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Are We Ready to Accept Homoparentality? Reflections on Changes in the Political, Social, and Educational Spheres of Two Central-Eastern European Countries

Czy jesteśmy gotowi zaakceptować homorodzicielstwo? Refleksje nad zmianami w sferze politycznej, społecznej i edukacyjnej z dwóch krajów Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej

KEYWORDS
family models, Czech Republic, Poland, governance, empty signifiers, gender politics, children

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modele rodzin, Republika Czeska, Polska, zarządzanie, puste signifikanty, polityka płci, dzieci

ABSTRACT

The research presented in this article employs a critical, narrative literature review to examine the social, educational, and legal dynamics of homo-parentality in Poland and the Czech Republic. While family structures in Europe are rapidly diversifying, legal recognition and societal acceptance of same-sex parenting in Central-Eastern

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Europe remain limited, reflecting persistent heteronormative norms and institutional inertia. Unlike systematic or scoping reviews, the narrative approach allows for interpretive flexibility by integrating a diverse range of sources—including peer-reviewed studies, legal and policy documents, government reports, and media accounts—while emphasizing conceptual clarity, theoretical insight, and socio-legal context. This method is particularly well suited to regions where empirical research on homo-parentality is scarce and fragmented.

The study addresses the following research question: How do socio-political, educational, and cultural factors influence the recognition and acceptance of homo-parental families in Poland and the Czech Republic? To explore this issue, the research examined national legal and policy frameworks; synthesized empirical findings on public attitudes, with a particular focus on educators and university students; investigated the role of demographic factors such as age, gender, education, and religiosity; and identified gaps in existing research, especially in the areas of education and policy. A purposive search strategy was used to select approximately 85 sources that met predefined inclusion criteria related to relevance, methodological rigor, and contribution to the discourse on LGBTQ+ parenting. Data were systematically extracted on legal recognition, adoption rights, public attitudes, and the influence of media and educational institutions. The findings were synthesized narratively and guided by gender and power theories, the concept of normativity in socialization, and the notion of empty signifiers, illustrating how debates around “gender” in Poland and Czechia shape both social perceptions and public policy. The study highlights the complex interplay between law, culture, education, and demographic factors in shaping acceptance of homo-parental families. While not exhaustive or generalizable, the review provides a multidimensional perspective that helps illuminate the realities of same-sex parenting in Central-Eastern Europe and underscores the need for further empirical research, inclusive education, and legal reform to promote equality and social justice.

ABSTRAKT

W badaniach przedstawionych w artykule wykorzystano krytyczny, narracyjny przegląd literatury do analizy społecznych, edukacyjnych i prawnych uwarunkowań homorodzicielstwa w Polsce i Czechach. Choć struktury rodzinne w Europie szybko się różnią, prawne uznanie i akceptacja społeczna rodzinnych osób tej samej płci w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej pozostają ograniczone, co odzwierciedla

utrzymujące się normy heteronormatywne oraz inercję instytucjonalną. W przeciwnieństwie do przeglądów systematycznych czy scopingowych podejście narracyjne pozwala na interpretacyjną elastyczność, integrując różnorodne źródła – w tym artykuły recenzowane, dokumenty prawne i polityczne, raporty rządowe oraz relacje medialne – przy jednoczesnym zachowaniu klarowności pojęciowej, względu teoretycznego i uwzględnieniu kontekstu społeczno-prawnego. Metoda ta jest szczególnie odpowiednia w regionach, gdzie badania empiryczne nad homorodzicielstwem są nieliczne i fragmentaryczne.

