

Attitude of social pedagogy students towards homoparental families

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Abstract: The paper is focused on the research of the attitude of the students of the Bachelor's and Master's degree programmes in social pedagogy from the J. E. Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem, University of Ostrava and Masaryk University in Brno (N = 107) towards the issue of homoparental families and in a broader context towards homosexuality as such. Furthermore, we also focus on the students' perspective on how the issue of homoparental families is reflected in the educational content of the subjects in their curriculum. An accessible type of research sampling was used. The author's questionnaire constructed on the principle of Likert scales was used as a research instrument. The questionnaire includes items aimed at identifying attitudes towards gay marriage, the causes of homosexuality, the upbringing of children by homoparental parents, and the space devoted to this topic in the university training of future social educators. The data obtained were processed using descriptive methods of statistical analysis and further analyzed. The findings show that a significant majority of the respondents are in favour of homosexual couples receiving the same rights as heterosexual couples, including the possibility of marriage. Furthermore, the majority of respondents appear to be in favour of the naturalness of homosexual couples raising children. From the answers we can conclude that the students interviewed consider homosexuality as natural as heterosexuality and their attitudes are mostly positive.

Keywords: social pedagogy, attitudes, homosexuality, homosexual family, gay marriage, child education

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Postoj studentů sociální pedagogiky k homoparentálním rodinám

Abstrakt: Studie je věnována výzkumu postoje studentů bakalářského a navazujícího magisterského studia studijního programu sociální pedagogiky z Univerzity J. E. Purkyně v Ústí nad Labem, z Ostravské univerzity v Ostravě a Masarykovy univerzity v Brně (N = 107) k problematice homoparentálních rodin a v širší souvislosti k homosexualitě jako takové. Dále se věnujeme také pohledu studentů na to, jak je problematika homoparentálních rodin reflektována ve vzdělávacím obsahu předmětů jejich studijního plánu. Byl použit dostupný typ výběru výzkumného vzorku. Jako výzkumný nástroj byl použit autorský dotazník konstruovaný na principu Likertových škál. V dotazníku

jsou položky zaměřené na zjišťování postojů k manželství homosexuálů, příčinám homosexuality, výchově dětí homoparentálními rodiči a dále pak prostoru, který je tomuto tématu věnován při vysokoškolské přípravě budoucích sociálních pedagogů. Získaná data byla zpracována pomocí deskriptivních metod statistické analýzy a dále analyzována. Ze závěrů vyplývá, že významná většina respondentů je pro to, aby se homosexuálním párům dostávalo stejných práv jako párům heterosexuálním, a to včetně možnosti uzavřít manželství. Dále se ukazuje kladný postoj většiny respondentů v otázce přirozenosti toho, aby homosexuální páry vychovávaly děti. Z odpovědí můžeme usuzovat, že dotazovaní studenti berou homosexualitu za stejně přirozenou jako heterosexualitu a jejich postoje jsou převážně pozitivní.

Klíčová slova: sociální pedagogika, postoje, homosexualita, homoparentální rodina, manželství homosexuálů, výchova dětí

1 Introduction

The topic of homosexuality and homoparental families is a very topical social issue that resonates strongly in both the professional and lay public and has its own significant political consequences. While societal attitudes towards homosexuality per se have improved over the past two decades (cf. Webb et al., 2020), attitudes towards same-sex families, and in particular the ability of such families to adopt children, are still rather negative and shrouded by a number of persistent biases (Webb et al., 2017). With regard to the legislative anchoring of the issue of same-sex couples in the Czech Republic, Act No. 115/2006 Coll. on Registered Partnership and on Amendments to Certain Related Acts (Act No. 115/2006 Coll., 2024) came into force on 1 July 2006. The main difference between a registered partnership and marriage is, for example, the fact that same-sex couples do not even acquire the right to a common surname after registration, registration does not create a kinship relationship with the partner's family, nor does it create joint property, and the partners are merely co-owners. A partner is not entitled to a widow's and widower's pension after the death of his/her partner. No rights and obligations arise in respect of the other partner's biological child and the non-biological parent cannot request information about the child's health, represent the child at school or have a maintenance obligation towards the child. It is also problematic from the point of view of the child of one member of the couple that he or she is not entitled to an orphan's pension from the non-biological parent, does not inherit from the non-biological parent and cannot claim maintenance or regular contact from the non-biological parent when the civil partnership breaks down.

