# The Triangle of Power: Fathers, Mothers, and Social Workers

Proposed Research Project for the Israel Science Fund

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## Introduction

1. **Scientific background**

The gendered analysis of men and masculinities, and the understanding that men, too, are the subjects of gendered norms and perceptions, have been receiving growing attention in recent decades. Since the 1990s, the development of the Critical Studies of Men and Masculinities (CSMM) has drawn attention to the historical evolution of masculinities in different cultural contexts, to their interaction with political, economic, and other social institutions, to the intricate array of power relations they are enmeshed in, and to the power this array exerts upon women and mostly upon men (Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Hearn, 2019; Hirsch & Kachtan, 2018; Holter, 2005).

As can be seen, power and power relation are central to the understanding of masculinities. These power relations have been studied extensively in recent decades focusing on power hierarchies between men. Raewyn Connell's groundbreaking *Masculinities* (1995) stressed that masculinity is not a single, unified cultural construct. Instead, Connell identified a multiplicity of masculinities, maintaining a complex relation of power between them.

Connell stressed the importance of the hegemonic masculinity – the cultural perception of masculinity that holds the prominent and hegemonic position in a specific time and place, maintaining men's power over women and other men. The concept of hegemonic masculinity stresses that while a multiplicity of masculinities exists in any given society, they do not peacefully coexist. Instead, masculinities are stratified in their relation to the hegemonic masculinity, their relation to power, and the access to power and resources they entail.

The sizeable body of research in the field defined as Critical Studies of Men and Masculinities that emerged in recent decades has mainly followed Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity. The central research agenda was the study of different masculinities and men in different social positions, mostly men from excluded groups and marginalized and protest masculinities and their relation to the hegemonic masculinity (Hearn, 2019; Messerschmidt, 2019b, 2019a).

The concept of hegemonic masculinity has, alongside most of the research in the field of CSMM, accepted the underlying assumption of the feminist concept of patriarchy – that the social structure of contemporary society benefits men, and that men are holding the central positions of power in society. CSSM does point out that this social structure does not benefit all men. While some men hold positions of power and enjoy social privileges based on their gender, other men find themselves excluded based on their relations with the hegemonic masculinity – originating, for example, from their race, their sexual identity, or their class.

The assumption of a multitude of masculinities, coupled with the acceptance of the assumption of patriarchy, has lead researchers to focus on relations between men – and mainly the relations between men in subordinate and marginalized positions vis-à-vis men in positions of power.

The theoretical basis of the CSMM, while acknowledging that most power in society lies in the hand of men, does identify the possibility of a local or temporary reversal of power relations – a specific situation in which the power balance reverses, and a specific woman holds a position of power in relation to a specific man. While gendered power does originate mainly in masculinity, the multitude of masculinities and their differential access to power, together with the differential access to power by women, dictate that some women may have greater access to power than some men, and when these women and men meet on the grounds of opposed interests, the women may use their excessive power.

However, while the CSMM acknowledges the theoretical possibility of locally reversed gendered power relations, it remains understudied and under-theorized. As mentioned before, the majority of studies in the field focus on power relations between men, while others focus on the social power exerted upon men by social institutions such as the media, the education system, and other such institutions.

The absence of research on reversed power relations does not extend to other fields and paradigms. Researchers of masculinity who reject the notion of patriarchy and the assumption that on the macro level, the majority of social power is held by men, often focus on situations of reversed power relations to reinforce these claims, bringing these situations as proof to the claim of changing balance of power between men and women (See, for example: Dutton, 2012, 2015).

The political grounds to the CSMM avoidance of the locally reversed power relations is understandable. In a political climate of a struggle between pro-feminist and anti-feminist agendas, a struggle that extends well into academic debates, focusing on situations of women exercising power over men appears to undermine the claim that the majority of gendered power still lies in the hand of men.

However, this project is based on the assumption that these situations of locally reversed gender power relations do not necessarily strengthen the claims of post-patriarchy, of new, more equal gendered power relations or the end of male hegemony. Rather, these situations provide an opportunity for a better theoretical understanding of the workings of gendered power in society, and specifically of its intersections with other forms of social power.

Such intersections of power are yet another area that has been understudied in the field of CSMM. Hearn (2019, p. 58), claims that "a whole range of wider theoretical, methodological, epistemological, and ontological questions to be taken up in CSMM much more fully. Some hinge on the intimate connections of the personal, the political, and the theoretical while recognizing tensions that can occur between these three domains." Further theorization on the relations between structure and agent is required, he claims.