Przeprowadzone badanie miało odpowiedzieć na pytanie: W jaki sposób czynniki społeczno-polityczne, edukacyjne i kulturowe wpływają na uznanie i akceptację rodzin homoparentalnych w Polsce i Czechach? W tym celu przeanalizowano krajowe ramy prawne i polityczne, syntetyzuje wyniki badań empirycznych dotyczących postaw społecznych, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem edukatorów i studentów, przebadano rolę czynników demograficznych, takich jak wiek, płeć, wykształcenie i religijność oraz zidentyfikowano luki w istniejących badaniach, zwłaszcza w obszarze edukacji i polityki. Do selekcji wykorzystano celową strategię wyszukiwania, obejmującą około 85 źródeł spełniających wcześniej określone kryteria dotyczące trafności, rygoru metodologicznego i wkładu w dyskurs o rodzicielstwie osób LGBTQ+. Dane zostały systematycznie wyodrębnione w zakresie prawnego uznania, praw adopcyjnych, postaw społecznych oraz wpływu mediów i instytucji edukacyjnych. Wyniki zostały syntetyzowane narracyjnie, w oparciu o teorie płci i władzy, koncepcję normatywności w socjalizacji oraz pojęcie pustych signifikantów, ukazując, jak debaty o „płci” w Polsce i Czechach kształtują zarówno percepcję społeczną, jak i politykę. Przeprowadzone badanie podkreśla złożoną interakcję prawa, kultury, edukacji i czynników demograficznych w kształtowaniu akceptacji rodzin homoparentalnych. Choć nie jest wyczerpujące ani w pełni uogólnialne, dostarcza wielowymiarowej perspektywy, która pozwala spojrzeć na realia rodzicielstwa osób tej samej płci w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej i wskazuje na potrzebę dalszych badań empirycznych, edukacji inkluzywnej oraz reform prawnych wspierających równość i sprawiedliwość społeczną.

Introduction: When the law lags behind society

Across Europe and globally, family structures are undergoing rapid diversification. Consensually non-monogamous households, single-parent families, and homo-parental arrangements have emerged

both in public discourse and in lived experience (Barker, Langridge 2010; Anapol 2010; Sheff 2011; Sadownik 2023). However, legal systems in many countries—including Poland and the Czech Republic—struggle to accommodate these evolving realities.

In both nations, despite their membership in the European Union and their status as signatories to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, legal and policy frameworks largely fail to reflect the social presence of same-sex families. In Poland, tentative steps toward recognizing same-sex civil unions have conspicuously excluded any provisions related to parenting (Legalis 2024; Gov.pl 2024). Legislative silence regarding children born into or raised within same-sex households implicitly negates their existence, pushing them into legal and cultural invisibility. Even in the Czech Republic, although the institution of registered partnership has existed since 2006 and offers partial parity of rights with marriage, the legal framework does not permit joint adoption by same-sex couples, including recognition of a partner as a second parent. This limitation is confirmed both in Constitutional Court case law and in the scholarly literature (Maříková et al. 2022; Křičková 2023).

A key Constitutional Court ruling (Case No. I. ÚS 3226/16 of 29 June 2017) addressed a situation in which a Czech court refused to recognize the parenthood of the second member of a same-sex couple, even though the legal parent-child relationship had already been recognized in the United States (within the framework of a Californian marriage and surrogacy). The Constitutional Court held that non-recognition of this relationship would constitute an interference with the right to family life and would be discriminatory. This ruling did not amount to a general authorization of adoption but rather to the recognition of an already existing legal and factual family. As of 1 January 2025, registered partnership was replaced by a new legal institution of partnership (Act No. 123/2024 Coll.). Under this framework, a partner may adopt a child if the other partner is the child's legal parent; however, the standard procedures for establishing parenthood (§§ 776 and 777 of the Civil Code) do not apply to persons in a partnership.

This paper explores homo-parentality as an unresolved ethical dilemma situated at the intersection of cultural identity, normative structures, and institutional inertia. In our review of existing studies,

we examine whether and how demographic variables, particularly education, age, gender, and religiosity, influence acceptance of same-sex parenting. Importantly, this inquiry is conducted without predefined hypotheses, in accordance with the principles of exploratory research ethics (Fain, Deegan 1996; Merton, Barber 2004).

