983, 1990) was very important in the practice of social workers. He identified and described two basic approaches to creating new knowledge related to working with people. The first is based on reflection after acting, that is, reflection-on-action, and the second on reflection during acting, or reflection-in-action. Within these approaches, he emphasises the importance of the work experience and practical skills that are gained in practice. Schön emphasises the idea that the art of

practice—mastery—is a better starting point for professional education than technical rationality based on systematic, theory-based knowledge acquired through academic education (Redmond, 2006).

Reflective approaches also implied a new perspective on the education of social workers, which began to focus mainly on the process of learning (Mezirow, 1985, 1991; Brookfield, 1987, 1995). As part of the learning process, students are led to reflectively assess their experiences and interpretations. This process focuses primarily on the transformation of knowledge and learning, in which there should be a critical confrontation of possible interpretations of the gained experience. Reflective education is therefore oriented to developing the abilities of future social workers to become aware of different aspects, levels and interpretations of their experience and that of their clients.

Within reflective education, there are a number of models applied to the training of social workers. In the preparation of students of social work, emphasis is placed on reflection in three main fields: (a) cognitive, (b) affective, and (c) value-based (Thompson & Thompson, 2008), although cultural reflection has also been of great consideration lately (Payne, 2008). Even though reflection plays a crucial role in the above-mentioned areas in the education of social workers, another key is the willingness to bring openness into the education process and the ability to integrate the diversity of human experience as a source of creativity and innovative practices.

In the next section, we will focus on elucidating the characteristics of discourses and identities that are part of the ideological background of individual approaches. This involves presenting the value aspects of discursive constructions as we could identify and differentiate them in the data.

DISCOURSES AND IDENTITIES OF SOCIAL WORK (SECONDARY ANALYSIS)

Based on the secondary analysis of the data, we identified four types of discourse and identity that are strengthened and created through the educational approaches described above, which are applied by schools to the education of social workers in the Czech Republic.

Discourse 1: Social Work as a (Natural) Science

As part of the secondary analysis, we identified a discourse that is anchored in scientific rhetoric. This means that the training of social workers emphasises the need to use scientific support in assessing the client's life situation and the choice of the most effective interventions. Although we have found only one piece of evidence showing social work to be anchored in scientific discourse, it is evident that there is also some permeation of such conceived social work in the education of social workers in the Czech Republic, as the following citations show.

In practical training, students are encouraged to find **research resources** about the target group they are working with. (Case study 18)

In social work, it is necessary to look at specific aspects of life situations with the **help of theory and research**. On this basis, we can indicate appropriate and objectively functioning interventions. (Case study 18)

The findings of **research and theoretical resources** should be (critically) reflected and confronted (by students) with their practical experience gained in practice and used to identify interventions. (Case study 18)

These quotations suggest that theories and research findings play an important role in determining the intervention. The value here is the objective systems of knowledge that are a frame of reference of each intervention. Knowledge in this mode tends more to being applied than that it would originate within the framework of practice. The power of the knowledge system is therefore crucial here. At the same time, some aspects of scientific discourse also appear to be part of a reflective discourse, in which, alongside theory and experience, research reflection is also of consideration.

Researcher Identity (Key Word: Proof)

In this identity model, the basic identifying feature is that social work is a science. Scientific social work is such that the social workers apply knowledge derived from basic research, as would be the case for a doctor who, on the basis of pharmaceutical research, knows that, for example, the administration of a certain substance (medicine) results in the relief of psychological stress in 90% of patients. After making the diagnosis (psychological stress), the physician would probably prescribe such a substance (medicine) to most of his patients with this diagnosis, as he would expect, based on the studies, that it would work with 90% of the patients. A part of the expert identity is a belief in empirical evidence that confirms the correctness of a process and determines the direction of intervention. The opinion of the patient is less relevant in this case because the patient does not know what substances could positively affect his illness. In such a model, there is a dominance of the positivist approach, which believes that reality can be well-described, explained, and expressed in a more or less accurate theory based on this explanation. According to this theory, trained professionals proceed and lead their intervention into the client's life situation.

Discourse 2: Social Work as a Craft

Providing unified instructions for solving client problems, specifying individual professional knowledge, and emphasising measurable behaviour, which are typical features of the competency models, have comprised the most

widespread approach to social worker education in our research. This discourse is also confirmed in the language of the competency models, which schools often describe in their curricula. For this reason, we come across expressions such as adopting/acquiring and certifying/verifying competence, a set of practical competencies, creating tools for standardisation, and learning objectives.