Most of these discriminatory elements have been removed by the amendment to the Civil Code No. 123/2024 Coll. (2024), which will enter into force on 1 January 2025. However, even in this amendment, same-sex unions are not referred to as marriage but as partnerships. From the perspective of homoparental families, the problem of adoption of a child by same-sex couples persists. The aforementioned amendment to the Civil Code still does not allow them to adopt children, but at the same time it allows so-called "step-adoption", i.e., the adoption of a child whose biological parent is one of the partners. These elements incorporated into the adoption legislation for same-sex couples are indicative of possible continuing prejudice against sexual minorities on the part of some legislators. According to social role theory, gender role assumptions are important in determining attitudes towards same-sex parenting. Specifically, gender roles are assumed to have a direct impact on children and shape their sexuality as well. Consequently, there is a persistent belief in society that children need a mother and father who perform traditional gender roles in order to develop socially and

psychologically (Rowlands & Lee, 2006). However, a number of studies (see below) show that there are no significant differences between children from homoparental and heteroparental families in their behaviour and experiences or in the formation of gender roles.

The following text presents the results of a research study aimed at describing the attitudes of students of the social pedagogy programme towards homoparental families and the teaching of this topic at selected universities. Since social pedagogy belongs to the so-called helping professions, students in this program must be knowledgeable about the problems and challenges experienced by gay and lesbian women and know their own attitudes toward homosexuality. However, among the students themselves, there are now also members of the LGBT+ community who are trying to navigate the issues, and this awareness is increasingly spreading to the heterosexual majority. Thus, the former biases that were so common in society are largely being diminished. It should be remembered that heterosexuality still enjoys certain privileges compared to the homosexual population. Therefore, the attention paid to teaching these topics in the undergraduate training of teaching staff is also very important, particularly with regard to ensuring equal opportunities for people regardless of their sexual orientation.

2 Basic theoretical definition of the issue of homoparentality

Although the current era is characterized by a gradual shift in attitudes towards the traditional family, the view of the family as the cohabitation of a man and a woman and their children still prevails. The traditional family is seen from two different perspectives. One view of the traditional family is based on the historical or, more precisely, cultural-historical context of the society in which the traditional family existed and was defined. Ciprova (2007) gives the example of racially mixed marriages, which are now seen as a traditional family, which was unthinkable in earlier times. The second conception of the traditional family is based on the fact that such a family must meet certain characteristics that are usually derived from the functions of the family (Špičáková, 2011). In contrast to the definition of traditional families, contemporary families are characterized by a large number of alternatives that differ from the traditional model. These can be children living with one parent, unmarried or childless cohabitation. These alternatives include families in which the parents are homosexually oriented.

There is a wide range of labels for families that are made up of gay or lesbian women. They can be found under the terms: homosexual families, same-sex families or gay/lesbian families. However, the fact that these families are primarily judged according to the sexual orientation of the parents and thus do not take into account the sexual orientation of the children growing up in the families speaks against these terms. Sexual orientation is not determined by the family, but by its individual members, which is why the term homoparental family is the most appropriate to describe these families.

The word "homoparentalité" first appeared in the second half of the 1990s, when it was used by French activists, in its original form homopatentialité. The activists' intention was to point out the specific quality of this family model (Polášková, 2009, pp. 29-30).

The research that has been carried out in the field of homoparentality since the 1970s has brought with it a change in the theoretical understanding of this issue. Expert discussions have shifted from a predominantly medical focus and exploration of the possible negative effects of homoparental parenting on children growing up in such families. Studies have not confirmed or even directly refuted this, and have increasingly moved into the sociological field (Nesporová, 2021). Rather, they focus on the level of experience of individual members of such families, often influenced by the legislative framework of the state in which such families live (Boele-Woelki & Fuchs, 2017). Indeed, this is often central to their functioning and acceptance by the majority society and varies considerably between states (Mendos et al., 2020). The aforementioned medical approach, which is nowadays considered outdated but still resonates in some more conservative countries (e.g., Poland), expresses concerns

regarding the healthy psychosocial and psychosexual development of the child and his/her gender identity.

Concerns about the negative impact of same-sex parents on child development have not been confirmed in any of the areas mentioned. The conclusions of most research studies on this topic (from quantitative research, e.g., Crowl et al, 2008; Golombok & Tasker, 1996; González et al., 2002; from qualitative research e.g., Domínguez de la Rosa & Peregrín, 2017), there are no significant differences between children from homoparental and heteroparental families. Thus, there is repeated evidence that parental homosexuality does not have negative effects on gender, psychosexual, and psychosocial development (e.g., Golombok, 2000; Stacey, 1993, 2003). There has been a gradual evolution in the sociological approach to the issue of homoparental families. Until the 1990s, we encountered considerable heteronormativity, homophobia and the resulting stereotypical and discriminatory prejudices (Sokolova, 2015). The socio-cultural, political and economic changes at the turn of the century caused a significant social transformation, which, together with the rapid development of social media, opened up an intense debate on gay marriage, same-sex couples and the criminalization of homophobia. As a result of these discussions, society has become more open towards homosexuality and homoparentalism, which is subsequently reflected in the legislative process (Marchi-Costa & Stefanini de Macedo, 2020).

It is no overstatement to say that the trend of homoparental families is on a permanent rise. This is evidenced not only by expert studies and research, but also by the reports and life stories of such families. In the Czech Republic, however, this topic still remains outside the research and academic interest (Sokolová, 2009, p. 116).

