ERC Consolidator Grant 2023

Part B2

Section a. State-of-the-art and objectives

The under-representation of men, and specifically of men in their role as fathers, in various social services is an ongoing, persistent, and harmful phenomenon. While a growing body of evidence illustrates the advantages fathers, children, and families gain from the father's participation in the child's life, and specifically from their participation in social work interventions (Brewsaugh et al., 2018; Brewsaugh & Strozier, 2016; Burrus et al., 2012; Malm et al., 2006; Velázquez et al., 2009), fathers' engagement with the services remains marginal (Brown et al., 2009; Maxwell et al., 2012; Scourfield et al., 2015).

Research on father engagement with the social services has achieved impressive milestones in the last decade, but three gaps in existing literature still remain: the absence of a comprehensive theoretical framework, the lack of attention to relational and systemic aspects of father engagement, and the sidelining of questions of agency. The proposed project aims to contend with these gaps by employing theories of care and capabilities to the issue of father engagement.

To achieve this aim, the proposed project follows a comparative, multi-layered research design. The research will take place in five welfare states, each representing different welfare and familization regime. In each case, the project will examine four levels of policy toward fathers in the social services: existing policy towards fathers; the attitudes of policymakers and bureaucrats; actions of street-level bureaucrats; and the perspective of the fathers themselves.

This proposal meets the European Research Council's principle of *High Risk, High Gain*, as it has the potential to revolutionize our understanding of the engagement of fathers in the social services. By offering an encompassing theoretical framework explaining fathers' engagement, this project also offers substantial theoretical contributions to the fields of social work research and social policy research. In addition, this proposal has the potential to offer new methods of intervention, which promise to have a substantial effect on the welfare of children, fathers, mothers, and families. The innovative nature of the proposal also leads to the *high risk* involved in it – the combination of an innovative theoretical framework with a complex, multi-dimensional, and comparative research design.

*Current State-of-the-Art*

The interest in the level and nature of fathers' engagement with the social services has risen significantly in recent decades. In the past, the services adopted the assumption that mothers hold sole responsibility for their children, and therefore worked almost exclusively with mothers. However, since the 1990s, and following changing family structures and cultural perceptions, scholars, policymakers, and practitioners alike have become more aware of the importance of working with fathers – not only when they pose a risk to families, but when they have the potential to be an asset, as well (Baum, 2015, 2017; Brewsaugh & Strozier, 2016; Brown et al., 2009; Featherstone, 2013; Maxwell et al., 2012).

Following these changes, an emerging body of research now stresses the advantages fathers and fathers' involvement provide for child welfare. Fathers' involvement in their children's lives has been proven to have a positive influence on their cognitive, behavioural, health, and education outcomes (Heinrich, 2014; Horn & Sylvester, 2002; Tully et al., 2017). In the field of social services interventions, including fathers in interventions has proved to have a range of positive effects on the effectiveness of these interventions (Brewsaugh et al., 2018; Brewsaugh & Strozier, 2016; Burrus et al., 2012; Coakley, 2013; Malm et al., 2006; Velázquez et al., 2009; Wingrove et al., 2016).

Research on the low level of engagement of fathers with the social services has, to date, focused on three central strands of research: examining the experiences of fathers interacting with welfare systems from their own point of view, critically analyzing the discourse of social workers regarding fathers, and assessing specialized, father-specific intervention programs.

The first strand seeks to give voice to fathers that are clients or potential clients of the welfare system. Responding to critique on earlier research as ignoring the subjectivity of fathers and treating them instrumentally (Featherstone, 2013), these studies seek to bring forward and represent the voice of fathers, especially fathers from excluded groups (See, for example, Gupta & Featherstone, 2015; Philip et al., 2018; Storhaug & Sobo-Allen, 2017). These studies tend to adopt either phenomenological qualitative methodologies, focusing on the experiences of fathers, or mixed-methods and quantitative methods, shedding light on the prevalence and distribution fathers' perceptions.

Despite the limited number of studies adopting these directions, and the work needed in this area (Gupta & Featherstone, 2015; Haworth & Sobo-Allen, 2020), important developments have been already made in bringing forward the voice of fathers. However, a major inherent theoretical drawback of this direction is its difficulty in accounting for relationality, as these studies focus on the subjectivity of fathers, rather than on their relationships. Another weakness of this direction is the lack of attention to the balance of power, as the focus on the voice of fathers may obscure other disfranchised voices, specifically that of mothers and children.

The second s trand of research focuses on the views and perspectives of social workers. These studies mainly use critical discourse analysis methodologies and seek to analyze social workers' positions toward fathers and uncover stereotypes, biases, and misconceptions.