Examples of such expressions are shown in the following quotations:

Our school works with the concept of **practical competencies** used in the Czech Republic, which we want to develop for the needs of our school The practice, which is an integral part of social work study, requires the creation of **tools for standardization** and the improvement of quality and effectivity. (Case study 4)

Our graduates must **master the practical skills and competences** of the profession of social worker. (Case study 13)

As part of the practical training, **students acquire and demonstrate their competence** in the skills of a social worker. During their practice, these competences are reflected in actual practice ... Our ultimate goal is to **verify and evaluate the competences** acquired in the practice of social work, to verify the documents obtained during the practice, according to **predetermined criteria**. (Case study 13)

The discourse that lies behind these respondents' statements shows that social workers are expected to undergo some training that will teach them the craft of social work. There is a hidden assumption that the complex and dynamic social interactions of our clients' lives can be reduced to individual components that social workers can learn to work with by mastering certain skills or competences (see Dominelli, 1997). The value lies in the skill, in the craft-based ability to solve the problem.

Craftsman Identity (Motto: Competence and Skill)

The identity of a technical profession is related to the logic of the competence discourse. It implies that the social worker should be a skilled (social) craftsman who can employ the appropriate skills to solve the problem of his client. The social worker should be a master of empathy and communication and can apply technically correct procedures at the right time. It is not necessary to be intellectually pervasive, as it is the craftsmanship that makes the person a sought-after assistant. As a result of the brilliance of his competences, the social worker can effectively solve the client's difficulties and problems. Social work in this model of identity is similar to computer repair technicians. In the event of a problem, he is sought out to detect and correct the defective part. Similar to the scientific mode, a diagnostic routine is used to help the repairer to identify the location of the error. As a result, the social repairer can

perform the expected action, providing in-depth information, training the client in better communication, and revealing alternatives in order to achieve the desired goal.

Discourse 3: Social Work as a Philosophy

Social work, in this sense, is understood as an activity in which a social worker considers each step, and its practical and symbolic consequences. The behaviour of the social worker should be subject to the critical verification of the assumptions and circumstances that are part of their work with the client. This concept is not about the discovery of the (only) objective truth but opens up the space to take into account the various (parallel) truths with which and in which all participants and, above all, the clients live. This type of discourse in social work aims not only to support the reflection in the work of social workers but also aims to help clients reflect on their diverse life situations and be familiar with the dynamically changing structures and networks that are part of their clients' lives. The social worker must be able to learn to respond to and handle the constantly new problems, risks, and challenges generated by the conditions of the postmodern world.

Below are the statements that represent this type of discourse:

In practice, we support the professional growth of a student to become, on the basis of his efforts, a **reflective helping professional** who is able to assess a social situation and **react to the ever-changing human problems** at an individual and structural level. (Case study 18)

The emphasis on reflection is also evident from the statements of the following respondents:

The ultimate goal of practical instruction is to **teach the student to critically reflect** on the profession of social worker, leading to self-reflection as well as personal and professional growth. (Case study 13)

We strive to equip our students with theoretical tools for the **critical reflection of their own practice** and to create a context for the administrative and organizational aspects of practice. (Case study 4)

Reflective social work is the opposite of proceduralised work. This kind of discourse emphasises the assessing of the uniqueness of the client's situation and his life situation. Using reflective thinking, clients are perceived as equal partners of the social worker. Social workers are encouraged to share their insights into the life situation with their clients. The purpose of such social work is to empower people to take responsibility for their lives and learn to handle the confusing living conditions of late modernity. The value of this discourse is the ability to view diversity and practice perspectivism.

Thinker Identity (Motto: Reflection)

With this concept of identity, a social worker resembles a thinker who must explore numerous hypotheses and theories to choose the one that he can trust. The reflective way of working entails the ability to look at the client's situation as well as at possible ways of working with him from various angles and perspectives. However, the research work requires one to talk to the largest possible range of conversation partners (respondents), who could help the researcher gain completely unexpected perspectives on a situation. Likewise, the reflective social worker is not afraid to reveal entirely new ways of interpreting a situation and takes into consideration which one will provide the client with the most opportunities, possibilities, and benefit. The reflective social worker, however, does not shy away from theory or research. They are understood as other possible points of view that can explain the situation in a useful way. The reflective identity, however, values one voice in particular; that is, the voice of the client, who from the beginning, is invited to work together. The client can and should, from the beginning, take part in solving his own detective mystery. That is why the participatory principle is sometimes considered a key feature of this concept of social work.

Discourse 4: Social Work as Education

A specific discourse that does not directly relate to the initially identified approaches in education is the educational discourse. Certain schools that we have previously identified as schools promoting scientific, matrix, or craft discourse have placed into the forefront, among other principles, the value of personal maturing and student growth, and the willingness of the student to overcome the social exclusion of his clients. As such, we have labelled this set of considerations as a separate discourse.