This project attempts to answer the challenge posed by Hearn and explore the interactions and intersections between structure and agent and between the personal, the political, and the theoretical. These questions can be best understood through the intersections of two domains of power – the gendered domain, shaping the lives of men and women through the tenants of hegemonic masculinity, and the institutional domain, shaping them through the coercive power of the state.

Specifically, the realm of the social services and their interactions with men, mainly in their roles as fathers, is a promising ground for examining locally reversed gendered power relations. Men are under-represented in social and welfare services in general, and specifically in those that focus on the welfare and well-being of children and families. The vast majority of interventions carried out by these services involve only or mainly mothers. Comprehensive statistical data are hard to achieve, but findings from various welfare states shows that almost universally, social work interventions rarely include fathers and focus mostly, if not exclusively, on mothers (Brown, Callahan, Strega, Walmsley, & Dominelli, 2009; Featherstone, 2004, 2013; Maxwell, Scourfield, Featherstone, Holland, & Tolman, 2012; Perez-Vaisvidovsky, Mizrahi, & Halpern, 2020; Scourfield, Smail, & Butler, 2015).

Among the causes of this low level of engagement, as identified by existing research, a prominent place is reserved for the role of the services in the exclusion of fathers. Various researchers identified several elements in the services that contribute to the exclusion of fathers.

The first cause that research identifies is that the knowledge base of social work with families tends to focus on mothers and neglect fathers. There is a dearth of research in the social work discipline on working with fathers, and the research on families and parenting is focused on the role of the mother (Haworth, 2019; Shapiro & Krysik, 2010; Strug & Wilmore-Schaeffer, 2003). The focus on mothers and the absence of fathers as part of the family are also evident in social work textbooks on child welfare, which tend to present the mother as the primary caretaker, if not the only one (Brewsaugh & Strozier, 2016). Besides textbooks, academic courses in social work also fail to include fathers when talking about families. In Canada, less than 5% of social work syllabi on work with children and family were found to mention fathers (Brown et al., 2009).

The absence of men and fathers from social work research and teaching is especially problematic because of the gendered socialization of men and women. Men are socialized to express distress and pain differently than women. Professionals are culturally blind to these differences and often misinterpret fathers' expressions of distress, fear, pain and other emotions, and fail to relate to those emotions and understand their consequences when working with those fathers and with their families (Baum, 2015b; Brown et al., 2009).

Another cause for fathers' exclusion identified by the literature is individual social workers' relationships with fathers. Social workers tend to pay more attention to the needs of mothers and ignore need and distress expressed by fathers (Baum, 2015).

Dominelli, Strega, Walmsley, Callahan, & Brown (2011) found that fathers of 'looked after' children felt that social workers were not listening to them, and preferred contact with mothers, as social workers tended to ignore their feelings and the efforts they made to care for their children.

Brown et al. (2009) claim that fathers are invisible to the social services, which fail to see them. Examining child protection files, they had found that social workers rarely contacted fathers, and only in cases when they saw this contact as beneficial to the child.

More generally, Featherstone (2013) identifies that social workers tend to see fathers either as risk to the children and the family – mainly due to violence towards the children or the mother – or as an available resource for promoting the family and children's wellbeing. In this process, the view of men as subjects and as clients of the social services is neglected, as they are viewed instrumentally.

Many researchers view the situation described above as exclusion of fathers from the social services, and even as abuse of their human rights. Baum (2015) defines fathers in the social services as 'unheard' and 'neglected'; Brown at al (2009) stress their invisibility, and Amato (2018) identifies 'a possible systemic male gender bias' in the child protection and welfare services.

Do fathers qualify as victims or as an excluded group in the institutional setting of the social services? The answer, we claim, is complicated. On the one hand, the focus of the services on mothers certainly hinders fathers' ability to take an equal part in raising their children. When social workers refrain from contacting fathers and prefer working with mothers, these fathers' ability to care for their children is limited.

However, classifying these fathers as an excluded group raises several problems. First, while they may be excluded from childcare, most presumably hold more power than the mothers of their children. As men worldwide have better access to employment, higher wages, and more political power (World Economic Forum, 2018), it is safe to assume that at least a majority of these men hold positions of power relative to the mothers of their children in all areas but one – their access to childcare, and in the context of this project, access to family-focused interventions. Could we classify a group as excluded based on one aspect of exclusion, while ignoring other types and aspects of power?