Substantial findings have been made in this strand of research, indicating problematic views of workers that present an obstacle to father cooperation (Brown et al., 2009; Nygren et al., 2019). However, one main theoretical drawback is its inherent reliance on the phenomenology of individual social workers, which moves the focus from the systemic and organizational levels. The focus on discourse analysis of interviews is very effective in uncovering problematic perceptions and misconceptions but is less useful in identifying systemic or organizational issues originating in the organizational structure of the services or in the prevailing work culture.

The last strand focuses on father-oriented programs – programs that are aimed specifically at fathers, trying to enhance their engagement with their children and their parental capabilities. Many of these studies tend to adopt a quantitative methodology, assessing programs' achievement against a control group of fathers or against a known baseline; others prefer qualitative or mixed-methods methodology (Cowan et al., 2009; Gordon et al., 2012; Holmes et al., 2010; Piotrowska et al., 2017; Symonds, 2020).

Studies in this area have contributed significantly to conceptualizing better practice with fathers. However, these studies suffer from two main drawbacks. First, they offer a narrow focus. The nature of this strand limits these studies to programs that are specifically father-focused. While these programs are important, they do not represent the majority of interactions of fathers with the welfare and child protection systems, which occur in more general, family-oriented settings. Moreover, in some of these studies – although definitely not all – one can identify a tendency to uncritically adopt the program's assumptions and perspectives rather than challenge them.

Thus, as demonstrated above, substantial work has been done in the field. However, the abovementioned drawbacks point to three main gaps in the literature on father engagement.

The first problematic gap is the lack of attention and theorization of systemic and relational aspects. All three strands provide a comprehensive outlook for the specific phenomenon they are examining, but – as elaborated above – they fail to provide sufficient attention to substantiative, empirical interconnections within the field – relational and systemic aspects of families and of welfare systems.

Both fathers and workers are parts of broader systems and must be understood in relation to these systems. Fathers – that is, men in their capacity as parents – are parts of families, which are relational institutions – that is, understanding their internal and external relationships is essential to the understanding of the family, no less than understanding each member by themselves (Collins et al., 2012; Saraceno, 2011, 2018). Turning our view to the worker, it is clear that they cannot be seen as atoms and must be viewed as part of a broader system. Social work is most often embedded within bureaucratic, state-oriented settings. Within these settings, the worker does not operate independently. They are subject to regulations and work procedures and are part of broader work culture (Kuronen, 2020; Montigny, 2021).

Therefore, anyany understanding of father engagement must be relational and systemic in nature and be able to relate not only to the father-worker relationship but also to the more complex relationship between a multitude of actors, including – but not limited to – fathers, mothers, and children on the one side, and the worker as a representative of a more comprehensive bureaucratic organization on the other.

A second gap in the existing literature is that of agency. All three strands emphasize analysing obstacles that prevent fathers from accessing the services and the system's reluctance to overcome these obstacles. Fathers' reluctance to access the services is an acknowledged fact but is seldom integrated into the research framework. The tension between the fathers' and the system's reluctance raises questions of agency – whose responsibility is it to engage fathers in care (and to care in practice)? Can we expect the services to engage fathers that are not interested in caring? A theoretical framework seeking to encompass all aspects of father engagement must relate to these questions, often raised as an objection to promoting father engagement.

The third and most substantial gap – that can be seen as the source of the previous two -is the absence of a theoretical framework providing a common ground for the three strands described above. Studies in each of the strands tend to share theoretical and methodological assumptions. However, these assumptions – some of which I discuss – are often left implicit. Moreover, the distinct theoretical assumptions of the different strands are not compatible with each other. The proposed project seeks to adopt a theoretical framework that will encompass the multitude of aspects and research directions in the field, thus offering a more holistic view of father engagement and accounting for relational, systemic, and agentic perspectives.

**Theories of Care and Capabilities**

The proposed research seeks to attend to these three problematic aspects in existing research – the lack of an encompassing theoretical framework, a proper theorization of relational and systemic aspects, and sufficient attention to questions of agency – by applying theories of care and capabilities to the field of father engagement.

Care, as a theoretical construct applying to the social organization of meeting the physical and emotional requirements of dependent adults and children, has been the subject of extensive research and theorization in recent decades (Daly, 2021; Daly & Lewis, 2000; Sainsbury, 2013). The relationship between fatherhood and care have been examined and theorized though less extensively than mothers' (Doucet, 2020; Doucet & Lee, 2014). However, theories of care have yet to be applied to father engagement with the welfare system.