2.1 Lesbian motherhood

The first references to lesbian women's specific partnership cohabitation can be found in the psychological literature for the first time in the early 1980s (Polášková, 2009, p. 21). For lesbians, as well as for heterosexual individuals, a stable partnership is one of the basic building blocks of a harmonious life. But apart from the partner role, it is also the role of mother that brings satisfaction, and for most women it is the most important role of their lives. In the 1970s, therefore, lesbian women began to strongly assert their rights to parenthood and to have custody of their children after divorce. On this basis, the first research on homoparenthood began to emerge (Procházka, 2005, pp. 1-2). Several studies were conducted with lesbian families that refuted the idea that children raised by two mothers had unusual sexual development, had problems with sexual identification in adulthood, or had homosexual tendencies. As an example, consider the study by Golombok and her colleagues, who examined 74 heterosexual families, 39 lesbian families, and 60 mothers who raised their children alone. No differences were found in child development and satisfaction, nor in the mother-child relationship. Lesbian couples and their children were found to interact more than the other groups. The study has been criticized because of the small research sample size (Weiss, 2010, pp. 117-118, also e.g., Hicks, 2011).

According to Sokolová (2009), lesbian women are more likely to become parents than gay men, not only reproductively, but also legislatively and socially. This is why there are many more lesbian mothers than gay fathers.

2.2 Gay fatherhood

The phenomenon of gay fatherhood first appeared in literature in the USA and Western Europe in the late 1970s. Since the 1980s, gay parenting has become increasingly visible. Throughout the 1990s, studies of homoparenthood divided into two streams, the first focusing on the fact that children of same-sex couples are at greater risk of negative consequences. The second stream sought to show that there were no differences in the development of children from the two types of families (Himl et al., 2013, pp. 557-558). Homosexuals are downplayed by society and are seen as incompetent to parent

for the following reasons. The first reason is the homosexual orientation itself. The second reason is the claim that men are less important in parenting than women, who are predisposed to motherhood. The last reason is people's opinion that gay men do not want children (Sokolová, 2009, p. 116).

In their study, Biblarz and Stacey (2010) focused on gay fathers, who, according to their findings, do not provide a double dose of masculinity, but instead possess elements of both sexes. Compared to heterosexual fathers, gay fathers engage in many more feminine practices when raising their children. Gay men who choose to parent accept all responsibility for the child and adopt a role that is commonly thought of as maternal. Himl et al. (2013) highlight research by Judit Takács in Hungary and Alenka Švab in Slovenia, the results of which are also relevant for the Czech Republic. The quantitative research, conducted between 1998 and 2000, focused on the value preferences of Hungarian gay men. It revealed the fact that there are no differences between heterosexuals and gays in terms of self-respect, independence, courage, responsibility, freedom, equality, forgiveness, social recognition and material security. For value preferences related to family, the research found much lower preferences among men who did not identify as gay.

2.3 Possibilities of establishing a homo-parental family in the Czech Republic

The formation of a homoparental family is a rather complex matter. Amendment No 123/2024 to the Civil Code (2024) allows same-sex couples to enter into a civil partnership, which is defined as *"a permanent union of two people of the same sex, which is concluded in the same way as marriage. Unless otherwise provided by law or other legislation, the provisions on marriage, rights and obligations of spouses, widows and widowers apply mutatis mutandis to the partnership and the rights and obligations of the partners"*. However, as mentioned above, even this amendment still does not allow for joint adoption of children, but only for so-called "step-adoption".

Lesbian couples find the whole process of forming a homoparental family much easier because they can conceive and give birth to a child. They can achieve pregnancy naturally, either through heterosexual intercourse or through assisted reproduction. Artificial insemination or assisted reproduction is regulated by Act No 373/2011 Coll., on specific health services (2024). It is defined as methods and procedures involving the collection and manipulation of germ cells, the creation of a human embryo by fertilising an egg with sperm outside the woman's body, and the manipulation of human embryos, including their preservation, for the purpose of artificial insemination of the woman. The Specific Health Services Act allows assisted reproduction only for couples in a heterosexual relationship. However, there is no one to address whether the individuals are actually in a relationship and have an intimate life together. Lesbian couples also have the option of having an offspring through a procedure called in vitro fertilisation (IVF), i.e., from a test tube. To do this, the man who accompanies the woman to the clinic must pretend to be the partner of one of the women in the lesbian couple. Some women use insemination without professional help in the home environment (Polášková, 2009, p. 59).

In addition, same-sex couples can use the option of surrogacy, better known in the Czech Republic as "surrogate motherhood". This is mainly a solution for male couples, where the surrogate mother rents her uterus. The woman decides to conceive a child with one of the gay couple, which she either relinquishes after birth or leaves in the couple's care. The child is then that of the man who is officially listed in the documents, but not of the entire gay couple. This form of parenting cannot be implemented legally in the Czech Republic, as it is not possible to conclude a contract of entitlement to the child (Sloboda, 2016, p. 114).