Another obstacle to seeing fathers in the social services as an excluded group is the lack of motivation, at least of some fathers, to taking part in parenting in general and in social work interventions specifically. While it is true that the social services are constructed in ways that hinder the equal participation of fathers, many fathers do not fight for their right to participate in these interventions. According to the data from existing research and the preliminary findings, fathers arrive less than mothers to the services and cooperate less with social workers. At least some evidence shows that they are less interested in taking part in interventions. Thus, the situation is not that of fathers fighting to take a more substantial part in caring for their children and facing rejection. Can a group that does not express interest in equality be seen as excluded from that equality?

Finally, it is not clear that the exclusion of fathers from the services necessarily impairs these fathers. In many cases, the exclusion of fathers places an additional burden on mothers. When the mother stands at the center of the intervention, she is expected to execute the agreed-upon intervention plan, which adds to her childcare and housework burdens. The father, not expected to participate in the intervention process, is seen as exempt from this burden (although he may suffer from other negative effects, such as stigma) (Brown et al., 2009; Featherstone, 2010).

Thus, while fathers in families that engage in interventions with social services can be considered to be excluded from these interventions, and while this exclusion may well amount to an abuse of their parental rights, it is not clear that they qualify as an excluded group.

While, as demonstrated above, most researchers regard fathers as an excluded, marginalized or neglected population, a few have regarded this problematic. Fethearstone (2010) points out that programs that are intended to engage fathers not only leave mothers out of caring for their children, rendering them invisible to service providers, it also creates an inaccurate image of the services as 'feminized' and of mothers as unpredictable and over-powerful in the eyes of the fathers.

Philip, Clifton, & Brandon (2018) point to the complexity of identifying a single victim in a given policy. They show how the prioritization of contact with mothers over fathers in child protection cases was perceived as an unfair tolerance of motherly care by fathers, while at the same time being perceived by mothers as an unfair burden placed upon them.

Thus, it seems that in understanding the relationship between fathers and social workers, one must not neglect other, often hidden, participants in this relationship – first, the mother, who usually carries the primary burden of childcare; and no less important – but too often neglected – the point of view of the children themselves, who are often the target recipients of the policy, but are seldom heard.

From a methodological point of view, this situation poses a theoretical conundrum when viewed from the perspective of feminist epistemology. One of the main aims of feminist critical theory has been to give voice to excluded and disfranchised groups. Abandoning science's claim to neutrality, and to some extent, the claim to objectivity (see Harding, 1986), feminist research aim is to make room for the life experiences of women (and men) whose experience have been sidelined or silenced (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1986; Smith, 2013). As Taylor (1998, p. 365) points out, "[e]mpirical feminist research seeks to validate, give voice to, and understand the experiences of women and men who have been marginalized or ignored in traditional research."

The field of Critical Studies of Men and Masculinities adopted this epistemological perspective, adopting as one of its main aims the desire to give voice to men who have been the victims of patriarchy and of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995; Hearn, 2019; Messerschmidt, 2019b).

The subject of fathers and social services does not easily fit into this research epistemology. On the one hand, as discussed above, it is clear that gendered norms and gendered power structures are fundamental in the position of fathers *vis a vis* the services, and this absence is detrimental to the life opportunities and the welfare of children, women, and men. On the other hand, while fathers suffer from exclusion on some aspects of their lives, they hold priviledged positions on others. Thus, one cannot point to a specific excluded, disfranchised, or marginalized group denied of voice, of which the academic should aspire to promote participation.

1. **Research objectives & expected significance.**

Following the situation described above, the proposed research project aims to untangle the matrix of power relations surrounding the engagement of fathers with the social services. As discussed above, this power matrix involves at least four actors – the social worker, the father, the mother, and their children – and sometimes more. Every two actors in this power matrix maintain a complex power relation, influenced by the variety of elements discussed above, and the effects of the struggle of power within each relationship affect the other relationships as well. Therefore, the objectives of this project are:

* + - 1. *To map the power relations between family social worker, father and mother*
      2. *To understand the development of these power relations over the course of the intervention*
      3. *To analyse the ways in which this matrix of power is affected by external factors*
      4. *To understand the effect of the matrix of power on the outcomes of the intervention and the welfare of the family*

## Detailed description of the proposed research

### Research Questions

As is costumary in qualitative research, the proposed project is based on research questions and not on hypotheses, allowing the hypotheses to emerge from the collected data. The research questions leading this project will be:

* + - 1. *What is the matrix of power between family social worker, father and mother?*
      2. *How does this matrix of power evolve over time in the course of the intervention?*
      3. *How is the matrix of power affected by structural, cultural, and other external factors?*
      4. *How does the matrix of power affect the outcomes of the intervention and the welfare of the family?*

### Research design & methods

In order to achieve the aforementioned objectives, the proposed project will follow a longitudinal triadic research design.