Mary Daly's recent theorization conceptualizes care as the intersection of four vectors: need, relations/actors, resources, and values (Daly, 2021, p. 113). The vector of need refers directly to answering the requirements of dependents. Following Fraser (1989), Daly (2021, 2022) stresses that need is not merely an objective fact. Common understandings of need are interpreted in processes that are both political and selective in nature, legitimizing and prioritizing certain types of needs over others.

The vector of relations/actors links to the relational aspect of care – focusing on relationships and processes rather than individuals and situations. Relating to actors draws attention to the role of agency in these relationships – a critical question in the context of father engagement. The focus on relations and actors allows inquiry on who is expected to answer needs, who supports them, and how do they interact with each other. In the context of father engagement, this vector begs us to look at divisions of care work between parents, the support caregivers receive, and their actions (or lack thereof).

The question of resources draws attention to the network or system that supports caregivers in their work. This includes supplying material resources such as time and money and non-material resources such as emotional support. Thinking about care and father engagement in terms of resources leads one to consider structural and organizational issues, as those govern and dictate access to resources, specifically to money and time (specifically of professionals).

The last vector, ideas and values, raises questions on the ideational and moral levels. It questions the ideational and moral framing of care, philosophies of care, and perceptions regarding the value of care. The vector of ideas and values looks at the attribution of meaning to care, with special regard to different meaning and value attributed to different types of care, based on the identity of the care receiver and giver and the mode of care.

Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum's concept of Capabilities (Nussbaum & Sen, 1993; Sen, 1995) may offer a relevant framework for this theoretical discussion. The theory of capabilities is concerned with people's freedom to live a life they value, focusing on the actual rather than theoretical sense. Capabilities concentrate on what people can effectively achieve – considering not only their resources, but the entirety of their cultural and social contexts (Robeyns, 2017; Sen, 1995; Yerkes et al., 2020)

The concept of capabilities expands the understanding of agency in two ways. First, it puts agency in an institutional and systemic perspective, stressing the importance of resources and means for the actualization of capabilities, and therefore of agency (Hobson et al, 2011), in contradiction to social workers' tendency to focus on parents – including fathers – parental capabilities and motives (Featherstone et al., 2018; Gupta, 2017; Krumer-Nevo, 2016, 2020; Saar-heiman & Gupta, 2019). Secondly, the concept of capabilities recognizes the importance of the cognitive level to questions of agency. It broadens the discussion from looking at what a person wants but cannot achieve to how they understand their will, desire, and state of efficacy, and the ways in which the institutional and ideational context limits a person's cognitive ability to shape them (Hobson et al, 2011). As fathers will and motivation are central to the understanding of their engagement, this aspect of the theory is highly relevant.

Thus, the proposed project aims to propose a comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding father engagement with the social services by employing theories of care and capabilities. By doing so, it aims to fill in the three gaps presented above: the absence of a comprehensive theoretical framework, the lack of attention to relational and systemic aspects of father engagement, and the sidelining of questions of agency.

**Research Questions and Objectives**

To achieve the goals stated above, the **main** **research question** leading this project will be **What elements contribute to the capability of fathers to participate in the care provided to their children and families through the welfare and child protection systems, in various structural and cultural settings**? Following the theorization of care and capabilities described above, and specifically Daly's (2021) vectors of care, this question will be further divided into these secondary research questions:

### Need

1. How do fathers, workers, and other stakeholders in the child protection and welfare systems perceive the needs of children in relation to fathers?
2. How do fathers, workers, and other stakeholders in the child protection and welfare systems perceive the needs of fathers in caring for their children?

### Relations/Actors

1. How does the position of **fathers as actors** within a **relational network of actors** contribute to their capability to participate in welfare interventions?
2. How does the **relational network within workplaces** affect social workers' interactions with fathers?

### Resources

1. How do **resources** **available to fathers** interact with their agency and capability to participate in welfare interventions?
2. How does the availability of **resources within welfare and child protection systems** interact with their ability to support father participation?
3. How do **institutional contexts** affect fathers' motivation to participate in welfare interventions?

### Values

1. How do **cultural values** affect the engagement of the welfare and child protection systems with fathers?

To answer these questions, the proposed project will follow these objectives:

1. To analyze **Top-Down Policy** toward father engagement in the selected countries.
2. To analyze cultural and organizational factors affecting **social workers' interventions** with fathers.
3. To analyze **Fathers' perceptions and views** regarding their interaction with the welfare system.