Adoption can be a possible route for both male and female couples who want to start a family. However, it is not as simple as it may seem at first glance. Adoption can be defined as taking in someone else's child as one's own by the adoptive parents. Before the adoption itself, psychologists and social workers examine the adoptive parent's personality and his or her aptitude for quality parenting (Hartl & Hartlová, 2000, p. 388). Adoption is regulated in the Czech Republic by the Civil Code

(Act No. 89/2012 Coll., 2024) and the Act No. 401/2012 Coll., on Social and Legal Protection of Children (2024). An adoptive parent may become an adult person who is legally competent and whose personal characteristics and way of life guarantee that he or she will be a good parent to the child. The amendment to the Civil Code No 123/2024 (2024) states that if a couple has entered into a partnership and one of the partners is the biological parent of the child, it is possible for the other partner to adopt the child. Last but not least, the aforementioned routes to parenthood include foster care. Foster care as well as adoption is regulated by the Civil Code No. 89/2012 Coll. (2024) and Act No. 401/2012 Coll., on Social and Legal Protection of Children (2024).

Matějček and Koluchová (2002) define foster care as a state-guaranteed and controlled form of foster family care, which should ensure sufficient material security for the child and adequate remuneration for those who take him/her in. In the case of foster care, the parents are not deprived of their parental rights and obligations, except for the rights and obligations that the law provides for the foster parent. The biological parents have the right to have contact with the child and to obtain the necessary information about the child. The relationship between the foster parent and the child ends when the child reaches the age of majority. Foster care is not prohibited for homosexuals, nor is partnership an obstacle, but joint foster care is only granted to married couples.

3 Research study description

3.1 Aim of the research inquiry

The main aim of the study was to investigate the attitudes of university students studying social pedagogy towards homoparental families. The extent to which students are familiar with the issue and whether they have encountered the topic during their university studies was also the subject of the study.

3.2 Research problem and research subproblems

Within the research, one main research problem was formulated, from which two sub-problems emerged. Both the problem and the sub-problems are based on the aforementioned objectives of the study and are formulated as descriptive. Main research problem: What attitudes do undergraduate students of social pedagogy take towards homoparental families? Research sub-problems: 1) What knowledge do social pedagogy students have about homoparentality and homosexuality? 2) From the perspective of the students themselves, how is homoparentality embedded in the teaching in the social pedagogy studies at university?

3.3 Characteristics of the studied sample

The research sample in this research study was designed as a purposive sample. Purposive sampling was chosen because the respondents must be students in a social pedagogy degree program. Furthermore, the selected students had to meet the requirement of full-time study at the Faculty of Education. Therefore, we approached students of this study programme at the faculties of education of selected Czech universities. At the final stage, the research sample consisted of 107 respondents from three different universities. These were the Jan Evangelista Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem (UJEP), the University of Ostrava (OU) and Masaryk University in Brno (MU). The research sought to achieve a balanced representation of all three schools. The first step was to approach school administrators to ask for their help in disseminating the questionnaire to students. Unfortunately, most schools do not support sending out mass emails to students. We were only successful with one of the schools, which was helpful and sent out emails with the questionnaires. For those schools that do not support such a procedure, it was considerably more difficult to make contact with the respondents. The school management referred us to social networks where students have their own

study groups through which they communicate with each other. It should be noted that social networks currently play an irreplaceable role in university studies. Therefore, we found countless student groups and pages on social networks, whose administrators were contacted with the request to distribute the questionnaire among their colleagues. Due to the above, it is not possible to accurately determine the return rate of the questionnaire.

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3.4 Research instrument

The research part of this study is based on an exploratory research method, namely interviewing. The research instrument is a non-standardized questionnaire that was developed based on previously conducted research on a similar topic (Costa et al., 2014). On the one hand, the construction of the questionnaire items was based on previously published research (see previous citations). As part of the pre-research, an unstructured interview was conducted with a total of seven students from the social pedagogy degree programme, which served as a starting point for the formulation of the individual items, or for their refinement and optimisation.

Likert scales are a frequently used method to measure attitudes. Janoušek (1986) states that the author of this method is the social psychologist Rensis Likert, who was based on an attempt to classify individual attitude indicators that belong to the topic under study and allow for a reliable assessment of the attitude. The indicators of attitude towards a particular social object are the responses to a number of items that are graded on a multi-point scale. After summing the scores assessing the individual responses, we obtain a score that indicates the position of the individual on the attitude continuum.

The questionnaire used in the research study was administered through Google Forms. The introductory part of the questionnaire begins by addressing respondents and briefly explaining its purpose. Respondents are also assured that the data collection is anonymous. Once the questionnaire starts, respondents have the opportunity to view the whole form at once, so they have an idea of the time commitment, and they can see the phase they are currently in. All respondents who started the questionnaire also completed it.