The triadic aspect of the research design refers to triads as the focus of research. The basic unit of analysis in the proposed project is the triad of a family social worker, father, and mother. Trying to untangle the power matrix, the research will focus on researching parents during their interaction with a family social worker in a municipal Department of Social Services in Israel, interviewing fathers, mothers, and social workers separately. Uncovering the views and perceptions of each of the vortices of the triad regarding the family, the intervention, the other two vortices, and the relationship between them, thus shedding light on the various aspect of the power relation.

The longitudinal design will enable taking into account the temporal aspects of the relationship. Philip et al. (2018) point to the importance of time and perceptions of time in the relationship between fathers and social workers. Thus, a longitudinal research design will enable the examination of the development of the relationship over time, monitoring the changing attitudes and perceptions of the participants in different stages of the intervention.

#### Research population

The target population of the proposed project will be clients of family social workers in the Departments of Social Services in Israeli municipalities. The participating families will be families containing a father and a mother, either married, cohabiting, or living separately. Only families with parents from both genders will be included, as the aim of the study is to examine a specific set of gendered power relations, existing only in such families*.*

In order to facilitate data collection and to promote participation, the research project will focus on a specialized program in the Departments of Social Services aimed at families. Focusing on a specialized program has several advantages: first, these programs have a clear beginning and ending points, efficiently defining the beginning of the intervention; moreover, clients of these programs are more likely to agree to participate in the research, as participation in the program often indicates higher motivation for interaction with the services. Last, many of these programs require the participation of both parents, promoting access to the father, which is often not in contact with the department

The selected program is 'Noshmim Le'Revacha,' a specialized program for families in poverty. The program was chosen based on its prevalence in more than half of the departments, on its status as a 'flagship program' for the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and its familial nature.

#### Sampling

The sample will include 15 triads of a social worker, a mother, and a father. First, the research team will contact social workers and guarantee participation. Then, the team will contact families referred to these workers and offer them to participate in the study.

The sample will include families in which there are identifiable father and mother (not necessarily cohabiting) and at least one child below 18 years. The participation of both parents in the program is not an inclusion criterion – families where only one parent is in contact with the social worker, will be included.

An effort will be made to create a diverse sample in terms of ethnic origins, social status, and family composition.

#### Data Collection and Analysis

The study will be based on semi-structured interviews with the father, the mother, and the social worker in each triad (even if one of the parents is not in touch with the social worker). Interviews will be conducted in three waves – at the beginning of the intervention, after six months, and after twelve months. Interviews will be taken at three points in time (beginning of the intervention, after six months, and after 12 months).

Interview design will include semi-structured interviews relating to four main themes:

**The intervention:** The need for intervention and expectations from it.

**The other parties:**  Feelings, expectations, and perceptions of the two other participants in the triad. Perception of the relationship between the other two parties.

**The Familial System:**  The division of labor and responsibility between the parents regarding housework and childcare in general and the intervention specifically.

**Power Relations:** Perceptions of the power relations between the three vertices of the triad, and their influence on the intervention.

Interviews will be analyzed in a thematic analysis methodology, aiming to identify central themes in each interview and cross-referencing them within and across triads.

#### Ethical Considerations and Required Authorizations

The proposed research is ethically complex for several reasons. First, the research participants belong to an excluded group – in the case of Noshmim Le'Revacha, people in poverty. Moreover, as the research focuses on the intervention process, issues of privacy become even more crucial. Lastly, interviewing both social workers and their clients raises issues of professional integrity and client privacy (Peled & Leichtentritt, 2002; Sobočan, Bertotti, & Strom-Gottfried, 2019).

Strict ethical procedures will be enacted to safeguard against these risks. First, informed consent will be given a central place. All participants will be given full details concerning the research and their role in it, data security procedures, and their right to withdraw their agreement to participate at any time.

To protect from unintentional data leaks between families and social workers, different researchers will interview social workers and parents in each triad.

Data will be stored on the researchers' computers on ways that will prevent the identification of the interviewees.

The proposed research will require authorization from several sources. First, as the research involves interviews with human participants, an ethical authorization will be acquired from the Ethical Committee (IRB) in Ashkelon Academic College. In addition, an authorisation from the Ministry of Labor, Welfare and Social Services is required to enable family social workers to participate. An authorization request has been filed.