These objectives will be pursued using a comparative, multi-layered research design. The project will take place in five countries, representing five care regimes – – Liberal (United Kingdom), Mediterranean (Israel), Post-soviet (Poland), Social-Democratic (Finland), and Conservative (Germany). In each country, the local research team will conduct research on four stages:

1. ***Policy And Cultural Analysis*** – Analysis of existing policies towards father engagement and cultural factors affecting it
2. ***Top-Down Policymaker Analysis*** – focusing on perceptions and attitudes of policymakers and top-level bureucrats, analysing their effects on field level practices.
3. ***Institutional Ethnography*** - focusing on street-level bureaucrats, the organizational framework they are working in and their tendencies and possibilities regarding working with fathers
4. ***Interviews with Fathers*** – focusing on the way fathers experience the welfare and child protection systems.

The relationship between the stages, objectives, and research questions is elaborated in Table 1.

Table 1 Stages, Objectives, and Research Questions

| **Stage** | **Objectives** | **Corresponding Research Questions** | **Stage-adapted research questions** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| (S1) Policy and Cultural Analysis | (O1) Top-Down Policy | (RQ6) resources within the systems | What resources are available to the relevant systems in general, and to father engagement specifically? |
| (RQ7) institutional contexts | What are the country- and region-level institutional characteristics that are relevant to father engagement? |
| (RQ8) Cultural Values | What are the relevant country- and region-level cultural values that are relevant to father engagement? |
| (S2) Top-Down Policymaker Analysis | (O1) Top-Down Policy  (O2) cultural and organizational factors | (RQ1) Stakeholders' perceptions of children's needs | How do macro-level stakeholders perceive the needs of children in relation to fathers? |
| (RQ2) Stakeholders' perceptions of father's needs | How do macro-level stakeholders perceive the needs of fathers in caring for their children? |
| (RQ4) relational network within workplaces | How do top-level bureaucrats and policymakers affect the intra-workplace relational network and, through it, social workers' interactions with fathers? |
| (RQ6) resources within the system | How do macro-level stakeholders perceive the availability of relevant resources and its effect on father engagement? |
| (RQ7) institutional contexts | - How do macro-level stakeholders perceive the institutional contexts that affect fathers' motivation to participate in welfare interventions?  - How do macro-level stakeholders perceive their effect on these contexts, and in what ways do they aspire to change them? |
| (RQ8) Cultural Values | In what ways do cultural values manifest in macro-level stakeholders' discourse? |
| (S3) Institutional Ethnography | (O2) cultural and organizational factors | (RQ1) Stakeholders' perceptions of children's needs | How do workers and other mezzo-level stakeholders perceive the needs of children in relation to fathers? |
| (RQ2) Stakeholders' perceptions of father's needs | How do workers and other mezzo-level stakeholders perceive the needs of fathers in caring for their children? |
| (RQ3) Fathers' relational network | How do workers and other mezzo-level stakeholders perceive fathers' position within familial networks and their effect on their engagement? |
| (RQ4) relational network within workplaces | How does the relational network within workplaces affect social workers' interactions with fathers? |
| (RQ5) resources available to fathers | - How do workers and other mezzo-level stakeholders perceive the relationship between family resources and father engagement?  - how does the organization take into account family resources when dealing with father engagement? |
| (RQ6) resources within the system | How does the availability of resources within welfare and child protection systems interact with their ability to support father participation? |
| (RQ7) institutional contexts | - How do macro-level institutional contexts shape organizational settings?  - How do mezzo-level institutional contexts affect fathers' engagement? |
| (RQ8) cultural values | How do wider cultural values manifest in organizational culture relevant to father engagment? |
| (S4) Interviews with Fathers | (O3) Fathers' perceptions and views | (RQ1) Fathers' perceptions of children's needs | How do fathers perceive the needs of children in relation to fathers? |
| (RQ2) Fathers' perceptions of father's needs | How do fathers perceive their needs in caring for their children? |
| (RQ3) Fathers' relational network | How does the position of fathers as actors within a relational network of actors contribute to their capability to participate in welfare interventions? |
| (RQ5) resources available to fathers | How do fathers perceive the effect of their available resources on their engagement with the services? |
| (RQ6) resources within the system | How do fathers perceive the availability of resources in the system and its effect on the system responsitivity to their engagement? |
| (RQ7) cultural values | How are cultural values reflected in fathers' discourse on their interaction with the welfare systems? |
| (RQ8) institutional contexts | How do fathers perceive the institutional contexts within which they operate and their effect on their interaction with the system? |

Expected Outcomes and Impact

The proposed project is expected to have ground-breaking implications both for academic research and for policy design, in the spirit of *High-Risk, High-Gain* promoted by the European Research Council.