The questionnaire is divided into logical units, the first part of the questionnaire focuses on attitudes towards homoparental families. It contains seven rating scales that relate to what rights students think same-sex couples should have or whether they think children raised in a homoparental family have the necessary role models. The second part of the questionnaire is designed to find out what knowledge students have about the issue. This includes questions such as what effect a same-sex couple can have on a child's personality, whether they know what rights such couples have or how homosexuality actually comes about. The third and final part of the questionnaire asks about the current state of teaching about homosexuality at Czech universities. It is about whether students have encountered the issue in their teaching at all. In designing the questionnaire, we drew on research already carried out in 2014 (Costa et al., 2014). The research served to determine students' attitudes towards same-sex parenting and gay rights in Portugal.

4 Results and interpretation

A total of 107 respondents from the three selected universities participated in the survey. In terms of gender, 85% of women and 15% of men participated in the research (this represents the actual gender distribution of students – an analysis of the situation at the UJEP in Ústí nad Labem found that 91% of women and only 9% of men study the social pedagogy programme). This imbalance, however, corresponds to the stratification of the core group, as study programmes focused on social pedagogy are predominantly studied by women. The age range of respondents is between 20 and 36 years. The largest group of the research sample is the 22 to 23 years old group (37%). Slightly fewer people comprise the 20 to 21 years old group (31%), which turned out to be the second largest. The 24-25 age group comprised 19% of respondents, while the 25-30 age group comprised 12% of respondents. Only one respondent from the respondents was over 30 years of age. The average age of the respondents was 23 years. In terms of university affiliation, 31% of respondents were from UJEP Ústí nad Labem, 31% from OU in Ostrava and 38% from MU in Brno. The following is an evaluation of the individual scales (statements) and a commentary on them (see Table 1). The scales are constructed from total agreement (value 1) to total disagreement (value 5). For each statement, the relative frequencies of responses converted into percentages are given for each scale level.

Table 1
Evaluation of individual statements on a scale of 1 to 5

		1	2	3	4	5
Number and wording of each statement on a scale of 1 to 5		%				
1	Children who grow up in homoparental families do not have the necessary male and female role models	8	7	19	36	32
2	Marriage of same-sex couples should not be allowed	14	2	1	10	73
3	It is not natural for same-sex couples to raise children	4	7	14	29	47
4	I agree that homosexuals should have the same rights as heterosexuals	79	9	4	3	5
5	I consider homosexuality as natural as heterosexuality	58	19	14	8	2
6	The decision of same-sex couples to raise children seems selfish to me	3	1	9	15	72
7	Children of same-sex couples are more accepting of human differences	16	33	43	4	5
8	Parents have a significant influence on the sexual orientation of their children	4	9	11	24	52
9	Homosexuality is determined by biological predispositions (innate predispositions, hormones), it cannot be changed	47	28	14	6	6
10	Children from same-sex families are more tolerant	9	36	40	8	6
11	Problems of homosexual families are based only on the attitudes of society	13	37	34	10	6
12	Sexual orientation can be learned in the family	1	6	8	25	60
13	In my studies I have often encountered the problem of homoparental families	8	11	23	33	24
14	Homosexuality was given attention in the teaching	8	17	20	37	19
15	Teaching focused on sexual orientation itself rather than homosexuality in the context of the family	11	11	36	26	16

Note: Scale values range from 1 = strongly agree to 5 = strongly disagree.

The first statement "*Children who grow up in homoparental families do not have the necessary male and female role models*" represents a very common argument of opponents of homoparental families. According to Giddens (1999), however, we can say that the child distinguishes between male and

female roles as a result of certain social pressures. Regardless of their sexual orientation, parents respond to the child according to certain gender stereotypes. Similarly, the wider environment from family and peers at school is also a factor. If both sexes are not represented in the parental couple, the child will be able to distinguish gender roles. He or she may look for role models in other family members, someone in the neighbourhood or, for example, in a television character.

Green (1978) also believes that the absence of gender role models in parents should not be threatening. In most cases, the children he worked with were undergoing natural sexual development and no disorders were noted. Concerns about the improper identity development of children from homoparental families were, in his view, unsubstantiated. A more modern research study by Marchi-Costa and Stefanini de Macedo (2020) reached similar conclusions.

Same-sex couples naturally want their partnership to be legislated in the same way as heterosexual couples (the statement *"Marriage of same-sex couples should not be allowed"*). This is largely made possible by the amendment to the Civil Code No. 123/2024 (2024), which establishes the creation of so-called civil partnerships. Homosexual couples can thus legislate for their relationship, but the union is not equivalent to marriage, especially regarding the upbringing of children (it is therefore not a so-called "marriage for all"). The amendment does not allow homoparental couples to adopt children. It only provides for so-called adoption.