Research methodology

This study adopts a critical, narrative literature review approach to explore the social, educational, and legal dynamics of homo-parentality in Poland and the Czech Republic. Unlike systematic or scoping reviews, a narrative review offers interpretive flexibility, allowing for the integration of diverse sources—including academic studies, policy reports, legal documents, and media accounts—while emphasizing conceptual clarity, theoretical insight, and socio-legal context (Grant, Booth 2009; Cook et al. 1997). The aim is to synthesize existing knowledge, identify research gaps, and critically reflect on how institutional, cultural, and demographic factors shape the recognition and acceptance of same-sex families. This approach is particularly well suited to Central-Eastern Europe, where empirical research on homo-parentality remains limited.

This study addresses the following research question: How do socio-political, educational, and cultural factors influence the recognition and social acceptance of homo-parental families in Poland and the Czech Republic? To explore this question, the study pursues the following objectives:

- Examine legal and policy frameworks concerning same-sex parenting in both countries.
- Analyze empirical findings on public attitudes, with a particular focus on educators and university students as key agents of socialization.
- Investigate the influence of demographic variables, including age, gender, education, and religiosity, on social attitudes toward homo-parental families.
- Identify gaps in existing research and highlight areas for future investigation, particularly in education and public policy.

A purposive search strategy was employed to identify relevant literature. Sources were selected based on their relevance, methodological

rigor, and contribution to scholarly discourse on homo-parentality, LGBTQ+ parenting, and family diversity. Inclusion criteria encompassed peer-reviewed academic articles and book chapters on gender, family diversity, and LGBTQ+ parenting in the fields of sociology, education, and psychology, as well as legal and policy documents, including national legislation, court rulings, and governmental reports. In addition, empirical studies using validated instruments or robust qualitative methods and media reports that reflect public and political discourse in Poland and Czechia were included.

The search was conducted using the following databases and repositories: Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, JSTOR, Google Scholar, national government websites (Gov.pl; Legalis 2024), and Czech legal databases, including Constitutional Court rulings. Keywords included combinations of “homoparentality,” “same-sex parenting,” “LGBT families,” “Poland,” “Czech Republic,” “education,” “attitudes,” and “legal recognition.” In total, 85 sources were analyzed, including 45 academic studies and book chapters, 20 legal and policy documents, 15 media sources documenting public discourse, and 5 meta-analyses or large-scale surveys providing quantitative context. The scarcity of publications and data from the region was striking when compared with global sources. Data were systematically extracted to capture key dimensions of the research problem:

- Legal recognition and adoption rights for same-sex couples.
- Public attitudes toward homo-parental families, particularly among educators and students.
- Conceptual frameworks related to gender, normativity, and socialization.
- Media and policy narratives influencing societal perceptions.

The extracted information was synthesized narratively, with a focus on identifying recurring themes, contradictions, and gaps in the literature. Interpretation was guided by gender and power theories (Connell 2006; Butler 1990), as well as the concept of normativity in socialization, which examines how dominant family and gender models are institutionalized and transmitted through education, media, and policy.

The study is framed within gender and social power theories, highlighting how hegemonic norms shape both legal systems and social attitudes. Homo-parentality challenges heteronormative

assumptions about reproduction, care, and family legitimacy, intersecting with education, religion, and civic culture. Teachers and future educators, as both products and producers of culture, represent pivotal agents in transmitting social norms; their attitudes toward homo-parental families influence children's perceptions and experiences of inclusion or exclusion (Bosch et al. 2016; Baiocco et al. 2020). The review also incorporates the concept of *empty signifiers* (Glasze 2007), illustrating how debates around "gender" in Poland and Czechia have become a rhetorical tool for framing same-sex parenting as a social threat, thereby influencing both public opinion and policy. By integrating socio-legal, cultural, and educational dimensions, this framework situates homo-parentality within broader debates about democracy, pluralism, and social justice.