It involves *High-Risk* because of the innovative theoretical framework, on the one hand, and the complex methodological approach on the other. The adoption of a care and capabilities oriented theoretical approach requires shifting our focus from the personal level to an ecological approach concentrating on macro, mezzo and micro elements, leading to the need in comparative multilayered design. Thus, this project offers a complex and research-intensive research design to support an innovative theoretical approach.

On the *High-gain* aspect, this project offers substantial gains both on the academic-theoretical level and on the practice-oriented level. On the academic level, the impact of the proposed project extends beyond revolutionizing the field of research on father's engagement in the social services. It promotes our understanding of family-related intervention in the broader field of social work on the one hand, and the role of fathers in familization regimes on the other.

Regarding the issue of fathers' engagement with the social services, the proposed project promises to provide an encompassing theoretical framework for understanding the level and nature of fathers' engagement. Such a framework, sorely lacking in current research, will serve as a point of reference for future studies, not only providing new avenues for research, but also combining existing insights and enabling research into their interconnections and interdependencies.

However, this project has the potential to further revolutionize adjactent, broader fields – that of research on social work intervnetions and on comparative care regime analysis. Applying theories of care and capabilities – common to the more macro understanding of regime analysis – to the field of father engagement, which have hitherto been analysed using micro-level focused approaches, have the potential to bring these fields together, offering new pathways to macro and comparative analysis of micro-level interventions.

The expected impact of the proposed project is not limited to the academic world. As demonstrated above, the absence of fathers from the services is a cause for concern for academics, policymakers and practitioners alike. A theoretical framework that focuses on systemic and relational aspects of father exclusion is a first step towards addressing structural and organizational barriers to father engagement, to the benefit of fathers, children, mothers, and families.

**Section b. Methodology**

The proposed project aims to disentangle the effects of the various vectors of care, as described by Daly (2021), on the engagement of fathers with the social services, and specifically social systems in the fields of family and child welfare and child protection, as detailed in research questions RQ1 through RQ8. To achieve this, through the accomplishment of objectives O1-O3, the proposed project follows a multi-tier comparative research design, consisting of five case-studies in five countries, each consisting of four different stages.

The comparative research design aims to reflect the diversity of institutional settings which set the framework for the work of the social services in industrialized countries, on the one hand, and their respective cultural contexts, allowing the unfolding of different arrays of social forces in different cultural and institutional contexts.

**Case Selection**

The case selection will aim at representing the variety of cultural and institutional contexts existing across European welfare states. Following this aim, the proposed project adapts a case-oriented comparative methodology, best suited for in-depth understanding of context (dela Porta, 2008). In this research strategy, case selection is aimed at representing 'ideal types', which, in the proposed project, translate into groups of countries with similar characteristics.

As discussed above, macro-level research on father engagement is limited (See also Perez-Vaisvidovsky, Forthcoming; Nygren, 2019), and no such ideal types are recognized. Therefore, one must turn to broader classifications, proposing ideal types of wider policy issues. Such classifications can be found in the field of welfare regime analysis.

Facing the wide variety of welfare state typologies, and specifically of familization regime typologies, this research proposal follows an expansive approach to case selection, aiming to select cases that represent accepted regime differences, to the most substantial possible effect. Thus, the case selection is based on Esping-Andersen (1990) classic typology of three welfare regimes – Liberal, Social Democratic, and Conservative. To represent changes in research and in welfare state development the Post-Communist (Fenger, 2007) and Mediterranian (Gal, 2010) regimes are also included. These regimes were cross-referenced against the literature on familization regimes (Specifically Bambra, 2007; Cho, 2014; Kurowska, 2018; Leitner, 2003) to ensure that the different cases selected represent differing familization regimes.

Following this analysis, five countries were selected, each being a case for study. For each country, initial contact was made with a leading expert on family policy based in the specific country, who has expressed agreement to serve as a local expert, providing advice on the country and serving as a basis for recruiting a local research team. These countries and experts include:

Table 2 - Countries and local experts

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Regime** | **Country** | **Scholar** | **Institution** |
| **Social-Democratic** | Finland | Dr. Petteri Eerola | University of Jyväskylä | |
| **Liberal** | The United Kingdom | Prof. Margaret O’Brien | University College London | |
| **Conservative** | Germany | Prof. Ulrike Urban-Stahl | Freie Universitat Berlin |
| **Post-Communist** | Poland | Prof. Anna Kurowska | University of Warsaw |
| **Mediterranean** | Israel | Dr. Nadav Perez-Vaisvidovsky (PI) | Ashkelon Academic College |