A significant majority of respondents disagree with the wording of the statement *"It is not natural for same-sex couples to raise children"*. Nevertheless, the so-called traditional understanding of the family as a union of a man and a woman who raise their children together still prevails in society. While some progress has been made in the partnership of same-sex couples, including legislative progress (although there is still a strong resistance to calling such a union a marriage), most of society is still sceptical about the adoption of children by homoparental couples (cf. Hicks, 2011).

The vast majority of respondents (79.4%) are inclined to the view that homosexuals should have the same rights as heterosexuals (statement *"I agree that homosexuals should have the same rights as heterosexuals"*). This is still not the case. The restrictions concern in particular the possibility of adoption by partners. The legislative aspects of this issue are addressed, for example, in the work of Pospíšil (2016).

Halama and Hrubes (2006) state that we can describe as natural something that undoubtedly belongs to a human being (see the statement *"I consider homosexuality as natural as heterosexuality"*). However, it equally belongs to a human being that he or she transcends the level of the natural. Extensive discussions about what is actually natural and what is not can also be defined as human nature leading to different outcomes. However, it should be noted that views on the nature of homosexuality are far from uniform. There are also theories about the cultural determination of homosexuality that deny its natural origin (e.g. Jannini et al., 2010).

The statement *"The decision of same-sex couples to raise children seems to me to be selfish"* represents a relatively common view of the proponents of the so-called traditional (heteronormative) family, where homoparenting is perceived as a selfish act aimed primarily at satisfying the members' own desires (Wardle, 1997). However, modern scientific paradigms clearly abandon this approach, which was also reflected in the views of our respondents.

Respondents' opinions on the statement *"Children of same-sex couples are more accepting of human differences"* show some ambivalence. The opinions of students of social pedagogy are not clear-cut on this issue and do not seem to be distinct either. In her study, Stacey (2003) conducted a comparison of research that focused on the effects of acceptance of difference by children growing up in homoparental families. She concluded that parental sexual orientation had no measurable effect on social adjustment, mental health, or the quality of parent-child relationships. On the contrary, she singled out children of same-sex couples who appeared to be more empathetic, less conflicted and more capable in communication.

Opinions on the causes of homosexuality vary (see the statement *"Parents have a significant influence on the sexual orientation of children"*), not only among the general public but also among experts. According to Janosova (2000), homosexuality has not been researched enough to give society a clear and true answer to the question of the origin of homosexuality. The theories are diverse, especially depending on the scientific field they are based on. Among the most well-known theories, we can include the influence of environment and upbringing or genetic predisposition (see Kitzing, 2005). Genetic determination is mainly discussed in the context of male homosexuality. Conversely, for lesbian women, hormonal influences are most often cited as the cause (Diamond, 2008). The historical notion of the anchoring of gender by scientific knowledge in Western civilization is discussed in more detail by Laqueur (1992).

Kassin (2007) in his publication talks about the possible influence of parents on the orientation of the child. From the statements of psychoanalysts, it has come to light that homosexuality may arise from the child being dependent on one of the parents. However, no relevant evidence for this theory was presented. The influence of parents is also found in the publication of Jandourka (2007). He states that the emergence of homosexuality may be due to the child growing up in an incomplete family where only the mother influences the child.

The opinion on the biological determination of homosexuality (the statement *"Homosexuality is determined by biological predispositions [innate predispositions, hormones], it cannot be changed"*) is currently the majority opinion in the professional community and is also held by the majority of respondents. In addition to genetic causes focused on the Xq28 gene disorder (Rice et al., 1999) and hormonal causes related to sex steroid hormone imbalances in childhood (Balthazart, 2011), the association between hypothalamic size and sexual orientation is also of interest. LeVay (1991) performed autopsies on men and women, focusing particularly on the hypothalamus. The hypothalamic nucleus controls sexual behavior and is larger in heterosexual men than in women. As a result, it was found that the nucleus was half the size of the nucleus in homosexual men than in heterosexual men. However, LeVay's results have never been replicated and are now considered rather implausible (Wilson, 2000).

For the statement *"Children from same-sex families are more tolerant"* we again encounter ambivalent evaluations from respondents. This is an area that is difficult to grasp research-wise and that does not yield clear-cut results. Previous findings suggest that there are no significant differences in psychological development or sexual and gender behaviour when comparing children in heterosexual and homosexual families (Cerqueira-Santos et al., 2021).

There are many unfounded prejudices against homosexuals (see the statement *"The problems of homosexual families are based solely on the attitudes of society"*). Among the most common are the claims that homosexual men are feminine in expression and homosexual women are masculine. There is also the assumption that homosexual men are more promiscuous. It is the greater promiscuity of gay men that is cited as a significant factor in causing homophobic attitudes in society towards homosexuals. However, some modern research studies show that the higher promiscuity of gay men is merely a prejudice and has no basis in real research data (cf. e.g. Pinsof & Haselton, 2017). Finally, there is a preconceived notion that gay couples occupy traditional roles divided into active (male) and passive (female) roles. However, the most common argument is the unnaturalness of homosexuality (Sobotka, 2010).