### Research stages

#### Stage I: Preliminaries (Months 0-3)

The first three months will be dedicated to the establishment of the research team, the building of the research strategy and accepting agreement for cooperation from family social workers in Departments of Social Services.

*Milestones*:

* + - 1. *Month 3: Participation Agreement from 15 Social Workers*

#### Stage II: First Wave Interviews (Months 4-12)

Upon the agreement of participation from a minimal number of social workers, recruiting of families for the research will commence. Upon agreement, and as soon as possible after their first contact with the social worker, the research team will conduct an in-person semi-structured interview with the social worker, the mother and the father. The interviews will relate to the four themes described above (the intervention, the other parties, the familial system and power relations), aiming to provide a benchmark against which developments in the intervention process woll be measured.

*Milestones:*

* + - 1. *Month 4: Interviews with 5 families*
      2. *Month 12: Interviews with 15 families*

*Deliverables:*

1. *Month 10: Transcriptions of 45 First Stage Interviews (15 triads)*

#### Stage III: First Wave Interviews Analysis (Months 13-15)

This stage consists of preliminary analysis of first wave interviews. The interviews will be analysed empoying a thematic analysis methodology, identifying tcommon themes in interviews and cross-referencing them across triads. Analysis will be accomplished using ATLAS.TI qualitative analysis software.

*Milestones:*

* + - 1. *Month 12: Completion of analysis of first-wave interviews*

*Deliverables:*

1. *Month 12: Perliminary Report on first-wave thematic analysis*
2. *Month 14: Manuscript on first wave thematic analysis sent for publication*

#### Stage IV: Second Wave Interviews (Months 13-21)

Six months after the first interview, research participants will be contacted by the research team for a second interview. This round will include either an in-person or a telephone semi-structured interview with the social worker, the mother and the father. The second-wave interviews aim to estimate the four themes mentioned above in the middle of the intervention.

*Milestones:*

* + - 1. *Month 12: Interviews with 5 families*
      2. *Month 15: Interviews with 15 families*

*Deliverables:*

1. *Month 16: Transcriptions of 45 First Stage Interviews (15 triads)*

#### Stage V: Second Wave Interviews Analysis (Months 22-25)

Again, the second-wave interviews will be analysed in a thematic analysis using the ATLAS.TI softwate. The analysis outcomes will be cross-referenced with the outcomes of the first-wave interviews to monitor changes and developments.

*Milestones:*

* + - 1. *Month 18: Completion of analysis of second-wave interviews*

*Deliverables:*

1. *Month 12: Perliminary Report on second-wave thematic analysis*
2. *Month 14: Manuscript on second wave thematic analysis sent for publication*

#### Stage VI: Third Wave Interviews (Months 19-27)

Third wave interviews will be conducted six months after the second-wave interviews (and a total of 12 months after first interviews). This round will include in-person semi-structured interview with the social worker, the mother and the father. The third-wave interviews, happening when at least some of the intervnetions have been concluded, will focus on the retrospective views of the participants on the aforementioned four themes.

*Milestones:*

* + - 1. *Month 6: Interviews with 5 families*
      2. *Month 9: Interviews with 15 families*

*Deliverables:*

1. *Month 10: Transcriptions of 45 First Stage Interviews (15 triads)*

#### Stage VII: Conclusive Analysis (Months 28-36)

This stage consists of analysis of third-wave interviews. The interviews will be analysed empoying a thematic analysis methodology, identifying tcommon themes in interviews and cross-referencing them across triads. Analysis will be accomplished using ATLAS.TI qualitative analysis software.

After the conclusion of the analysis of the third-wave interviews, a conclusive analysis of the three stages will be conducted, aiming to map relations and developments between the stages.