**Preliminaries** (Months 1-3) [[1]](#footnote-2)

For each country, the first step would be the establishment of a local research team, reporting to the PI and to a central coordinating research officer, based in the Host Institution in Israel. Each team would then fulfill the following stages:

**Stage I – Policy and Cultural Analysis** (Months 4-6)

This stage contributes to fulfilling objective *O1* – top level policy. The research questions for this stage will be:

* What resources are available to the relevant systems in general, and to father engagement specifically? (Based on RQ6. See table 1 for further details)
* What are the relevant country- and region-level cultural values that are relevant to father engagement? (Based on RQ7)
* What are the country- and region-level institutional characteristics that are relevant to father engagement? (Based on RQ8)

To address these questions, this stage will aim at analysing the macro-level characteristics of each country in the sample. These characteristics include cultural views regarding fatherhood, families, and the father’s role in the household; a summary of existing research regarding familization and other gendered aspects of the welfare state; Description of the social services system, with an emphasis on family- and child-oriented services; and a summary of existing research on fathers’ engagement in these services.

Specifically, this stage will define the services to be included in the project for each country. The criteria for inclusion will be services that supply frontline social services to children and families, rather than specialist services, and interact mainly with parents. Another decision to be taken at this stage regards regional focus – as some of the countries in the sample have multi-level governments or federal organization, the local experts and the PI will focus on one regional unit and will analyze policy regarding this specific unit.

The methodology employed in this stage will be secondary literature review and policy analysis.

*Milestones:*

1. *[[2]](#footnote-3)Month 3: conclusion of stage I*

*Deliverables:*

1. *[[3]](#footnote-4)Month 3: a report on existing policy and research*

**Stage II – Top-Down Policymaker Analysis** (Months 7-15)

This stage further contributes to fulfilling objective *O1* – top level policy, and O2 – cultural and organizational factors. The research questions for this stage will be:

* How do macro-level stakeholders perceive the needs of children in relation to fathers? (Based on RQ1)
* How do macro-level stakeholders perceive the needs of fathers in caring for their children? (Based on RQ2)
* How do top-level bureaucrats and policymakers affect the intra-workplace relational network and, through it, social workers' interactions with fathers? (Based on RQ4)
* How do macro-level stakeholders perceive the availability of relevant resources and its effect on father engagement? (Based on RQ6)
* How do macro-level stakeholders perceive the institutional contexts that affect fathers' motivation to participate in welfare interventions? (Based on RQ7)
* How do macro-level stakeholders perceive their effect on these contexts, and in what ways do they aspire to change them? (Based on RQ7)
* In what ways do cultural values manifest in macro-level stakeholders' discourse? (Based on RQ8)

The objective of this stage is to analyze the positions, perceptions, and intentions of policymakers and top-level bureaucrats regarding the level and nature of the engagement of fathers in the social services, aiming to provide a better understanding of current policy towards fathers. This objective will be achieved by conducting an in-depth top-down policy analysis into the services identified as relevant in stage I. The analysis will include the ways father engagement is perceived by policymakers, top bureaucrats and other stakeholders in the policy arena; their perceptions on desired policy towards father engagement; and their views regarding the positive and negative elements in current policy.

This stage will employ in-depth, semi-structured interviews with policymakers, bureaucrats in positions of influence over relevant policy, and other stakeholders in relevant policy arenas. Interviews will follow a pre-designed interview guide, which will combine general questions common to all countries with country-specific questions corresponding relevant information gathered at stage I.

Research participants will be sampled using a snowball research design. Relevant stakeholders from all relevant organizations and levels of government identified at stage I will be accessed and interviewed. As part of the interview, participants will be asked to identify other potential participants with relevant information. Sampling and interviewing will commence until the specific research team agrees that all relevant stakeholders have been interviewed. Estimated number of participants per country: 15-20.

In addition to interviews, archival data such as documentation of laws and regulations, internal procedures and other data deemed relevant by the research team will be collected.

The collected data will be analyzed using thematic content analysis, identifying central themes recurring in interviews and their significance regarding the engagement of fathers in the variety of relevant services.