A significant majority of respondents disagree with the statement *"Sexual orientation can be learned in the family"*. Procházka (2002) states that there is no single theory on the origin of homosexuality. Nor can homosexuality be said to be due to a single cause. However, we know for certain that homosexual orientation is immutable and therefore cannot be changed or cured by anything, and the respondents are clearly aware of this fact. However, even in contemporary society, there are views that homosexuality is shaped particularly in the context of single-parent families, where the child tends to become a surrogate partner for the remaining parent. Szopiński (2017) even suggests that in such a

formed environment imbued with emotional and erotic bondage, homosexuality may provide protection from incest. We argue, however, that in this case it is induced homosexual behavior rather than homosexual orientation that is at issue (in agreement with, e.g., Field & Waite, 2004).

The last three statements of the questionnaire (i.e. *"I often encountered the issue of homoparental families in my studies"*, *"Homosexuality was given attention in the teaching"*, *"The teaching focused more on sexual orientation itself than on homosexuality in the context of the family"*) focus on how students evaluate their own perspective on how they encounter the issue of homoparental families in their studies at university. Thus, the aim was not to capture an exact endorsement for each topic, but rather students' subjective perceptions of how the topics are emphasized.

The obtained results show that not much attention is paid to the issue of sexual orientation, and more specifically to the issue of homosexual families, in university teaching (this was confirmed, among other things, by an analysis of the syllabuses of the curricula of the social pedagogy study programme, which are publicly available in the study information systems used by the participating universities). This is a topic that can be described as very topical in society, with intense discussions on the equalisation and destigmatisation of people with different sexual orientations taking place throughout the Western world. However, research studies have mainly focused on university students' attitudes towards homosexuality (see e.g. Hlad'o, 2015). We therefore believe that an analysis of the teaching of this educational content would be necessary, especially in pedagogically oriented degree programmes. In the same place, Hlad'o argues that preparing teachers to work with a diverse population of students, which includes students with different sexual orientations, and forming desirable attitudes in them is one of the important goals of undergraduate education of future teaching staff.

5 Conclusion

The main aim of this study was to find out what attitudes students of the social pedagogy programme have towards homoparental families. Statements focusing on male and female role models in homoparental families showed that most respondents did not share the view that the children of these couples were not receiving the necessary role models. Thus, it is clear that students do not consider the absence of one of the role models to be central. Janosova (2000) argues that children of heterosexual couples construct their gender identity through long-term cohabitation with their father and mother by modeling their masculine and feminine roles. However, when one of the role models is absent in the family, children look for such role models among their peers, in the mass media and in the characters of various heroes from television or computer games, or in relatives from the extended family. This issue is also addressed in Green's analysis (Goldberg & Allen, 2013), which focuses on children raised in homosexual families. Her results ruled out deficiencies in gender upbringing and did not confirm the presence of gender identity disorder. There is now a myriad of professional research that proves that parenting by same-sex couples is not harmful to the child and does not compromise their psychosocial development. These include research by G. P. Mallon from 2004 or Bose and Sanford from 2010.

However, there are also experts who consider same-sex families unsuitable, especially for the child. They are of the opinion that such couples do not provide children with quality gender role models. For example, sociologist Morgan (2002) states that children of heterosexual couples tend to find themselves in better living conditions than children of same-sex couples. She bases her claims on

A significant majority of respondents are in favour of homosexual couples receiving the same rights as heterosexual couples, including the possibility of marriage. Furthermore, a majority of respondents appear to be in favour of the naturalness of gay couples raising children.

studies that purport to show that children from straight families are more able to avoid conflict, complete a good education, get a good job and start a family. However, the studies from which these claims are made compare children from traditional and single-parent families, not children from homoparental families. Other research that contradicts same-sex families was published by Patterson (2000).

Furthermore, students were clear in their statements regarding marriage and the rights of same-sex couples. On these questions, there was a significant majority in all cases in favour of gay couples receiving the same rights as heterosexual couples, including the possibility of marriage. The Czech Republic is relatively tolerant towards the homosexual community. The first step towards preserving the principles of a democratic society was the law on registered partnerships. This establishes the right to self-determination, equality before the law and protection against discrimination. However, some authors believe that under the legislation, even after entering into a partnership under this law, homosexually oriented people are not considered full-fledged and are denied certain rights. The amendment to the Civil Code, No. 123/2024 (2024), refers to same-sex unions only as "partnerships" and these persons still do not have full rights as traditional spouses (man and woman). According to *jsmefer.cz*, same-sex marriage is also supported by the Czech public. In 2019, the MEDIAN agency conducted a survey in which 67% of the Czech public expressed support for marriage for all. According to figures from previous years, support from Czech men and women is steadily increasing (*Jsmě fér: Manželství pro všechny*, 2020).