Looking at the limitations, it should be stressed that this is a narrative review, which means that the study does not aim for exhaustive coverage or statistical generalization. The findings are context-specific, reflecting Central and Eastern European societies, and are contingent on the availability and scope of existing literature, which is scarce due to the tabooization of the topic in the region. However, by combining academic, legal, policy, and media sources, the review provides a multidimensional perspective on the social, legal, and educational realities faced by homo-parental families, while also highlighting avenues for future empirical research and policy reform.

Theoretical framework: Normativity, gender, and social power

The study is framed within gender and power theories, most notably the work of Raewyn Connell (2006, 2007, 2011, 2019), which sheds light on how hegemonic masculinity and gender normativity are reinforced through institutions, media, and interpersonal relations, including children's literature (Jirásek, Maceková 2023; Jirásek et al. 2023). In this context, homo-parentality challenges not only legal systems but also gendered social orders and heteronormative assumptions about reproduction, care, and identity.

A critical concept in our framework is *normativism* in socialization—the idea that certain models of behavior, gender, and family are normalized through repeated institutional endorsement. In Poland, this normativity is closely intertwined with the Roman Catholic

Church, whereas in the Czech Republic, a more secular social fabric has allowed for broader tolerance in some domains, albeit not consistently with regard to parenting. These differences invite deeper philosophical reflection: What makes a family legitimate in the eyes of the law? Who decides which forms of love or care are morally acceptable? And can societies be truly democratic and pluralistic while excluding certain families from legal recognition?

These questions become even more pressing when viewed against statistical data on children born to LGBTQ+ parents. According to the Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law (LGBTQ Parenting 2024), in the United States alone, an estimated 5 million children are being raised by LGBTQ+ parents. This includes approximately 2 million children living in households with a single LGBTQ+ parent and nearly 300,000 being raised by parents in same-sex relationships. Additionally, about 30% of LGBTQ+ parents either lack legal recognition or are uncertain about their legal standing as a parent or guardian of at least one of their children. In the United Kingdom, same-sex couple families in 2022 numbered 217,000, which translates into approximately six children from LGBT+ families in every educational institution in the UK (LGBT+ Parents Report 2024).

Data on Poland are limited and difficult to obtain (Mizielińska et al. 2014). EU studies highlight the lack of recognition of civil partnerships of same-sex couples, even when their legal union was established abroad in a country that recognizes such partnerships (Policy Department 2021). This situation may negatively affect same-sex parenting, freedom of movement, and the rights of children raised in these families (LawsAndFamilies 2016). Wycisk and Kleka (2014) reported that 5.5% of homosexual and bisexual respondents had raised their own children in Poland at the time of the study; however, it was unclear whether they were parenting as single parents, whilst in “traditional” families, or as same-sex couples. Political figures often cite data from NGOs and independent watchdog organizations suggesting that between 50,000 and 100,000 children may be raised by homosexual parents, but it is unclear whether these children live with same-sex parents and whether they are aware of their parents’ sexual orientation (Demagog 2024).

Data on the Czech Republic are also limited. A study by Hašková et al. (2022) estimates that approximately 1,000 children in Czechia

live in same-sex families. The legal framework is complex and not straightforward. In the Czech Republic, LGBTQ+ individuals are legally permitted to adopt children as single parents. In 2016, the Constitutional Court overturned a previous ban that had prohibited individuals in registered same-sex partnerships from adopting, thereby allowing adoption regardless of partnership status (Ústavní soud 2016; Yahoo! 2016). Stepchild adoption by same-sex partners became legal on January 1, 2025. However, the legal framework still does not provide for joint adoption by same-sex couples. Despite this limitation, it is legally possible for both partners in a same-sex relationship—whether formally registered or informal—to adopt the same child individually. This arrangement effectively grants parental rights to both individuals, although not through joint adoption (Michalčíková 2023). Efforts to introduce legislation permitting joint adoption by same-sex couples have repeatedly failed since 2016, despite ongoing advocacy and public debate (Gay Star News 2016; Lazarová 2018).