Educational discourse aims to train experts to deepen their critical consciousness with their clients, to be sensitive to various forms of discrimination, and to conceive strategies to overcome them and develop the client's potential. In this discourse, the social worker is often defined as an agent of social change, who coordinates social groups using educational strategies to help citizens understand and participate in their social, political, economic, and cultural environment and fully integrate into society.

Educational discourse emphasises the readiness of adepts of the field to operate in a very wide variety of contexts: to have the ability to respond to the needs of all groups of people, to have access to culture and the material assets of society, and to promote their client's daily participation in society. Social work in this type of discourse has an educational character as well as an anti-discriminatory dimension. The two basic tasks of this type of social worker include education and social support in the environment. The following citations represent this discourse:

We teach students to learn to **perceive themselves as a tool of assistance** that needs to be developed. (Case study 13)

... Our goal is the **personal growth** of students. (Case study 13)

... Students must also be **able to educate** themselves outside the classroom and **provide care** for socially challenged individuals (children and youth, abandoned individuals, people in crisis situations). (Case study 13)

The goal is the personal growth of students so that they are **able to stimulate their clients**. (Case study 13)

Educator Identity (Motto: Knowledge and Growth)

The educator identity can be compared to an orchardist. The orchardist is characteristic by the ability to breed trees, to promote their growth, occasionally prune them, and provide water or other necessary external resources. The aim of the orchardist is, however, to ensure that the tree has healthy growth and makes use of its potential. Similarly, educative social workers attaching to this concept of social work, use their skills to stimulate the development of individuals, groups, and communities. They want to release the client's internal resources and possibly remove external limits in an environment that prevents them from realising this.

Discourses—Summary

Each of the discourses represents a different image of the profession. In the case of scientific discourse, social work is depicted as an expert profession. Competence (skills) discourse portrays social work as a profession of technically competent experts who solve life's problems. Reflective discourse represents the vision of social work as a thinker profession in which the best solution is achieved by proper thinking. Scientific discourse sets out the ideal of a social worker as an expert who "knows" and can obtain valid information. Skills discourse formulates the idea of the ideal worker as a technically competent craftsman who can solve problems. The ideal of the philosophical discourse is an expert striving to understand the multifaceted dimensions of the client's situation. Educational discourse creates a picture of social work as a profession whose aim is to empower individuals and communities, as well as their growth and development of potential.

CONCLUSION

Our study was to answer the question: "*What types of professional identities are developed by schools through the educational approaches applied to the training of social workers in the Czech Republic?*" Based on secondary analysis, we

Table 9.1 Overview of discourses and identities of social work

	<i>Scientific discourse</i>	<i>Craftsman discourse</i>	<i>Philosophical discourse</i>	<i>Educational discourse</i>
General points of view	Social work as science	Social work as craft	Social work as reflective thinking	Social work as education
Key values	Proof	Competence	Thinking	Power/grow
Approach to education	The goal is to educate an expert who knows what is best for the client	The goal is to educate an expert who can technically solve the problem	The aim is to educate an expert who seeks understanding in the context	The aim is to educate an expert who can educate others
Identity in short	<i>Scientist</i>	<i>Craftsman</i>	<i>Thinkers</i>	<i>Educator</i>

Source: Own research

have newly interpreted the data of our own empirical survey, which originally dealt with the concept of social worker education. Based on the reanalysis of these data, we were able to identify four main images or identities of social work to which Czech educators are trying to orientate their education.

These are identity models that can be referred to in short as (1) scientist identity, (2) craftsman identity, (3) thinkers identity, and (4) educator identity. For each identity, we have tried to outline its general starting point, key value, approach to education and concept of professional identity. We briefly summarise the findings that are presented in Table 9.1.

A key aspect of scientific discourse is the ability of the social worker to find evidence that enables him to conceive the best possible intervention. Craftsman discourse then assumes that it is essential that the social worker master the skill as a craft that will provide the client with the best assistance. Philosophical discourse is based on the premise that the best service can only come from reflective thinking. The discursive starting points are also reflected in the image of appropriate social worker education. The educational approach in social work emphasises the aspect of knowledge transfer, which empowers clients and promotes their growth.

It is not possible to clearly identify which of the social worker identity types prevail in the Czech context. From the point of view of our research, however, this is not absolutely essential. We wanted to report on the spectrum of identities that have developed in our environment, as we believe it is very important to have an awareness of what type of social worker identity we are promoting in the educational process. This is not merely about having a technically adequate study structure, but rather of further identifying the values that are related to the preferred type of social work identity.

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