The majority of respondents also expressed a positive attitude on the question of the naturalness of homosexual couples raising children. From the answers we can conclude that the students interviewed consider homosexuality as natural as heterosexuality and their attitudes are mostly positive.

The above mentioned positive attitudes of university students of social pedagogy are to some extent influenced by the changing perception of homosexuality and homoparental families in the eyes of our society. In 2007, the Czech Republic produced an Analysis of the situation of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender minority, which states that in recent decades the trend of society's rejection of this minority has begun to reverse. The Centre for Public Opinion Research confirms this trend by conducting an annual survey on tolerance towards selected groups. Tolerance is measured by asking whether the person concerned would not like to have the people in question as neighbours. In 2003, when the results of the survey were first reported, 42% of respondents said they would not want people with a homosexual orientation as neighbours. In contrast, the latest available data from 2019 shows that only 22% of respondents are now opposed to having homosexuals in their neighborhood.

Compared to the first measurement, the rejection of people with a homosexual orientation has gradually dropped to about half. In the last survey in March 2023, only 11% of respondents would not want people with homosexual orientation as neighbours (the highest number of respondents, 89% said they would not want people addicted to drugs as neighbours) (Tuček, 2023).

The next part of the questionnaire of this research study was to find out how students of the social pedagogy degree program are doing with knowledge related to homoparental families. It focused on what impact the respondents believe a homoparental family has on a child's personality. Also, this section focuses on knowledge of theories of the origins of homosexuality and awareness of the current rights of homosexual couples. The question of the influence of the homoparental family on the development of the child's personality is not entirely clear. This fact was reflected in the answers of the respondents. In the statements where the effects on the child's personality were mentioned, the students answered ambiguously. In such statements, the middle value, i.e. a kind of ambivalence, was the most frequently chosen answer. Farr et al. (2010) refer to numerous previous studies that conclude that children of same-sex and heterosexual parents achieve similar outcomes psychologically. Nor were significant differences found between children of homosexual and heterosexual parents in terms of risk and problem behaviours.

In addition, the second part of the questionnaire devoted considerable space to statements about theories of the origins of homosexuality. The answers speak of a clear opinion of the students. Statements that indicated that homosexuality can be learned from any contact were not met with a positive response. On the contrary, students were inclined to theories about the biological origin of homosexuality. There are countless theories of the origin of homosexuality today. Unfortunately, however, there is an ongoing debate as to which theory is the one that can be considered true – whether nurture and environment or biological factors play a major role. The evolutionary aspects of homosexuality, what evolutionary advantages homosexuality brings, as well as its impact on the evolution of the human race and human society, have also been intensively researched (Masoud, 2012). In the overall context, explaining the cause of homosexuality may seem irrelevant, but it is the children who are raised by same-sex couples that play a crucial role. Indeed, proponents of the theory of the influence of environment and upbringing are of the opinion that raising a child in a homoparental family may cause the child to develop a homosexual orientation. The knowledge item, which focused on the equality of rights of homosexual couples with heterosexual couples, was answered quite clearly. Students have a very clear idea of the current differences in rights between homosexuals and heterosexuals to the disadvantage of the homosexual minority. As already noted, there are not many exact theories concerning homosexuality and homoparentality. The students' answers therefore corresponded to the current level of knowledge on the subject.

As the questionnaire was addressed to university students, it was appropriate to find out the possible source of knowledge. The third and final part of the questionnaire survey focused on the extent to which students encounter the topic of homoparentality in their studies at university in different subjects. From the evaluation of the responses, it is clear that more students are inclined to claim that they rather did not encounter the issue in their studies. When the question was directed to whether they had at least encountered the topic of homosexuality, the answers were very similar. Some discrepancy was found in the statement whether the teaching focused on the orientation itself rather than on homosexuality in the context of the family. It is therefore not clear to what extent homoparenting is embedded in the teaching of social pedagogues. We can assume that if the issues were sufficiently discussed, the students' responses would be more distinct. Same-sex parenting is a relatively new phenomenon in society. It is therefore not surprising that students have not yet encountered this phenomenon much in their teaching. Over time, however, we can expect to see an increase in interest in this phenomenon and its gradual inclusion in university teaching, as has been the case with the issue of homosexuality itself.

Certainly, the research study we have presented here also has its limitations. On the one hand, these are due to the contradictory nature of the theoretical definition (it is obvious that some of the authors have a tendentious attitude – either in the form of support for homoparental families or, on the contrary, in a critical attitude towards homosexuality as such). Furthermore, we are aware that the research sample was also somewhat limited in its availability, and given this, we can only speak of partial representativeness. The research itself was essentially descriptive in nature, which is fully legitimate from methodological point of view; however, some relations and causalities were left unresolved by this and may inspire further research studies.

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Postoj studentů sociální pedagogiky k homoparentálním rodinám

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