While civic initiatives related to same-sex partnerships occasionally emerge in the Polish parliament, each such attempt is met with a renewed mobilization by far-right politicians (Veto 2021), the media (TVN 2014; Polityka 2024), and representatives of the Roman Catholic Church (Gość 2024; Ekai 2024). These actors activate negative public discourses centered on the alleged loss of family values, moral panic surrounding adoption by LGBTQ+ parents, and, above all, they instrumentalize the issue of “gender,” drawing on its function as an empty signifier in public discourse (Glasze 2007). Moreover, several openly homophobic initiatives have appeared in the official actions and statements of state representatives (Ilga.org 2020). The notion of “gender” repeatedly reemerges as an external enemy of a shared national identity, creating an antagonistic divide between alleged supporters of “gender ideology” and self-proclaimed defenders of “true” social values (cf. Odrowąż-Coates 2015b). In this context, “gender” becomes a powerful, weaponized concept that allows the issue of homo-parentality to be subsumed under its umbrella. As an empty signifier, it has the capacity to encompass everything and nothing at once. Lacking a precise or universally agreed-upon meaning in popular consciousness, it facilitates the cultivation of fear and



amplifies negative emotional responses toward anything and anyone associated with it.

At this point in the discussion, Karl Popper's reflections (2012) come to mind, especially his criticism of populist political rhetoric and his defense of liberal democracy and the "open society" as opposed to a closed society based on excessive restrictions on individual freedom. In an open society, rules and regulations are more liberal and, at the same time, non-exclusionary. Popper advocated critical rationalism, social criticism, and individual freedom within a framework of relatively limited government intervention. He opposed all forms of totalitarianism and authoritarianism, emphasizing the importance of institutions that allow for peaceful transfers of power and the correction of political errors. As our knowledge of homo-parentality and its presence in contemporary societies continues to grow, it becomes necessary to ask why it remains so invisible in legal and normative frameworks. Why does bringing this issue into public debate so often result in its being labeled as "gender ideology" and, consequently, silenced time and again?

Law, politics, and the ethics of exclusion

Legal recognition, or the lack thereof, conveys powerful messages about social values and the ethical positioning of same-sex families. In Poland, same-sex partnerships lack parental rights, and political rhetoric has actively fostered anti-LGBTQ+ sentiment, exemplified by the creation of "LGBT-free zones." This legal and political invisibility signals moral exclusion and reflects the denial of full personhood to homo-parental families. In the Czech Republic, legal recognition is partial. Registered partnerships have existed since 2006, and individual adoption by persons of non-heterosexual orientation has been permitted since 2016 (Sloboda 2021). Joint adoption remains prohibited, access to assisted reproductive technologies is limited, and surrogacy lacks a clear legal definition (Hašková, Pomklová 2015). While this framework suggests a relatively tolerant society, these legal gaps indicate that ethical commitments to family plurality are incomplete.

Cultural narratives often stigmatize same-sex parenting, framing it as "unnatural" or potentially harmful to child development

(Clarke 2001). Empirical evidence, however, contradicts these normative claims. Children raised by same-sex couples demonstrate psychosocial outcomes comparable to those raised by heterosexual parents, including resilience, flexibility in gender roles, and tolerance (Bos, Sandfort 2010; Biblarz, Stacey 2010; Perrin, Siegel 2013; Adams, Light 2015; Bolaños et al. 2019). Meta-analyses and longitudinal studies further indicate that family stability, rather than parental sexual orientation, predicts educational outcomes (Rosenfeld 2010, 2013, 2015; Anderssen et al. 2008; Crowl et al. 2008; Vučković Juroš 2017). Polish research by Kowalska (2015, 2021) adds context-specific insights, highlighting non-binary parental roles, humor, and love-oriented disciplinary practices. These findings enrich the understanding of homo-parental families in Central-Eastern Europe and underscore the importance of culturally situated evidence rather than reliance on global generalizations. Assessing public and professional attitudes requires validated instruments (Sokolová 2009). Existing tools developed in Spain (Ramirez et al. 2006; Frias-Navarro, Monterde-i-Bort 2012) and validated in Mexico (Barragán-Pérez et al. 2016) remain largely unused in the Central and Eastern European context, leaving a significant empirical gap. Current EU-funded research, including projects at the University of Warsaw (UW 2025), promises methodological advances, though regional data are not yet available.