*Milestones:*

1. *Month 12: conclusion of data collection stage*
2. *Month 15: conclusion of data analysis stage*

*Deliverables[[4]](#footnote-5):*

1. *Month 12: a report on top-down policy towards fathers, combining data collected on stages I and II.*
2. *Month 15: a thematic analysis of stakeholders positions and perceptions*
3. *Month 18: Scholarly manuscript on top-down policy submitted to a journal (one manuscript per country)*
4. *Month 21: Comparative scholarly manuscript on top-down policy submitted to a journal*

**Stage III – Institutional Ethnography** (Months 16-39)

This stage contributes to fulfilling objective *O2* – organizational factors affecting social workers' interventions. The research questions for this stage will be:

* How do workers and other mezzo-level stakeholders perceive the needs of children in relation to fathers? (Based on RQ1)
* How do workers and other mezzo-level stakeholders perceive the needs of fathers in caring for their children? (Based on RQ2)
* How do workers and other mezzo-level stakeholders perceive fathers' position within familial networks and their effect on their engagement? (Based on RQ3)
* How does the relational network within workplaces affect social workers' interactions with fathers? (Based on RQ4)
* How do workers and other mezzo-level stakeholders perceive the relationship between family resources and father engagement? (Based on RQ5)
* how does the organization take into account family resources when dealing with father engagement? (Based on RQ5)
* How does the availability of resources within welfare and child protection systems interact with their ability to support father participation? (Based on RQ6)
* How do wider cultural values manifest in organizational culture relevant to father engagment? (Based on RQ7)
* How do macro-level institutional contexts shape organizational settings? (Based on RQ8)
* How do mezzo-level institutional contexts affect fathers' engagement? (Based on RQ8)

The objective of this stage is to analyze the work procedures, routines, norms, and standards of street-level bureaucratsaffecting the level and nature of the engagement of fathers in the social services. The methodology employed to achieve this objective will be an institutional ethnography of frontline social services aimed at the services identified as relevant in stages I and II. The underlying assumption of this methodology is that institutional practices and work procedures are not neutral, but are embedded in ideology. This ideology shapes the actions of both the employees of the organization and the services it provides for its customers. Institutional ethnography is designed to expose this ideology and uncover these implicit assumptions, and it does this through observations, interviews, and other ethnographic procedures of data collection. Institutional ethnography is aimed at uncovering not only the explicit ideologies and discourses people believe guide their actions, but also the implicit ones embedded in their practices (Campbell & Gregor, 2004; Smith, 2013). Thus, the use of institutional ethnography is expected to uncover implicit assumptions embedded in the work of the social services, both those based on traditional gender roles and those based on managerial discourse, as described above.

For each country, the PI and the local team will select five organizational units within the regional unit defined at stage I, taking into account consideration of population types, rural-urban differences, socio-economic status and other relevant variables, aiming to reach a variety of institutional and cultural settings.

In each organizational unit, participant observations will be conducted by accompanying workerson a variety of levels in their daily routines, documenting their work procedures and practices. In addition, those workers and others will be interviewed. Various relevant texts will be collected from the interviewees. Such texts may include manuals, documentation of work procedures, forms (empty and filled), brochures, reports, and others. For ethical considerations, texts relating to specific clients will be collected only when necessary**,** and only after receiving consent from both the client and the worker and after anonymization done by the worker, so that identifiable data will not be exposed to the researcher. The exact nature of the data, such as type of observation, questions asked in the interview and specific texts collected, cannot be determined in advance, as institutional ethnography seeks to uncover the implicit and unspoken assumptions that characterize particular organizations. Therefore, the exact course of the study can be determined only as the research develops (Campbell & Gregor, 2004). The relevant work procedures will be those relatingto protection of children and promotion of the family welfare. For each unit, specific areas will be determined according to data gathered from managers and workers.

Datawill be recorded, transcribed or digitized, according to the source. The complete body of data will then be analyzed according to the methodology of institutional ethnography data analysis, with the object of uncovering connections between different work procedures and their effects on the actions of professional workers and on the service received by clients.

*Milestones:*

1. *Month 18: unit selection process completed, including units’ agreement to participate*
2. *Month 24: First pilot unit ethnography complete (including preliminary analysis)*
3. *Month 36: Four more ethnographies complete*
4. *Month 39: Analysis for each country complete*

*Deliverables:*

1. *Month 24: report on the pilot unit, including preliminary findings, insights for further analysis, and expected pitfalls*
2. *Month 36: report on each unit, including preliminary findings*
3. *Month 39: a comprehensive report on each country, including data from stages I, II, and III*
4. *Month 42: Scholarly manuscript on institutional ethnography submitted to a journal (one manuscript per country)*
5. *Month 45: Comparative scholarly manuscript on institutional ethnography submitted to a journal*

**Stage IV – Interviews with Fathers** (Months 40-51)

This stage contributes to the fulfilment of objective 3 – fathers' perceptions and views. The research questions for this stage will be:

* How do fathers perceive the needs of children in relation to fathers? (Based on RQ1)
* How do fathers perceive their needs in caring for their children? (Based on RQ2)
* How does the position of fathers as actors within a relational network of actors contribute to their capability to participate in welfare interventions? (Based on RQ3)
* How do fathers perceive the effect of their available resources on their engagement with the services? (Based on RQ5)
* How do fathers perceive the availability of resources in the system and its effect on the system responsitivity to their engagement? (Based on RQ6)
* How are cultural values reflected in fathers' discourse on their interaction with the welfare systems? (Based on RQ7)
* How do fathers perceive the institutional contexts within which they operate and their effect on their interaction with the system? (Based on RQ8)

The objective of this stage is to analyze the positions, perceptions, and experiences of fathers as clients of the social services and their effect on the level and nature of their engagement with the services. The methodology in this stage will be in-depth, semi-structured interviews with fathers who are clients of services identified as relevant in previous stages.

The interview guide for these interviews will combine a standard part, common to all countries, and a country-specific part, building on insights from stages I, II, and III concerning the issues relevant to fathers accessing the relevant services. The interview guide will aim to assess the fathers’ positions regarding these issues and to identify differences between the viewpoint of the services and those of the fathers and blind spots in the purview of the services.

Research participants will be recruited using a variety of methods – including through the services, via social networks, and by using snowball sampling. Interviews will proceed to the point of saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Estimated number of participants is 30.

Interviews will be transcribed and translated into English. The transcription will be analyzed using an atlas.ti qualitative analysis software and thematic content analysis methodology, analyzing common themes emerging from the interviews.

*Milestones:*

1. *Month 48: Conclusion of interviews*
2. *Month 51: Conclusion of thematic analysis*

*Deliverables:*

1. *Month 48: a report on preliminary interview findings*
2. *Month 51: a thematic analysis report on the positions, perceptions, and experiences of fathers*
3. *Month 54: Scholarly manuscript on fathers’ interviews submitted to a journal (one manuscript per country)*
4. *Month 57: Comparative scholarly manuscript on fathers’ interviews submitted to a journal*

**Stage V – Comparative Analysis** (Months 52-60)

*Corresponding objectives O6 and O7*

The objective of this stage is twofold. First, to create an explanatory model for each country, combining the results of stages I-IV. The second objective is to conduct a comparative analysis of the countrys, creating a theoretical framework that accounts for similarities and differences between the countrys.

First, a model of each country will be created, based on the theoretical framework of the *Mother-Based Intervention*. Combining policy review, top-down policy trajectories, institutional characteristics of the unit researched and fathers’ positions, perceptions and experiences, the model will explain to what extent and in which ways do interventions in the specific country comply with the assumption of the mother as the central contact person in the intervention.

Table 3 - GANTT diagram

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Stage | 3 | 6 | 9 | 12 | 15 | 18 | 21 | 24 | 27 | 30 | 33 | 36 | 39 | 42 | 45 | 48 | 51 | 54 | 57 | 60 |
| Preliminaries |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| I – Policy And Cultural Analysis |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| II - Top-Down Policymaker Analysis |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| III - Institutional Ethnography |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| IV **–** Interviews with Fathers |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| V – Comparative Analysis |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| M­­­ilestones | M1 |  |  | M2 | M3 | M4 |  | M5 |  |  |  | M6 | M7 |  |  | M8 | M9 |  | M10 | M11 |
| Deliverables | D1 |  |  | D2 | D3 | D4 | D5 | D6 |  |  |  | D7 | D8 | D9 | D10 | D11 | D12 | D13 | D14  D15 | D16 |

Following the completion of these models, a Fuzzy-Set Comparative Qualitative Analysis (fsQCA) (Ragin, 2009; Schneider & Wagemann, 2010) will be conducted. Relevant variables on each of the levels described in stages I-IV will be built and coded into categorical variables using fuzzy logic. The QCA methodology will then be used to identify which prime implicates can be derived from the data. These prime implicates will then be used to create a comprehensive and comparative theoretical framework to explain influence the level and nature of the engagement of fathers with the social services.

*Milestones:*

1. *Month 57: Conclusion of country-specific analysis*
2. *Month 60: Conclusion of comparative analysis*

*Deliverables:*

1. *Month 57: a report on country-specific analysis*
2. *Month 60: Scholarly manuscript on country-specific comprehensive analysis submitted to a journal (one manuscript per country)*
3. *Month 66: Academic book draft submitted to a publisher (After end of funding - not in GANTT ta*

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1. Months mentioned below relate to the period from the beginning of the project. See GANTT table (p. 14) for full details on the timeframe [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. M1 = Milestone 1. See GANTT table below. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. D1 = Deliverable 1. See GANTT table below. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Number of scholarly manuscripts in deliverables represents expected minimums. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)