*Milestones:*

* + - 1. *Month 30: Completion of analysis of third-wave interviews*
      2. *Month 33: Completion of conclusive analysis*

*Deliverables:*

1. *Month 31: Perliminary Report on third-wave thematic analysis*
2. *Month 33: Manuscript on tihrd wave thematic analysis sent for publication*

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| Stage | Year 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | Year 2 | | | | | | | | | | | | Year 3 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Q1 | | | Q2 | | | Q3 | | | Q4 | | | Q1 | | | Q2 | | | Q3 | | | Q4 | | | Q1 | | | Q2 | | | Q3 | | | Q4 | | |
| I - Preliminaries |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| II – First Wave Interviews |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| III – First Wave Analysis |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| IV – Second Wave Interviews |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| V – Second Wave Analysis |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| VI – Third Wave Interviews |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| VII – Third-Wave Analysis |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| VIII – Conclusive Analisys |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

## Preliminary results

The PI and the research group are currently engaged in three relevant projects. The first documents the viewpoints and perceptions of fathers, the second focuses on social workers and the third on policymakers and top bureaucrats. Findings from these projects indicate a significant gap between professionals and fathers. While fathers view themselves as excluded from the intervention, as neglected by the social workers (Authors, Forthcoming a), the social workers usually view the fathers as uninterested in the intervention and themselves as putting extra effort into bringing in the men. The gap also prevails on the sides' perceptions of power relations: while the fathers perceive themselves as the powerless side of the interaction, and could be sometimes classified as suffering from micro-aggressions, the social workers perceive the fathers as having significant sources of power, and sometimes even as threatening or violent (Authors, Forthcoming).

However, these findings are partial, for three reasons. First, the data collected is not reciprocal. We do not have data on social workers that worked with the participating fathers or of fathers who are clients of the participating social workers. Second, a central viewpoint is missing – that of the mothers, who were not interviewed, but as described above – play a central role in the inclusion or the exclusion of fathers in the intervention. Third, the viewpoint supplied in previous projects is in retrospect – interviews referred, almost exclusively, to past intervention, therefore bringing in the analysis of the intervention in retrospect. However, as shown above, the temporal dimension is critical in such interventions and is missing from those accounts. The longitudinal triadic research design aims to remedy these three drawbacks of past projects and existing research in general.

## Tools for Conducting the Research

The PI heads a research team, consisting of three research associates, with rich experience in qualitative research in general and in semi-structured interviews and thematic content analysis specifically. The team has been working on research projects related to father engagement in the social services for the last three years, acquiring considerable research experience and knowledge in the field. This experience and knowledge relate both to the technical aspects of the project – such as recruiting participants and data analysis – and theoretical aspects.

## Expected Results and Pitfalls

The proposed research is expected to have significant results both on academic knowledge and on practice in the field. On the academic level, the project is expected to provide a significant contribution both to the field of critical studies of men and masculinities and to social policy and social welfare studies.

In the field of CSMM, this project aims to provide a novel outlook on power relationships in interventions, a point which may serve as a key to a deeper understanding of masculinities in situations of complex power relations. Understanding the matrix of power in situations of locally reversed power relations would provide a theoretical framework for explaining (local) female dominance from a CSMM perspective, thus widening this field and providing tools to some of its main unanswered questions, as described above.

In social policy and welfare studies, the proposed project aims to provide answers to the question of fathers' – and men's in general – absence from the welfare services. While previous research focused separately on the role of fathers, mothers, and social workers in this absence, the proposed project seeks to understand the role of the interaction between these three players in leading to the exclusion of fathers from interventions.

On the field practice level, this project is expected to shed light on the difficulties fathers, mothers, and social workers find in working together. Understanding the power relationship will provide social workers with a toolbox for contacting fathers, engaging them, and effectively working with them for the benefit of fathers, families, and children. The project has the potential to provide a basis for building a new model of interaction between workers and families, which will be more inclusive for fathers and will therefore lighten the burden on mothers and provide children with better parental care.

However, the proposed research design contains several elements that are methodologically complex, and various pitfalls may hinder the project. The first possible pitfall is difficulties in recruiting participants. Men, and especially men from excluded groups and clients of the welfare system, are notoriously difficult to recruit as participants. However, the research team has previous experience with recruiting such fathers. The most effective method of recruitment is through the social worker – as employed in this case. in addition, monetary compensation is offered to participants, a method that proved effective in the past.

A second possible pitfall, related to the previous one, is persistence. Even when recruiting participants for one interview is successful, returning to the same participants twice over the course of a year is expected to cause attrition, as many of the interviewees will refuse to participate in second or third wave interviews. To prepare for this contingency, the number of participants selected for the first round will be larger than the expected final number. While we expect that ten triads will suffice for saturation, the project aims to begin with 15 triads, allowing 33% attrition. In cases of higher rates of attrition, several measures will be considered – using only two interviews for some of the triads, using triads in which only two participants have interviewed for one of the waves, and – in the worst eventuality – recruiting more triads for the second round of interviews. This is reserved for a worst-case scenario, as it is expected to prolong the period of the project beyond three years.

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