Poland and the Czech Republic share a communist past, accession to the European Union in 2004, and Bologna-aligned education systems, yet they diverge markedly in levels of religiosity, political engagement, and civic trust. Public support for adoption by same-sex couples reflects these differences: 12% in Poland versus 47% in the Czech Republic in 2019 (Nizinkiewicz, Krzyżak 2019; CVVM 2019). Trends among younger Poles suggest gradual shifts in social attitudes, with rejection of homosexuality declining from 47% in 2001 to 17% in 2021 (CBOS 2019, 2021). EU-wide comparisons show increasing acceptance of assisted reproduction and joint parenthood over time, although regional disparities remain substantial. This descriptive comparative context situates the findings without implying causal generalizations or a formal comparative model.

Educational institutions: Perpetuators or disruptors of norms?

Education is a key site for the transmission of ethical, axiological, and social norms (Łebkowska 2020; Nowak 2010). Teachers are not neutral actors; they both reproduce and contest dominant ideologies while guiding critical thought. Students internalize messages about family legitimacy, gender, and social inclusion not only through curricula but also through omissions and silences. The exclusion of homo-parental families from textbooks, classroom examples, and discussions conveys normative messages about family hierarchies, particularly in Poland and the Czech Republic.

Empirical research confirms that educators' attitudes influence students' perceptions of difference and belonging (Renzetti, Curran 2005; Deaux, Kite 2002). While Polish studies on gender and socialization are extensive (Kopciewicz 2007; Chomczyńska-Rubacha 2005, 2006; Gromkowska-Melosik 2017; Chmura-Rutkowska 2002; Odrowąż-Coates 2015a, 2015b, 2015c, 2016; Perkowska 2009), homo-parentality is underexplored (cf. Gajek 2021). Evidence indicates that female educators tend to support LGBTQ+ rights more than male educators (Costa et al. 2018), and that higher parental education may correlate with less stereotypical gender attitudes (Palus 2006). Nonetheless, ingrained assumptions about gender persist across educational settings (Brannon 2002).

Focusing on teachers and teacher trainees is justified both empirically and normatively. They are agents of socialization capable of either reinforcing heteronormativity or fostering inclusivity. Inclusive practices, representation, and anti-discrimination measures in schools reduce the stigmatization of children from homo-parental families (Bosch et al. 2016; Baiocco et al. 2020). Gender and generational differences among educators suggest potential levers for intervention (Costa et al. 2018; Richardot, Bureau 2020). From a normative perspective, societies should recognize diverse family models, as exclusion perpetuates social inequities. Empirically, existing evidence indicates that legal and educational systems in Poland and the Czech Republic lag behind social change, particularly among younger cohorts. By combining empirical assessment with normative reflection, this study situates homo-parentality within broader

ethical, legal, and social debates, aiming to inform policy and pedagogy without conflating what is with what ought to be.

Conclusion: Toward ethical inclusion and policy reform

Homo-parentality in Central-Eastern Europe is simultaneously a legal, social, and ethical issue. Comparative descriptive analysis reveals how evolving social attitudes interact with legislative inertia, particularly among younger and more educated populations. By focusing on educators, students, and measurement tools, this research highlights empirical realities without prescribing normative outcomes.

Understanding perceptions of new family arrangements is essential for responsible policymaking, social cohesion, and inclusive education. Ethical reflection guides the question of what ought to be, namely, recognition and support for diverse family models, while empirical evidence describes what currently exists in law, education, and public opinion. Encouraging researchers to study homo-parentality despite its taboo status contributes both to evidence-based public discourse and to the gradual alignment of ethical ideals with institutional practice.

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